

## What People Are Saying...

In *From Destitute to Ph.D.: My Homeless Journey*, Jeremy Reynolds tells the riveting story of his life in England, to being homeless in America, to founding New Mexico's largest homeless shelter, Joy Junction. Throughout each chapter, an honest, heart-felt love for life and God is manifest on each page, offering hope to the homeless and inspiration for those yearning to make a difference in life. It's a must read.

—**Brian Nixon**

Writer, Musician & Minister

“This is a story that could be made into a movie. Jeremy Reynolds was once homeless himself. He founded and runs New Mexico's largest emergency homeless shelter, and along the way earned a master's degree in communication from the University of New Mexico, and a Ph.D. in intercultural education from Biola University in La Mirada, California. He has, quite literally, risen from the despair of homelessness to the pinnacle of academia.

“In addition, he has reported for the ASSIST News Service from locations including Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and the Philippines. His story will amaze you.”

—**Dan Wooding**

Founder ASSIST Ministries and the ASSIST News Service

Jeremy Reynolds is an iconoclast who has combined a genuine passion for the hungry, homeless, abused, and addicted with a creative ministry model in New Mexico. His books give a face to what is often a faceless problem in today's society. This chronicle of his conversion, calling, and creation of an important agency of service—plus his guidelines for setting up a gospel rescue mission—is a valuable read for all who want to follow his lead and demonstrate their commitment to Jesus Christ in a practical manner.

—**John Ashmen**

President of Association of Gospel Rescue Missions

Homelessness in our country is a story about tragedy and hope. Dr. Reynolds weaves together this story beautifully. The power of his words, however, can be found in his compassionate acts.

—**Joel John Roberts**

CEO of PATH Partners and publisher of inforumusa.org.

If anyone knows the ins and outs of homelessness and the solutions that will work, it is Jeremy Reynolds. I have grown to deeply respect his work and labor of love for the underprivileged and needy. I know this book will help keep a cause in the forefront of our national consciousness that needs our ongoing attention.

Once again, I applaud Jeremy's willingness to champion the rights of those who rarely have such an impassioned advocate.

—**Mike Shreve, BTh, DD**

Director of Deeper Revelation Books,  
Triumphant Living Ministries, and Mike Shreve Ministries.

Jeremy Reynolds has a special combination of blunt realism and a relentless pursuit of sharing God's grace with those in need. I have no doubt that heaven is pleased by the work that Jeremy does, and this book is a reflection of his heart.

—**Chip Lusko**

Pastor

This book will touch and impact your heart, changing your view of the homeless. Johnny Probst, chaplain and author of the *Strangers and Pilgrims* book series With the increasing need for charity for homeless people, Jeremy Reynolds and Joy Junction stand out as a leader and a protector of many. Jeremy writes about what we all fear could happen to anyone. He brings reality to the forefront in hopes to make changes for many.

—**Larry Garrison**

President of Silver Creek Entertainment

To say from the comfort of our own homes that the plight of the homeless is not our own negates the alarming fact that it can happen to anyone. Jeremy's story proves this to be true. And proves it can be overcome. We support Jeremy on his tremendous journey and support the work of his tireless organization, Joy Junction.

—**Rabbi Jonathan Aaron** and **Michelle Azar Aaron**  
Temple Emmanuel Beverly Hills

Provocative and knowledgeable, Jeremy Reynolds speaks from years of experience in serving the homeless population in a practical, sensible, and compassionate manner. His yearning and passion leap from the pages, grip your heart, and motivate you to get in the game and join him in the immense battle that must be fought by all of us. This is a must-read for anyone with a heart of serving others. Open your mind and be challenged. Otherwise, stay on the sidelines and let life pass you by through your inaction!

—**Jim Sandberg**  
Senior Pastor, Tabor Baptist Church, Muncie, Indiana



# **FROM DESTITUTE TO Ph.D.**

MY HOMELESS JOURNEY



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**JEREMY REYNALDS**



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Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022 Toll Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

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Edited by Leonard G. Goss and Carolyn Stanford Goss, [GoodEditors.com](http://GoodEditors.com)

Cover design by Brittany Osborn

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-913-4 (Print)  
978-1-63232-914-1 (ePub)  
978-1-63232-915-8 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2014956631



To my love, Elma. You have changed  
my world and I will love you forever.





# DEDICATION

**S**ince *From Destitute to PhD* is the story of how the Lord worked in my life and how, in the midst of a very dark time, he personally reawakened his original calling in my life, it is dedicated to him. Without the Lord the ministry of Joy Junction would not have come into existence.

