

What People Are Saying:

I've been honored to know, serve along side, and walk through life with Jeremy Reynalds. And I can say unequivocally that two qualities characterize his life: One, Jeremy knows the depth of God's love for all people found in Christ; and, two, Jeremy knows that God's love in Christ compels him to serve others. It is this dual notion of salvation and service that has fueled his 30 years of ministry among the homeless of New Mexico—and through his writings—the homeless of the world.

God has used an English immigrant to help transform the landscape of an American city. Through the homeless shelter, Joy Junction, we here in Albuquerque, New Mexico are better because God commissioned—and continues to use—a man called for Christ.

So do yourself a favor: read Jeremy's newest book, *Two Hearts, One Vision*. And you never know, Christ may use you as a catalyst in our culture as He has Jeremy, engaging the world for eternity.

—Brian Nixon
Writer, Musician, and Minister

Jeremy Reynalds and those working at Joy Junction make the gospel visible by bringing a lifeline of hope to the homeless community. Joy Junction is both a sanctuary and a prayer in action and I have been moved to watch Jeremy over the years with this ministry that makes such a difference. Jeremy and his work at Joy Junction are a life changer.

—Canon Garth Hewitt
Singer/songwriter
Founder of social justice organization Amos Trust

In addition to his many responsibilities at Joy Junction, Jeremy Reynalds has been a senior correspondent for the ASSIST News Service (www.assistnews.net) for many years and is an excellent writer. While true, his life story reads like a novel, and makes for riveting reading. Once you

have started it, you won't want to put it down. I am sure this is a book you will enjoy, for in it you will soon realize that Jeremy is making his life count for the Kingdom of God, and I pray that reading *Two Hearts, One Vision* will likewise inspire and encourage you to do the same.

—Dan Wooding

Author, broadcaster and journalist
Founder of 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, Association of Gospel Rescue Missions

TWO HEARTS ONE VISION

HELPING THE HOMELESS TOGETHER

TWO HEARTS ONE VISION

HELPING THE HOMELESS TOGETHER

JEREMY REYNALDS Ph.D.



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DEDICATION

Since *Two Hearts, One Vision* is the story of how the Lord worked in my life through taking me from a dark time to great joy that 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 dedicated to my amazing and beautiful wife, Elma, the “other” heart. She has shown me what it is to truly love and be loved.

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

Many thanks to the Joy Junction staff for carrying out the vision of homeless ministry on a daily basis. My thanks also go to the late 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

Once in a while I come across a well written book that gets my attention.

I usually take my time to finish a book, but this time, I am surprised that I read a whole book in just two days. Yes, it's an easy reading, which is part the beauty of *Two Hearts, One Vision*.

It reminds me of those few adventure, love story books I read growing up. Jeremy's book gives us a wide variety of real stories of people finding hope in situations or circumstances that are seemingly hopeless. This book touched the core of my faith in God to fulfill His promises and I hope it does the same to you.

Two Hearts, One Vision is a story of love, adventure, courage and trust. It is a real account of lives touched by grace from struggles to victories. The book will change your perspective on homeless people and help you not to make quick judgments on people based on in their current situation, but rather be inspired to take steps to become part of their transformation. As a result, we will find ourselves changed for the better.

God's ability to engage and challenge each of us to participate is part of His desire for people to love, grow and appreciate the life He has entrusted to us. As I am inspired by this book, I hope you will be too.

Jeremy and his wife Elma are a match made in heaven. I've spent time with each of them, but hearing their separate stories is a great testament of God's sovereignty and how He worked and molded them for each other and for the ministry.

Two Hearts, One Vision shows a perfect second chance in love and purpose in life.

Jerome Bringas COO - The Edge Media Ministries
Davao, The Philippines



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GOD'S UNCONVENTIONAL GIFT

BY JEREMY AND ELMA REYNALDS

People “liking” Joy Junction on social media usually do so because they have a concern for the homeless and hungry and an appreciation for the help that community support allows us to give.

Each of our staff members at Joy Junction has a very personal story, and those stories greatly impact the work we do for the needy. As the founder and CEO of Joy Junction, I am no exception, and so I thought you may appreciate a peek behind the scenes at my life.

It’s just over a year since I married Elma, the love of my life. She has quickly become an indispensable part of everything I do at Joy Junction, and we quickly realized that we are two hearts with one vision.

