



CHAPTER II

FLYING FIRST CLASS FOR THE LORD

*You are My witnesses,” says the LORD,
And My servant whom I have chosen.*

—*Isaiah 43:10*

I was packing for a trip to Belize, Central America, where Rosinell Craig, the Women’s Ministries leader, had asked me to share my personal story of abuse. She said that domestic violence was a major problem in her country and that the women there needed to hear my message of hope. I was humbled and amazed at how God continues to use the darkest times of my life not only to bring healing to hurting people but also to draw others closer to Jesus.

“Let’s see, I have my clothes, shoes, blow dryer, and—oh, yes, I don’t want to forget my bookmarks.” I hurried to my office to grab a couple hundred bookmarks and then tucked them into the suitcase. I called to my husband, Tim. “Honey, I’m ready to leave for the airport!”

Thirty minutes later I was sitting at the gate in Knoxville’s airport waiting to board Continental’s flight to Houston, Texas, where I would change planes for Belize City. I began looking around at the other passengers. *People are so interesting*, I thought. Some were doz-

ing in their chairs; others were talking on cell phones so loudly that everyone else could hear; and still others were quietly sipping coffee and reading. One mother was trying to distract a crying child that had obviously been awakened too early. *I wonder which of you God wants me to witness to today?* I said to myself.

Every time I fly I ask God to seat me next to someone with whom I can share Jesus. Today was no exception. I closed my eyes and began talking to my heavenly Father. *Dear God, You know all the people who are flying with me today. You know their hearts. Lord, please seat me next to someone I can witness to; someone who needs to hear how much You love them.* I continued to pray for others on my prayer list and for the women in Belize who would attend the retreat. Before I knew it, we were boarding the plane.

As I slid into the wide soft leather seat I had been assigned, I whispered another prayer, “Thank You, Jesus, for letting me fly first class.” It had been a long time since I had flown first class. This kind of privilege just didn’t fit into a full-time volunteer’s budget! I was in this wide seat only because the person responsible for purchasing my ticket had waited too long and the only seats available were in first class!

When everyone was boarded and the flight attendant had closed the door and instructed us to fasten our seat belts, I was disappointed. The seat next to me was empty. *Oh well, Lord, You know what You’re doing. Is there someone on my connecting flight that You want me to witness to? Is someone hurting that needs to hear Your plan of salvation? If so, please anoint my lips and let me be a vessel You can use. Amen.*

In Houston, I changed planes. As I made my way down the aisle, I quickly found my seat, 2B, and sat down. Again, the seat next to me was empty. I began to plead for the Holy Spirit to fill that seat! I didn’t have to wait long before a lady carrying an oversized purse said, “Excuse me, I believe I’m in the seat by the window.”

As we both settled in, I asked, “Have you been to Belize before or is this your first visit?”

“No, I’ve been there many times,” she answered. “My husband and I vacationed there several years ago, and we fell in love with the country. In fact, I’m meeting him there. We’re buying a house and retiring. The cost of living is so much better in Belize than in the United States. You just can’t beat the weather, and the people are so warm and friendly. How about you? Is this your first visit? Oh, by the way, my name is Beth.”

After introducing myself, I commented, “I’m in Belize only for a few days.”

Before I could say anything else, Beth interrupted, “Why in the world would you come to Belize for only a couple of days! What are you doing? Are you traveling on business?”

Wow! Thank You, Jesus! I breathed in silent prayer. *You sure opened this door in a hurry!* I quickly explained that I was going to Belize to give my testimony, based on my book, to a group of women. I had a copy of the book with me, so I pulled it out of my carry-on bag and handed it to her. “It’s called *Battered to Blessed*,” I said, “because I was abused in my first marriage.” Before I knew it, I had told her my whole story. As I finished, I commented, “There are so many hurting people around the world. I understand that Belize has its share of domestic abuse, as well. I am praying that God will use me this weekend to be a blessing in someone’s life! Maybe hearing my story will give someone hope because Jesus wants to save her, too!”

I continued, “God is so full of grace and mercy. He delivered me from that abusive relationship and made me whole! I thank Him for each day that He gives me, because so many times I was left for dead and never should have survived. It doesn’t matter what we are going through; God is with us every step of the way. All we need to do is pray and ask Him to come into our lives!”

“It’s amazing,” Beth responded, “that you can talk about God so freely. I have to tell you, I don’t think I have ever heard anyone speak about God in such a personal way. You make it sound so natural, so easy, like you know Him personally!”