This book is also dedicated to the many homeless men, women, and families who have met their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and experienced his compassion while staying with us.





# SPECIAL THANKS

**M**any thanks to the Joy Junction staff for carrying out the vision of homeless ministry on a daily basis.

My thanks also go to Dr. Bob Gassaway, formerly of the University of New Mexico, who has been a wonderful mentor and a good friend, and who gave me a lifelong appreciation of the importance of correct grammar.





# FOREWORD

**T**he King will answer “I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”  
Mt. 25:40

Dr. Jeremy Reynolds—my friend Jeremy—is a man who has opened his heart so much to Jesus that the Spirit of Matthew 25 is able to live again. I believe that God our Father creates persons because he loves stories, and we get to be the author of our own story.

We are free to write what we want in the story of our life. We can be hero or villain. We can be mentor or manipulator. But if we experience the Spirit of Jesus we believe we are forgiven, blessed, and empowered to celebrate those around us. We are aware especially of those who are broken—those who have forgotten or have never known that they are created and loved by the Father.

The story of Jeremy, *From Destitute to Ph.D.*, is a wonderful personal work. Once you start reading it is hard to set it down as you follow the challenges he faces and the decisions he makes. It is interesting that those who have made a personal commitment to Jesus, from Francis of Assisi to Theresa of Calcutta, have never identified with either failure or success. They only strive to be faithful to their commitment to Our Lord and

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allow the Spirit to work as He will. Then they witness to the blessing of the presence of the Lord as they reach out in love and celebration of the people around them.

There is one more thing that comes with friendship with Jeremy, and that I hope you can find in his story, and that is *enthusiasm*! You find that you, yourself, will want to do something beautiful for God! Jeremy's story is a challenge to us to use our life and talents wisely as we journey together to the Kingdom.

It is my hope that this book will inspire you, and that you will discover many wonderful and unique opportunities to be of service to God and His people. May our Lord, Jesus, bless us all!

—**Fr. Michael J. Shea**, Pastor  
Prince of Peace Catholic Community  
Albuquerque, New Mexico





# PROLOGUE

I was flabbergasted to hear about the head of a homeless agency thinking it is “immoral” to mix religion with delivery of services to the homeless. Maybe he or his clients have had bad experiences with those who combine religion with helping the homeless. If that is the case, it is very sad, because the gospel is supposed to be Good News.

At Joy Junction, a faith based ministry, we think sharing Jesus kindly and compassionately with our guests is essential. Why do we feel so strongly about that message? It is because my experience working with New Mexico’s homeless for over thirty years teaches me that people often fall into drug abuse and an inappropriate use of alcohol to escape the emotional pain and despair characterizing their lives. While regularly working with medical and mental health professionals, Joy Junction offers a relationship with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone on which to build a fully recovered life. We believe that to do otherwise would be “immoral.”

Some time ago I remember talking to a homeless man holding an empty twelve-pack of some very strong malt liquor. We were talking about how encouragement from the Joy Junction Lifeline staff, and food from our lunch truck, had motivated him to no longer steal or do drugs. Yet he was still a heavy drinker. I asked why he continued abusing alcohol,

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and his answer still haunts me. He pointed to a concrete culvert. “See that? It’s where I slept last night. That stuff (pointing to the alcohol) helps me not notice the bugs, the mice, or think about my life.”

He knew he had to put an end to the drinking, and he said he was working on it. When I asked if I could pray with him, he gratefully agreed. While this man obviously needed many physical resources, what else other than a relationship with the God of the universe would help him get through each day?

To find out what others think about sharing the gospel when helping the homeless with food and shelter, I asked some of our Facebook friends. Is it immoral to mix religion with delivery of services to the homeless? Is it immoral not to? They were quick to respond.

Rita was very much in favor of sharing the gospel while helping the homeless. She said, “I am a graduate of Joy Junction. It is an establishment that helped me in so many ways. And having a devotional in the mornings helped set the path for a new day.”

Angel said, “It is essential and very much needed. Your ministry is wonderful not only for the homeless but for those who are not homeless. If only more people followed your example.”

Charles could see no other way of offering hope to the homeless outside of sharing the message of Christ. He said that Jesus gives hope to those who feel they have none. He added, “Keep up the good work, Joy Junction. And when someone tells you to not mix religious beliefs with helping someone, or when they tell you to turn your shirt inside out, remember Romans 1:16: ‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.’”

Andrea commented, “I’m Jewish, so the way I see it, your Savior was a Jew—so it’s all fine. Besides, if someone doesn’t want to hear the preaching, they will tell you. I give to various food banks and to Joy Junction. The bottom line is tzedakah (charity). Give to those less fortunate than yourself.”