We’re always together, where we’re in the community daily, heightening awareness of the plight faced by the homeless and letting people know what they can do to make an impact on the issue by partnering with Joy Junction.

While I could never have kept going for so many years without your prayers and support, God also knew I needed a partner. As he told Elma shortly after we met, we could do more for him together than we could apart. We continue to see the truth of those words unfold daily.

In addition to our work for Joy Junction in the community, Elma and I usually finish our workdays off with a visit to the shelter. After all, that's ultimately the reason why we spend countless hours every day crisscrossing the streets of Albuquerque going from one meeting to another.

The time we spend at the shelter often includes some joking and light-hearted banter with the staff as well as interaction with our guests. As the months have gone by, they have come to increasingly love Elma. Who wouldn't? She's as lovely inside as she is out.

In addition, it's an absolute joy to spend many Saturday evenings sharing God's Word at Joy Junction with Elma concluding my message as she shares a five-to-ten-minute sermonette rounding out what I have been sharing. In addition, she occasionally blesses all of us with a song. She has a great voice. Of course, while our guests only get to hear her sing a song once, I am treated to her renditions many times as I hear her practicing.

The path to our getting married was not at all conventional. While beautifully covered by local media the day after we got married, some of you may not be aware of our journey.

So how did this whole adventure begin?

I first met Elma "virtually" on www.eHarmony.com in early 2013, and then in person in October 2013 during a quick trip to Israel. The following March I traveled to the Holy Land again as a reporter to cover the 2014 Christ at the Checkpoint Conference for the ASSIST News Service (ANS). Working with ANS and covering stories of this type is a natural extension of the ministry I feel God has given me to help bring light to the oppressed and marginalized.

The week at the conference was busy and eventful, as I'll relate in more detail in the next chapter. I interviewed several people with firsthand knowledge of the long history of the Israeli-Palestinian animosity, and I looked forward to the time I would spend with Elma in Tel Aviv. I could hardly wait to see her. We had talked daily on the phone, but we hadn't seen each other for several months.

Before leaving Bethlehem, however, there was one more “adventure” in store. I needed to get some money out of the ATM located in the hotel lobby. Two of the bills I got were 200 shekels each (almost \$58). I did the transaction without a thought and put the bills in my wallet. A couple of days later while attempting to buy something in Tel Aviv with Elma, a clerk looked at the bills and told me they were fake. The paper was much glossier and of a lower grade than the genuine article. I would have never thought I could get fake money from an ATM! I should have known better.

Elma and I had a wonderful time of reconnecting from Friday afternoon through Monday evening. The highlight was an engagement dinner for us on Sunday night at The Old Man and the Sea restaurant in Jaffa Port with a number of friends from Elma’s church family, including her pastors. They went out of their way to embrace me and make me feel welcomed and loved, which I most definitely did. What a delight it was to experience God’s plan and redemption unfold for me in my personal life!

The Kiss of Hearts

A year back before Elma and I met on eHarmony, we each had been praying that God would bring the right person into our lives—not only as husband or wife, but also as a ministry partner. We had both learned (after many years) to give God the full authority over our lives in finding that person. Doing so always works out best in the end, and Elma and I are ongoing testimonies of that fact.

We are both Christians and love to help the poor, hungry, marginalized, and disenfranchised. What better choice for a life partner than that? We got engaged in Bethlehem and returned to Tel Aviv a few days later.

When it was time to leave Israel the following week, tears flowed. I realized I was truly in love and had met the woman with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. During the ensuing months we continued

to talk daily, usually for between ninety minutes to two hours at a time. I spent more time with Elma on the phone than I had with anyone else in my life.

Of course, that was all we *could* do. We couldn't go out to see a movie or take a walk on the beach. However, that time we spent talking laid a great foundation for a strong relationship. Most married couples don't spend that amount of time communicating. When I would sometimes tell friends how long we talked on the phone, they would look at me in amazement. We talked about every subject conceivable, including sharing what we imagined our lives together would be like in the years ahead. There was no made-for-TV drama in our deepening relationship. Instead, there was an increase in the love and commitment we felt for each other.