I liked what Joel said. “I’m not a big fan of anyone pushing any religion; however, at Joy Junction you do it with taste and class. You do

not try to ram it down anyone's throat like some other groups. I may not believe in the same God that you do, but when someone tells me 'God bless,' I don't get insulted by it. I say 'thank you,' and then go about my day."

Paula also had encouraging words. She wrote that while she believes in "live and let live," as long as no one is being hurt, "I firmly believe in God, and that's what makes me the strong, compassionate, and giving person I am. I appreciate your organization and I am glad to see you doing all you do. If you want to praise our Lord, I stand behind you one hundred and ten percent."

Destiny said she was okay with sharing Jesus with our guests so long as food or services are not denied to those who reject religion or our Christian outlook on it. "But if you're withholding food or clothing on the basis that they have to participate in any religion or religious activity, then I can see it as a problem. Helping those in need should be just that, without pushing your agenda on them. I love the work Joy Junction does, though, and I donate to them all the time."

I appreciate everyone who responded. My question to the agency head whose comment motivated me to write this prologue to the book, and my question to anyone else who does not believe in sharing the gospel when assisting the homeless, is this: What other form of real encouragement is there for a homeless and hungry person after the basic human needs have been cared for?





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# MEET DOUG AND EDITH, JOY JUNCTION RESIDENTS

**E**dith was married to a man who abused her and continually called her useless. “I was always being corrected and reprimanded; nothing was ever good enough. Then it turned physical. Being slapped and hit by a man three times my size was more than I could take. The police were no help. When I got the courage to leave, he became completely obsessed and possessive.”

If she hadn’t left, Edith might not be alive today. After Edith met and married Douglas, her abusive ex-husband tracked her down and made their lives a living hell. It got so bad the couple decided they had to relocate from the South to the West Coast to escape the ex-husband and live in a state where there were more job opportunities. But unexpected events led them to Joy Junction in Albuquerque.

Doug and Edith left after selling their furniture and electronics to finance the trip. The drive was pretty uneventful, until they arrived at a truck stop just west of Amarillo, Texas. Doug said, “We had spent the night in our van and had been in and out of the truck stop’s store a number of times. We ran in once more, just before we were going to leave, and we came out to find our van gone—along with Edith’s purse, which contained all our money, IDs, and debit cards, not to mention family pictures, kids’ yearbooks, and precious keepsakes from both our families.”

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“Like a dummy, I had put the keys on the floorboard. Someone must have been watching, because we were only inside for a couple of minutes,” Edith explained.

Providentially, a Christian family heard about the couple’s predicament and offered them a place to stay in their barn, along with food, clothing, luggage, and personal hygiene items, in exchange for helping out at their alpaca ranch. Doug said they felt so blessed by the kindness of strangers, “yet not surprised at how the Holy Spirit moves.” After staying with this family for just over two weeks, Doug and Edith were able to make arrangements to be dropped off at Joy Junction.

Even though Joy Junction wasn’t where they expected to be, Edith says, “It’s a true comfort and a blessing for both of us to be here at Joy Junction, knowing that we are safe and our identity is protected. The love and acceptance we have found here has been a true blessing from God. As we pray and lift up our need for bus tickets [out West], we know in our hearts that God will provide. [He will help us] both with our immediate needs of shelter and food, and also for our transportation needs.”

I invite you to come along as I share not just more of Edith’s and Doug’s story, but stories of many others, people like you and like me, who have experienced the fear and hopelessness of not having a place of safety to call their own.

At the end of each section I will offer what I call “Food for Thought”—reflective questions to help you interact and engage with the stories of many of the people I have met and the experiences I have had as the CEO of one of the country’s largest homeless shelters. Perhaps they could be used as discussion questions in a group setting.

First up, my own story. . .





# HOMELESS IN AMERICA

I was not on a mission for God. I was just a broke young Englishman stranded in the American Southwest. I had made it to the New Mexico–Texas border but ended up standing in the blazing sun for hours. Cars sped by, but none stopped. As the hours passed, I was getting more and more tired, so I left the highway and walked to a store. I wearily looked through a telephone directory and called the first church I could find. I then asked the man who answered the phone if he could help me find shelter. The man told me I was welcome to sleep on the church floor, but I would have to walk there—a distance of about five miles. Needless to say, walking that far on an unknown Texas highway was more than my body or spirit could endure. I thanked him and dejectedly hung up.

Walking back, I saw a restaurant that was about to close for the night. It didn't matter, because I had no money for food. I saw that behind the restaurant there was a storage shed filled with odds and ends, and I looked for something to sleep on. The only thing that looked suitable was a piece of fiberglass, and that was my bed for the night.

I woke up early the next day and headed down the highway again. Soon, a trucker stopped and gave me a ride to Phoenix. By this time, I was starving. Without me asking, the kind trucker shared his sandwiches with me.

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Looking back all these years later, I see the Lord's hand in my life. Back then I was just another homeless person on the road, but today I am founder and CEO of Joy Junction, New Mexico's largest emergency homeless shelter. The transformation came through God's grace in my life.

## Growing Up in England

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My heart pounded as I lay in bed and listened to the muffled, angry voices coming from the living room. My mother and father were arguing again. About what, I did not know. I just knew they were fighting, something they did almost every night. I was eleven, and I hated listening to my parents' fights. I knew my mother was unhappy living with my wheelchair-bound father, diagnosed several years earlier with multiple sclerosis. On a number of occasions, she acidly told me that if my dad had not been sick, she would have left him. At other times Mom informed me I should be grateful she stuck around to take care of my older brother and me. Lots of parents would not have done that, she said. My mother only married my father because he told her he would apply for a commissioned officer's position in Britain's Royal Air Force. He failed to do so, and now, because of his disability, there was no chance of that. She felt cheated and angry.

As sharp tones filtered through the muffled voices, I focused on the one bright spot on the horizon: I would be leaving for boarding school in a few weeks. Initially, I looked forward to this as an escape, but later it became my own private hell.

At boarding school in Bournemouth, only about an hour's bus ride from my home on England's south coast, I was the routine victim of schoolboy pranks, such as having my bed short-sheeted. Days were filled with dread, as I worried about being laughed at for my stammering when asked to give an impromptu answer. If that wasn't enough, there was also the necessity of faking a sickness to escape the perils of hockey games, rugby football, cricket, or cross-country running—all nightmares

for my un-athletic body and so much fun for others to laugh at. I didn't seem to fit in anywhere, so I retreated into a world of books, where no one demanded anything from me. This traumatic time was perhaps the beginning of my shutting down emotionally. The pain of being continually taunted by a multitude of pampered and merciless British kids was too much for me to bear.

Ironically, my escape on many weekends was to go back to the home from which I had tried to escape. Perhaps I concluded that the tension at home was somewhat bearable compared to the abject misery I endured at school.

Admittedly, there were a few fun times at school. One early morning, all the kids in my dorm awoke at about two o'clock, buzzing with excitement. The chapel was on fire. Since a destroyed chapel meant no church services in the morning and maybe for a long time, the kids were elated. These chapel services were extremely boring for me—just something else in my life to be endured rather than enjoyed. The fire and the circumstances surrounding it were the talk of the campus, and did we love what we found out! The word was that the school chaplain had gone for an evening of entertainment in a nearby town. Returning to school (where he lived) in the early hours of the morning, he found the chapel on fire. This hip spiritual adviser had not gone to town dressed in robe and cassock, however. He dressed in full sixties regalia, including a Beatles-style wig and high-heeled boots. Naturally, we all thought this was hilarious. No one talked about anything else for days.

I scarcely remember anything about most of my classes and my teachers. There was one very memorable class I attended, however, even though I hated it. It was math class, and my teacher, a born-again Christian, is someone I have never forgotten. The last few math lessons of each semester were different. For a treat at the end of each term, this teacher asked if we would like him to read to us. Naturally we agreed, even though we thought his choice of books could have been improved (but then, anything beat math!). His readings of choice were evangelical Christian books, usually dramatic life stories about a hero

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of the Christian faith who had done exciting things for the Lord. While I did not at that time know the author of the Good Book, the stories were very gripping and easily held my attention.

I took it on myself to argue with this teacher about whether Christianity was relevant to culture. I was then a vegetarian, and I had read books showing that Jesus didn't eat meat, either. I used those books as weapons to argue with him, and I twisted Scripture in any way I could to persuade him. Instead of falling for my arguments, this godly man responded that the important thing was not what Jesus ate but what he had done for me on the cross. I responded by letting my long-suffering instructor know that Christianity was a crutch for old women and the intellectually feeble. How difficult it must have been for this man to deal with my obstinacy! Still, those powerful, end-of-term stories remained with me, as did my memories of this faithful, patient teacher.