In January 2014, I had already submitted a packet of information to the U.S. government to start the ball rolling for the K-1 visa—also referred to as the “90-day fiancé visa”—upon which the TLC reality show of the same name is based. There are differences between our experience and the experiences of the show's participants, though: *90 Day Fiancé* focuses outward on the drama that occurs after the foreign fiancé arrives in the United States. In our case, however, the drama was more internal as we worked our way through the visa process and exposed much of our lives to the probing eyes of the U.S. government. In addition to tax returns, fingerprints, an FBI background check, and proof of income, Elma and I also had to include, as part of our application package, a number of the e-mails we had exchanged with each other.

While, technically, the requirement for a K-1 visa is that you only have to meet once in person preceding the interview at the embassy, obviously more meetings are conducive to a healthy relationship. They're also useful to help prove the relationship is genuine to routinely suspicious consular officials.

In July 2014, Elma returned to the Philippines to spend some time with her daughter. I joined her a few weeks later, and we started gathering

additional documents still needed for the all-important interview at the embassy, for which we still didn't have a date.

As we waited and waited, we both felt frustrated and powerless. We couldn't do anything other than let the wheels of the bureaucratic process run their course. And for me, typically a type-A personality, it was perhaps worse than for someone with a more low-key, relaxed personality. I would wake up day after day hoping there would be some communication indicating progress. Elma encouraged me to be patient. I wasn't.

Finally, we found out that the U.S. Embassy in Manila was ready for us to schedule our appointment. We went online and saw that January 29, 2015 was available. After that, I recall, there was nothing open for at least a couple of months. We quickly locked in the date.

The day loomed large in our minds. As it drew closer, neither Elma nor I thought about much else. We were prayerfully prepared, but it was still a tense time.

Finally the day arrived. Elma went by herself to the interview, as we didn't think I was allowed to be there with her. (Later on, I found that I could have accompanied her.)

The morning hours of January 29 passed slowly for me, as I prayed and waited for Elma to come back and tell me how things had gone. Finally she arrived and said that things had gone well, but we still needed three more documents. Two of those we obtained the same day and sent to the embassy; another one took a little longer. About a couple of weeks later we heard from the embassy that they had everything the staff needed and would notify us of their decision.

We were back to the waiting game again, and there was nothing else for us to do other than wait. During those weeks I appreciated our good friends in Davao who encouraged us during this time, as they had for many months prior. The Edge radio station manager Jay Bringas, Pastor Michael Thompson, and Jeremiah Gubat, you will always have a special place in our hearts.

That long anticipated e-mail arrived from the embassy a couple of weeks or so after. Elma had been granted the K-1 visa. I started crying—tears of happiness. Our long wait was over.

As I reflect on the last three years, I realize they have been the most exciting time in my life. God used the eHarmony computers to introduce us to each other, and that resulted in me getting to know the woman who would become the love of my life and very soon my wife.

Thanks to God's provision and the Holy Spirit's unifying gift, we are now two hearts with one vision for the homeless, poor and hungry.

"True Love Starts with the Kiss of Hearts," says the song of that name by Christian musicians Steve and Annie Chapman. It goes on to say, "Though a kiss may be the end result, it should never be the reason."

That's the way it happened for my wife Elma and me. We've now been married just over a year and are savoring every minute. It all started with the "kiss of hearts."

Remembering how our relationship grew, I recall how we talked about every subject conceivable, including sharing what we imagined our lives together would be like in the years ahead. We also shared past experiences in our lives that had led us to where we are today—together in love and ministry.

Knowing and loving Elma has caused me to marvel as I have asked myself what makes the "other heart" of Joy Junction beat with such a resounding passion for the needy? In addition to being an obvious spiritual gift, from where did Elma's compassion come in a human sense? I had never met anyone in my life as Elma who is as moved by and interested in bettering the plight of the needy, hungry, and disenfranchised.

I knew her life growing up in the Philippines was far from easy. Her parents, while both hardworking farmers, often struggled to make ends meet. Elma said they had three meals a day "most of the time," but when her parents got sick, finding the necessary funds to go to the doctor was a challenge.

Those hardships helped instill in Elma an ongoing desire to work hard to help ensure she had a better life, as well as to help her family and other people in need who she encountered.

Elma's parents always reminded her to be kind and compassionate to the less fortunate. She says, "Both of them had a big heart. They always helped others, even when we only had enough for us."

Fast forward to Elma becoming a caregiver in Israel for nearly twenty years. Due to the wages available in the Philippines (a typical wage may be a dollar an hour or a little more), it's a common practice for many Filipinos to spend a lot of their working life outside the country and to send much of their income back home to support family. Elma says the almost two decades she spent in Israel helped mold her further into the person she is today.