I wanted to study sociology, a subject not offered at my boarding school, so I finished the last couple of years of my education living at home again. I still did not fit in. I attended a different school, with different people, but I encountered the same misery. I was desperately lonely and felt like an outsider again. I threw myself into my studies, and soon I adopted all the latest sociological buzzwords and phrases into my vocabulary. One such phrase was Karl Marx's well-known saying, "Religion is the opiate of the people."

I remember scoffing at various religious posters I saw plastered around town. I proudly declared, "I am not a Christian. I am an agnostic. You can't tell if there is a God." My mother was bitterly angry about this, but I reasoned that if the Bible was not true (and I had already made up my mind that it was not), then Christianity was false, since the Bible is its foundation.

Desperate for friends, I eagerly welcomed attention of any type. One day I was sitting in the student lounge when an attractive young woman came up to me and started talking. Her name was Jenny Griffith. There was a hook to the conversation, however. Jenny was a Christian, and

she invited me to church. I did not relish the prospect, but I definitely liked the idea of seeing more of Jenny, so I went. Was I in for a shock! This was not like anything I had imagined, for my idea of church was based on very formal, proper, incense-burning Anglican parishes. This church was not like that at all. It was very small, and it had no organ. There were seats instead of pews. The congregation sang lively, upbeat songs and sounded as if they actually enjoyed being there. Everyone was very friendly. Surprisingly, I liked it. This was definitely unlike any other type of church or religious organization I had ever encountered.

I continued returning to this small, friendly, and informal little church—although not for the right reasons. I was hoping there might be the possibility of a relationship springing up between Jenny and me. The Lord, meanwhile, had other more significant things in mind, beginning with my salvation!

## The Gospel Hits Home

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Following one Sunday night service, the pastor of the little church approached me and asked if I wanted to do anything “about it.” I asked him what “it” was, and he again responded by asking if I wanted to do anything “about it.” I told him I was not interested in “it,” and that, for the moment, was the end of the conversation. It was not until later that I learned Pastor Phillip Powell was really asking me if I wanted to commit my life to Jesus Christ. He did not want to be overly pushy and force the situation, hence the mystery about “it.” He felt if he came on too strong it might cause me to run out the door and never come back.

As the weeks went on, I continued attending church, and I even started listening to contemporary Christian music at home. I was also developing an interest in what the pastor was saying. It seemed the Lord’s hook had caught another fish, and it was time to reel it in. While initially attending church to spend more time with Jenny rather than to learn about Jesus, as I heard the Word preached and taught, it now began to take effect.

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One day I purchased a copy of *Good News for Modern Man*, a modern translation of the Bible. For the first time, I read Scripture with an open mind. Instead of considering myself to be so intellectually superior that the Bible had nothing to teach me, I read it with a sincere interest in knowing what it said about who God is. I picked up that book and said, “God, if you’re real, please speak to me in a way I can understand.” At that point, I can honestly say that I had a genuine, supernatural experience. The letters on the Bible page in front of me appeared to be about six feet tall. From that point on, I read Scripture with a different set of eyes: the eyes of understanding that God gave me. And I knew what I read was true. I asked God to intervene in my life in a way I could grasp, and he honored my request. He will do the same for anyone who asks him. The Word of God says that “if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 4:29). That happened to me over thirty years ago, and it was a supernatural experience, a one-of-a-kind encounter where God met me where I was at that time in my life. Although I have had other supernatural experiences, nothing quite like that one has occurred since. That was the coup de grâce. My relationship with the Lord has deepened over the years, and he has communicated with me in many different ways—but nothing quite so dramatically as that time.

Despite that extraordinary incident, I was still not on board with trusting Jesus as my Savior. I had not completely surrendered my life to his control, but the Lord was supernaturally preparing my heart to do so. I did not even know how to “get saved.” A week later, however, I was reading a book by an Anglican clergyman named David Watson. He made a very simple yet profoundly compelling statement to the effect that if you have never asked Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, you are not a Christian, and you will be eternally lost.

My newfound understanding of the truth of the Bible swept away any reasons to hesitate. At that moment, I bowed my head and asked Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life. There were no flashing lights

and no further supernatural experiences, only a quiet act of obedience to God's Word. At that point, the future direction of my life became clearer. I was a Christian, and God was beginning an exciting work in me, preparing me for something I could hardly imagine.

Becoming a Christian brought with it certain profound changes in my personality and behavior. My mother began noticing those transformations in me and became rather worried about my sudden religious "fanaticism." She was not overly concerned about the changes she saw at first, because she thought it was just another phase I was going through and that I would get over it. But as my faith solidified and began increasing rather than dissipating, she became very concerned indeed. She even went so far as to make an appointment for me with a local Anglican parish priest. He asked me if I really thought that anyone who did not receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior would go to hell. Assuring him that I most definitely believed just that, he terminated the interview, shaking his head in absolute disbelief. He thought there was no hope for me, but I had an eternal hope by the name of Jesus.

## Bible School

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I felt the need to receive some Bible college instruction, so I spent the 1976–1977 academic year at a Bible college in South Wales. It was a good experience for the most part, like being in a spiritual hothouse. After finishing that year, I returned home to Bournemouth, where the burning question became what I planned to do with my life. As I prayed, I began to feel God might be calling me to full-time ministry. That was a challenge for me then. The church in England where I met Christ did not give young people the opportunity to make their own decisions about obeying God's calling in their lives. In other words, you were not encouraged to decide individually to obey God. Instead, someone who had more spiritual authority had to decide for you. Still, I followed the call as I heard it by applying to a couple of universities as well as to London Bible College.

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I was accepted at LBC, but shortly thereafter I sensed a call from God to go to the United States. I applied to Southeastern College in Lakeland, Florida, and was initially accepted, but that was only the beginning. There were still lots of other issues to be worked out, such as how I planned to pay for everything. While England was very generous in student financial aid, that generosity only extended to those attending British colleges and universities. The British government was not willing to finance a student going to school in the United States. This meant I was at a standstill, unemployed, with an acceptance to an American college valid only if I could come up with the funds to get there and subsequently support myself.

Meanwhile, things were a little rocky at church youth group meetings, where I soon became the object of humor—especially when there were guest speakers. When other young people introduced themselves to guests and said what they did for a living, they would laughingly say, “Oh, that’s Jeremy Reynalds, and he’s going to America!” The months dragged on, and I was not any closer to getting over the pond. Had I missed God’s calling in my life? Should I abandon the entire plan?

I was on the verge of giving up my idea to immigrate to the United States when, a few weeks later, something very interesting happened. I had been corresponding with a minister who had previously spent some time in the United States, and he invited me to meet him. Consequently, a few weeks later, I took the train from Bournemouth to London, a journey of about one hundred miles, to meet with this individual. I told him all my woes, hoping he might offer me some money. He did not. Instead, he told me, “Jeremy, you say that God has called you to America. But right now you have a lot of time on your hands. I wish I had the amount of time you do. Go home and make up your mind that you are going. If you say God has told you, then act on it.” This man’s sound advice caused a change in my thinking. God used his words to speak deeply to my heart, and I knew from then on that I would be crossing the pond to America.



## America, Here I Come!

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Three days after meeting with the minister in London, a lady asked me how my plans to go to the United States were going. She did not profess any relationship with Christ, but I knew her through some friends. After I told her I was going no matter what, she gave me two hundred dollars for the airfare. Ten days later I was offered a place to stay in Orlando, Florida, by an English pastor and his wife, who opened their home to me without even knowing who I was.

I was on the plane two weeks after this. Even though I was actually flying across the Atlantic, it was still hard for me to believe that what I had dreamed of, hoped for, and prayed about for so long was becoming a reality. What was in store? I might not have been so keen to go had I known. In time, what awaited me was poverty, homelessness, almost losing my ministry, and an eventual divorce. All that and more came later, but one thing I learned right off the bat was that it was time for me to grow up. I was on my own now. For the previous twenty years, I had lived a relatively pampered life with a guaranteed roof over my head and three meals a day. Whether I worked really made no difference. Now things had changed, and it was just the Lord and me. I knew I would have to take care of myself.

Just before I left for the States, my mother said I was making my bed and would have to lie in it, meaning I would face all the consequences of choosing to leave England. She made it quite clear there would be no help from her at all. She had done enough, and now, she said, I was denigrating all her assistance by going to the Colonies (as she dubbed the United States) on a “wild-goose chase.” And it was all because of that “fanatical religion.”

She did have some reason for the way she felt. My mother had taken wonderful care of both my older brother, Tony, and me. We both benefited from her tutelage and strong English private school educations. Mom felt she had prepared us properly, and I admit I was less than gracious and wise in my comments to her since my conversion.

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For example, one morning we were in a heated argument. I told this good, upright, caring Englishwoman that she was both a heathen and a sinner! Now, from a scriptural point of view, this was perhaps true. But saying so, and saying so in the way I did, was unkind and unwise. To my mother, a sinner was someone like a prostitute, and a heathen was a half-naked person running around a jungle. To put the matter delicately, my newfound Christian zeal needed some refining! Thankfully, God worked in me to develop the wisdom and compassion I lacked.