She was able to meet some needs. Over a decade ago, her sister who is a pastor of a church in a rural area of the Philippines, told her about a woman who was in immediate need of an operation in her right eye or she would probably end up going blind in both. Despite the offer of a free operation, additional funds were needed to make the procedure a reality.

Thinking about the need, Elma was unable to sleep until she gave what she had saved to allow the operation to happen. Three years later while visiting the Philippines, Elma met the woman, who thanked her for the generosity that allowed her to live a normal life.

"Her story opened my eyes by being sensitive to other people needs," Elma explains. "It was so scary for me to think if I didn't pay attention when the Lord was leading me to help that woman, she would have been blind by the time I met her in person."

Elma continues, "Though I learned to love my job and was contented with my life, I knew there was something more out there God had in store for me, but I had no clue what it was."

In late 2012, Elma felt she wanted to be in a ministry that fed the hungry with three meals a day, helped the poor and homeless, and

ensured that youngsters could go to school with the school supplies they needed.

She knew this was a very ambitious goal, but she was also aware that nothing was impossible with God. “All I could do was pray and ask God to lead me to the direction where He wanted me to go. The best thing that happens when you just continue to delight yourself in the Lord, is that he will give you the desire of your heart.”

On March 27, 2015, following an amazing adventure and a number of challenges, we became husband and wife. I have shared a shortened version of my article, “Two Hearts, One Vision,” which appears earlier in this chapter (www.joyjunction.org/two-hearts-one-vision/).

Having a shared vision has been both challenging and rewarding. “We both wake up thinking about Joy Junction, spend the whole day working for JJ, and the last thing in our mind before going to bed is still JJ,” Elma says, echoing my own thoughts. She adds, “We’re dealing with different kinds of people at JJ, but at the same time, I never have trouble in understanding the needs of the people we serve. I understand exactly what our guests are dealing with. Many of them are not hesitant to come and talk to me and are so grateful that I am willing to listen and encourage them.”

Looking back, Elma says she is amazed at what God has done—and keeps doing—as am I. I am humbled and honored to be one of two hearts with the same vision. Elma now understands why she’s always had a heart for the needy. “Everything I have experienced in my life prepared me for the ministry where God has put me. Now I feel whole and complete in my life.”

Meeting Jesus in 1976 changed my life forever. Now forty years later, my journey with the most amazing woman I have ever met in my life is everything I ever thought it could be and more. I wake up each morning thankful for the blessings God has given me. I look forward to what lies ahead as I go about the day’s activities with Elma at my side.



A REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

As a reporter, I keep notes about the backstories related to the ones I submit. Following is my reporter's notebook of the trip that cemented Elma's and my future:

I left Albuquerque for Washington's Dulles Airport, from which my journey began with an uneventful flight to Munich. I arrived at Ben Gurion Airport just after 2:00 p.m., which would have been 6:00 a.m. Albuquerque time.

After navigating through Israeli immigration, I went to the airport entrance where I found a cab I had booked in advance. We started out for the beautiful hotel facility where the conference was to be held. I checked into my room and took a few moments to breathe.

After cleaning up, I followed directions through the cavernous hotel to find out where dinner was being served. At my best I am directionally challenged, and that's in places I know. This hotel posed a special challenge. But once I got my footing and found where I was supposed to be heading, I met some delightful United Methodists from Oklahoma who were there for the conference.

By dinner's end, I was exhausted and the pillow was calling my name. I got up late the next morning, had some Turkish coffee (my

favorite), and did some pre-conference interviews with attendees willing to talk to me.

At lunch, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was a pleasure to run into Isam Ghattas, director of Manara Ministries in Amman, Jordan. I met Isam some years before while in Jordan for ANS. We caught up a bit, and I also enjoyed meeting his wife. They are an amazing couple. Among other things, Manara helps refugees who have flooded into Jordan from neighboring countries.

A while later, the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference opened with a word of greeting from Rev. Munir Kakish, president of the Evangelical Council in Palestine. He said, “As a religious group, we are unable to practice our civil rights . . . Our council prays for peace and justice to rule our land.” Then World Evangelical Alliance CEO, Rev. Dr. Geoff Tunncliffe, also greeted delegates. He began by requesting official recognition of his group’s member churches from the Palestinian Authority, adding, “I will bring the same message to Israel later this week.” Tunncliffe concluded by saying, “My hope and prayer is that as evangelicals, we can be on the leading edge of peace, so that in coming years there may be a new bridge of peace.”