I can look back now and see that some of the experiences ahead of me were the Lord's way of preparing me for my work of ministering to the poor and needy. How wonderful God is to weave into our lives the very circumstances he will use to enable us to serve him.

I arrived at Miami International Airport clutching my one-way ticket to America carrying my last fifty dollars in my pocket. At that time in 1978 an Air Florida ticket from Miami to Orlando only cost twenty dollars. Haven't times changed! I was in the United States with thirty dollars in my pocket, and this represented all my worldly wealth.

I disembarked from the plane and made my way to immigration. There were numerous booths from which I could choose, so I prayed and made my selection. I knew I needed to trust God on this and all things, although I did not always do so—to my detriment. The official at the booth asked me what I planned to do while I was in the United States and how long I wanted to stay. When I told him I wanted to preach the gospel, he looked a little concerned and asked, “Oh, are you going to make a living at that? There are people who make a lot of money doing that.” I don't know if he was being cynical or serious. Years later I realized how the Lord had gone before me during that experience when I learned what the official *should* have asked me. He should have asked me if I had a return air ticket to England. If I could not produce one, he should have inquired if I had enough money to purchase one. That would have been protocol. Fortunately for me, he did not ask those things. It seems the Lord was serious about taking a middle-class English boy with

absolutely no personal experience of being poor, hungry, and homeless and sending him to the United States to help care for America's needy.

Finally, I arrived at the pastor's house in Orlando. A lady answered the door, introduced herself as Julie, and said her husband would be back shortly. She gave me tea (naturally, she was English). When her husband, Phil, arrived, they questioned me closely about my plans and then said something that chilled me. It impacted me so greatly that I still remember it as clearly today as the day it was spoken. Phil said, "Our faith has gotten us here, and if you want to get anywhere, it's going to have to be your faith that does it. You're not going to sponge off us, okay?" With a mouth that went instantly dry, I gulped a quick response, assuring the couple I would not sponge off them. What else was I going to say? Yet I was now in a foreign country, staying with strangers, and U.S. immigration law prevented me from working while holding a visitor's visa. I had nothing. I was very much like the homeless people I would be helping some years down the road: totally dependent on others for my most basic needs.

Phil and Julie's reception and attitude was not quite what I had expected, and I was caught up short. All sorts of things flooded through my mind during the next few minutes. Maybe I could go back to England without losing too much face and reapply to London Bible College. Maybe . . . maybe . . . maybe. I was still trying to determine just exactly what I had really gotten myself into when the couple said they were really tired and showed me my room. I went to bed.

I lay in bed for a long time that night, thinking and wondering. It was obvious this couple was not going to give me a free ride just because I said God had called me to America. If God really had called me, they wanted to see some proof. The next day I could see more trouble brewing on the horizon when, in an expanded version of what they had already told me, they said, "You say God has called you to America. Well, he has called us as well. You are in our house, which is a tangible example of God providing for us. It has a pool and orange trees, and we have

plenty of food in our pantry. If God has called you, he will provide for you as well.”

I was getting more fearful by the minute. It is one thing to tell your peers in England that God has called you to another country. It sounds sort of grand, even if they do not believe you. But all the while I was telling them I was still being provided for by my parents. Now, God would have to be my provider. If he did not, starvation or deportation was imminent, and those things were all I could think of.

A couple of days passed before I made my first visit to an American church. While I did not know it, sitting in that service was my future wife. But that was not the thing I remember about the service—in fact, I don’t even remember seeing her at the time. Neither was the thing I remembered from that first service the sermon or the church building. As odd as it may seem, it was learning that the church had a secretary. This was my first real sense that I was being exposed to the American church culture, and it was a shock. All the evangelical churches I had visited while in England were small and poor. In one, the church did not even have an office for the pastor, who worked out of his house. Even small churches in this new country had secretaries, and to me this seemed an extravagance.

## A Different Side of the US

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A few days later, Phil and Julie recommended what they thought was a wonderful idea to introduce me firsthand to the realities of American life. They suggested that I spend the summer with a high-spirited group of Christians who traveled the United States holding tent revivals. This seemed a very unusual and interesting thing to do for a proper English lad. I packed my suitcase and met with a group of other believers from the Orlando area who were planning to spend their summer in the same way. We arrived in Anderson, South Carolina, at about one o’clock in the morning while everyone was asleep—in tents.

This was my introduction to a new way of living. We had long Bible studies in the morning and ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, or whatever else was available, for lunch. As a result, to this day I cannot stand peanut butter! In the afternoons, most of us went street witnessing. Following that, we returned to camp, took showers, and had about an hour's free time before participating in long evening revival services. We didn't eat supper until after the evening evangelistic meeting, and by that time, we were pretty much starving. In this thing as well I can now see how the Lord was forming me for my ministry to the needy, which was still some years on the horizon. While in England, I truly never knew what it was like to be poor. I had everything I physically needed, and while I might not have enjoyed every aspect of my upbringing, my experience was still one sought after and envied by many.

England has what is known as council housing. Here in the United States, the equivalent would be the projects. Back in the sixties and seventies, most of this type of housing was painted a uniform drab gray. My image of poor people—their needs, hopes, and problems—was shaped by listening to my mother make derogatory comments about them. She felt that these individuals ended up in project-style housing because of some deficiency in their personality and motivation. She believed, as many did, that the poor could have something better if they only tried harder. The Lord had to straighten out my thinking by leading me gradually into his chosen calling for me. Talk about a strange type of work for God to choose for me. I really cannot think of any more unlikely person to minister to the needs of the poor than myself. My background completely prejudiced me against it.

The Lord did many wonderful things for me my first summer in the United States, especially by giving me many opportunities to share his Word. Many of the circumstances surrounding those events were quite humorous. For example, the evangelist in charge of the young people that first summer was constantly being asked by one visitor to have me preach. After honoring the request a few times, he said to the lady, "You

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must sure like what Jeremy has to say.” “Oh, no,” she responded. “I don’t understand a word of what he says. I just like his British accent!” God continued showing me the wonders of his provision by supplying my personal needs, as well as those of the group.

At the end of the summer, I returned to Orlando and was invited by Phil and Julie to stay with them again. Unfortunately, plans for attending the Bible college in Lakeland did not work out, and I really did not know what I was going to do. A few weeks after returning to Orlando, I met Sylvia, my wife-to-be, and we started dating in September of 1978.

I didn’t have any money, so we didn’t really go out on dates; it was more like a “hanging out” situation. At twenty-one years old, I was still very immature. Sylvia had been married previously and had a child. At the time, she was working full-time in a day care center. I was scarcely on my own and did not have any idea how to support myself, let alone a wife and a family. Nevertheless, a few months later, we were married on April 14, 1979. Sylvia paid for everything, even the rings, because I still could not legally work.

Reality hit me like a hammer following the honeymoon. I was anxious to be in full-time ministry, but I failed to see the Lord’s dealings in my life. I was leaning on my own understanding and ability instead of relying on God. Obviously, he knew the significant step I had taken by getting married, and he still had more to teach me. I had also neglected to consider that there could be a significant time difference between receiving the call of God into ministry and being involved in actual ministry. The biblical example of this is when the shepherd David was called to be king of Israel (1 Sam. 16). Although the prophet Samuel anointed him, it was not until sometime after that he actually took on the role of king. The waiting time did not invalidate God’s calling; it was just God’s way of doing things, because there is much to be learned in the waiting.

Those in tune with what the Holy Spirit is saying to them hold that word—that call—in their hearts and know they have special

purposes set aside for them to perform in the future. Unfortunately, I was not in harmony with God's timing and wanted to be "God's little helper"—and for him to move along a bit faster! I thought I could help God out by not waiting for his timing. Consequently, I caused a lot of grief for myself and everyone around me. One of the first things I did after marrying Sylvia was apply for my green card, which I subsequently obtained. This meant I could now work. The only problem was I was not trained to do anything in particular. I worked a variety of odd jobs and took some community college courses, all the time wanting to be in full-time ministry. The last thing I wanted to do was wait.

I very foolishly launched myself into a full-time volunteer ministry position. Lack of income resulted in our family becoming homeless in late 1981. A kind family in central Florida agreed to shelter Sylvia, our eight-year-old son, Ben, and our two-and-a-half-year-old son, Joshua. Because of my arrogant attitude, that offer did not extend to me.

### On the Road

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With my wife and family safe and being provided for, I set out on the road. I had enough money for a bus ticket to Dallas, and from then on my mode of transportation was hitchhiking. On a late, cold evening in January of 1982, I arrived in Dallas. I had about ten dollars in my pocket, and I carried a small suitcase, which seemed unbearably heavy. My thumb had been sticking out in the wind for so long it got frozen and sore and felt like it would drop off. Yet just when I was about to give up, an elderly couple stopped their car. They asked where I was headed. It turned out they were Christians who actually lived their faith, and to me they were like angels sent from heaven. They taught me some incredible lessons. They took me to their home, fed me a delicious meal, gave me a comfortable bed, and took me back to the highway in the morning. Even though it was a dangerous thing for them to do, for me it was a great blessing.