After the opening session concluded, I went outside the hotel where the evening traffic was quite brisk. There was nothing visible occurring out of the ordinary. The traffic flowed, and people walked in and out of local stores buying necessities. It occurred to me this scene could have been played out almost anywhere in the world.

Just a few hundred yards from the hotel, however, was a quiet reminder of what the conference was all about. A sign read, “Warning. This is illegally occupied land. State of Palestine.” Never forget, this is an area in the Holy Land where ongoing tension bubbles just beneath the surface—and sometimes spills right over. Thus the reality of the tense Middle East situation was brought right home for me and other conference delegates.

When the morning session concluded, a conference organizer told those interested in eating lunch at the nearby Bethlehem Bible College (organizers of the conference) they needed to take a back door from the hotel, as there was an “incident” occurring outside in the front. Undeterred, I ran out to see what was going on. Bethlehem’s main street was full of choking tear gas and rubber bullets as the Israeli army faced off against stone-throwing Palestinian youth.

An observer told me about one hundred young people were involved, upset about what they believed was the killing of at least two Palestinians by the Israeli army (IDF) in the few days prior to the conference. The reason for the killing was disputed—depending on which narrative you listen to—that of the Israelis or the Palestinians.

One side of the story, represented by a *Times of Israel* article, said, according to a *Ma’an News* report, driver Fidaa Muhye Addin Majadlah was killed and passenger Ibrahim Adnan Shukri was seriously injured after their car went off the road and flipped over. The other side of the story was that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had shot the men.

The *Times* said while a Palestinian security source had initially told the news service AFP that IDF forces had fired on the vehicle, the news agency retracted the story after Palestinians notified them that “their information on army gunfire was incorrect.”

The young people involved in the demonstration outside the hotel were also reportedly upset about the killing of a judge by the IDF at the Allenby Crossing. While a preliminary IDF investigation said that an IDF soldier fired his weapon because he felt his life was in danger, Palestinians weren’t buying it.

According to a story by Gili Cohen and Jack Khoury for *Haaretz*, the Jordanian government sent a sharply worded statement to Israel following the killing of the judge. The border terminal is operated jointly by Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. It is the main border crossing for Palestinians from the West Bank traveling to neighboring Jordan and beyond and a crossing point for goods between Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan.

Officials in Jordan told *Haaretz* the government is under pressure to conduct an in-depth investigation, and that the issue would be discussed in parliament.

Though hotel security ushered us back in (or tried to), I stayed outside the hotel as close as I could to everything going on. I appreciated their concern for our safety, but I felt compelled to observe the melee firsthand. The tear gas was thick, and I really didn't want to inhale its obnoxious fumes, yet I needed to find out what it felt like. Just a few short whiffs were enough as the gas made its way to the back of my throat, stung my eyes, and gave me a gigantic headache. An ambulance made its way down the street past the hotel. I heard a Palestinian youngster had inhaled too much of the tear gas and needed medical treatment.

Regardless of your political viewpoint on who is "right" and who is "wrong," can you imagine living like this? I was told that similar situations are a pretty regular occurrence in Bethlehem.

More conference sessions came and went, and there were a multitude of viewpoints presented. One influential college president did not seem to be a good judge of his audience when he told everyone he felt safer since the wall, or checkpoint, was built. A torrent of disagreement rippled through the audience when he said that.

On the afternoon of the third day of the conference, I visited a longtime friend in Bethlehem, Joseph Canavati, owner of the Alexander Hotel, where I had stayed in previous years. Joseph has always been so gracious to me. He set me up with a couple of interviews last year that included a visit to one of Bethlehem's hugely overpopulated refugee camps, Camp Aida.

It was so good to reconnect again and enjoy Turkish coffee with Joseph, his wife Ivonne, and their son Joey. Since I brought only three shirts on the trip with me, I asked Ivonne if she had any idea where I could get some shirts, thinking she would direct me to a local store. But she was kind enough to give me some, which lessened my predicament and ensured I wouldn't be a smelly distraction to those around me!

The next day at the conference brought a message from Pastor Bob Roberts who energized delegates right from his opening words. Later, he was gracious enough to give me a one-on-one interview. Roberts is the founder and senior pastor of Northwood Church near Dallas, Texas. He covered a number of issues in his conference presentation, including the fact that he loves both his Jewish friends and his Palestinian friends. When he asked conference delegates how many of them love Israel and pray for the peace of Jerusalem, there was loud applause. Roberts also spoke about eschatology (events associated with the end times). He apologized to Palestinians on this topic, saying his heart breaks for their suffering.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,” Psalm 122:6 instructs. We can each do that, no matter what our political or religious persuasions are.

And we can pray for each other. Elma and I appreciate your prayers and support as we continue together with the work that God has for us. I’ll shortly elaborate on that work, or rather, “calling,” but first, let me relate how God taught me what being homeless is like—by allowing me to experience it for myself.



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 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. 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. 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

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 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 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. Those 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 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 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 saying 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 let my long-suffering instructor know 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

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.

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 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, "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 anyone who did not receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior would go to hell. Assuring him 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

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.

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. 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 about me, “Oh, that’s Jeremy Reynolds, 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 emigrate 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 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!

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 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 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 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.

For example, one morning we were in a heated argument. I told this good, upright, caring Englishwoman 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 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 in 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 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 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 sermon or the church building the thing I remembered from that first service. As odd as it may seem, it was learning 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 U.S.

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 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. 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 uniformly drab gray. My image of poor people—and their needs, hopes, and problems—was shaped by listening to my mother make derogatory comments about them. She felt 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 I. 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 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 daycare 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. A 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

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 with about ten dollars in my pocket. 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 as if it would drop off.

Just when I was about to give up, an elderly couple stopped their car and asked where I was headed. It turned out they were Christians who actually lived their faith. 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.

I have found that trials often follow blessings. By the next evening, I had gotten to the New Mexico-Texas border, where I stood out in the blazing sun for hours.

As hard as the lessons were to learn, my homeless experiences helped shape the ministry of Joy Junction. For example, I insist we provide transportation to pick up new residents. I have also instructed my staff to see that guests who come in after the normal arrival time are fed something, no matter what time of the day or night it is.

While I definitely did not enjoy my experience of hunger and homelessness, I know that if I had not gone through it, I would not have appreciated how good a bologna sandwich could taste when you have not eaten for a long time. If that church had not offered me shelter five miles away, I would not have understood how hopelessly distant and unreachable five miles sounds when you are broke, exhausted, and homeless.

Later, I arrived in Phoenix, and friends bought me a bus ticket to Flagstaff where they picked me up and took me to their home in Cameron, Arizona. For the next few weeks, I stayed in Cameron, a little village on an Indian reservation about fifty miles north of Flagstaff. I spent a lot of time thinking about my life's direction.

A few weeks later, on a wing and a prayer—really more of a wing than a prayer—I traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, the site of a bloody prison riot a year or so earlier. I heard the penitentiary was hiring prison guards, and the pay was good. After arriving in Santa Fe on a Saturday evening, I stayed in a hotel and the following morning made my way to Christian Life Fellowship, at that time pastored by Carl Conley. He not only became my pastor, but also remained a good friend throughout the years. All these years later, he still maintains an active ministry schedule and travels all over the world.

Another fortuitous event was about to happen. Following the service, a church member offered me a place to stay for a week. Afterward I stayed in the basement of another church member, a local property owner named Rudy Rodriguez. Rudy put me to work painting apartments for him, which must have required continual faith and patience on his part, as I ended up spilling more paint on the floors than I put on the walls. Consequently, even long-suffering Rudy decided it would be best if I looked for another job.

A local hotel hired me, and I worked there for a while, washing dishes and driving their van. During this time, Rudy and the members of the Santa Fe chapter of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship collected money for me to bring Sylvia and our boys from Florida to Santa Fe. By this time, she was about eight months pregnant.

Sylvia arrived a few weeks later. New Mexico provided a big climate change and a culture shock after living in Florida. While it was good having a job and a roof over our heads, it was not easy living on minimum wage in Santa Fe. Still, we were more blessed than many Americans. Thirty-plus years later, Rudy still helps us. What a blessing he is.

Food for Thought

If all we have done is for ourselves alone, what we have accomplished dies with us. What we have done for others and the world remains.