I had to smile as I saw the bewildered look on her face. “I *do* know Him personally; He’s my best Friend. I can talk to Him about anything and everything. And I know He hears me. The real purpose of prayer isn’t just to ask for things, but to get to know Jesus! And when you talk to Him, you’ve got to listen. When I was in the midst of my worst moments of abuse, I was praying and pleading, begging God to save me. But I wasn’t listening. I would figure out how I thought God should answer my prayer, and then ask Him to make it happen. Then I’d wonder why it didn’t. I wasn’t listening to His voice directing me. It is never God’s plan that we should be hurt, physically or emotionally. God wants to give us the desires of our heart. But we must first learn to listen to His voice.”

Beth sat there for a moment, silently taking in what I had just said. She looked deeply troubled, and I could sense the emotion building up inside her.

She looked directly at me and said, “I have to tell you that I think it was God’s plan for me to sit next to you today. I have a wonderful husband now, but it wasn’t always that way, and I still struggle with feelings of resentment from years of rejection. I don’t know you at all, but I don’t detect any bitterness in you. How is that possible? How did you move past the pain?”

“Oh, that’s simple.” I replied. “I can sum it up in one word: *forgiveness!* If you refuse to forgive, you will live with that pain for the rest of your life, and it will totally destroy any chance of happiness for you on this earth *and* in heaven. God tells us in the Bible that if we do not forgive others, He will not be able to forgive us.

“Beth, you have a choice to make. You can choose to live a miserable life dwelling in the past and harboring bitterness and resentment, or you can choose to forgive and give that burden to Jesus! If you choose to forgive, that burden will be lifted from your shoulders, and you will experience the real joy that Jesus has to offer!”

Tears rolled down Beth’s cheeks, and she reached for her purse to retrieve a tissue. “You make it sound so easy, but how can you forgive someone who has done such horrible things to you?”

I reached over and took her hand. “Jesus can give you that forgiveness. All you have to do is ask Him. You may not be able to love him with your human love, but you can love him with *God’s love*.”

“How will I know if I’ve really forgiven him or not?” she asked.

“Oh, you’ll know all right. You will experience incredible peace and joy. When you have truly forgiven, there’s no bitterness or resentment. God will replace that anger and hate with His love! You will even find yourself asking God to bless whoever has wronged you with the same blessings that you’d ask for yourself. God is so full of grace and mercy, and that’s what Jesus wants us to have!”

We continued talking. She asked questions, and I answered first one and then another. I could see that she was searching for something that was missing in her life. There was no doubt in my mind that God had placed me in that first-class seat beside Beth for a reason.

The flight attendant’s voice came over the loud speaker, “Please place all tray tables and seats in their upright position and prepare for landing.”

What? It can’t be time to land already! The two-hour flight had gone by so quickly, and there was so much more that I wanted to share with Beth.

“I’d like to give you a book to read,” I said. “It is a book that will answer some of your questions, and more importantly, it will help you see just how much Jesus loves you.”

I pulled the book from my carry-on bag and placed one of my business cards inside. “It is called *Passion of the Christ*, and I believe it will be a blessing to you.” I handed her the book.

She looked at it and held it almost reverently. “Thank you so much, but not just for the book. I can’t thank you enough for what you did for me today. You certainly have given me much to think about.”

Before leaving the plane, I leaned over and asked if I could pray with her.

“Yes, I’d like that very much.”

I took her hand in mine and began to pray. “Dear Father in heaven, thank You so much for allowing Beth and me to sit together today and for giving us the opportunity to talk about You. Please come into Beth’s life, Lord, and give her the forgiveness in her heart that she is seeking. Lord, replace the bitterness and hurt with Your love. May she have so much joy and love in her heart that her marriage will be happier than she could have ever imagined and she will know it is because of You! I am also asking, Lord, that somehow You will let Beth know how much You really love her and that she will have a desire to be closer to You! Thank You for being the awesome God that You are. Amen.”

When we finished praying I gave her a hug. She was crying now, oblivious to the people around us that were already getting off the plane.

“I want you to know that I will be praying for you,” I told Beth. “And if we never meet again on this earth, let’s plan to be neighbors in heaven.”

“I’d like that very much,” she said. And with that we went our separate ways. All the way to the baggage carousel I was praising God for answering my prayer and giving me the opportunity to witness for Him.

GOD’S BIRTHDAY GIFT

Tomasa Smith picked me up at the airport and dropped me off at my hotel. She told me she would give me a couple of hours to check in and get settled before she picked me up for the evening meeting. As I walked toward the registration desk, I glanced toward a door that was opening and watched as three girls and a woman carrying a child walked out from the restaurant. One of the girls had some helium-filled balloons in her hand, and the others were carrying gift bags.

Suddenly the girl carrying the balloons looked at me and shrieked! “Miss Brenda! I can’t believe it’s you! Mom, look, it’s Miss Brenda!”

The girl ran toward me, and I dropped my suitcase and carry-on bags just seconds before she wrapped her arms around me. She was jumping up and down and still screaming my name. Then turning to look at her mom, she exclaimed, “Oh, Mom, thank you so much; this is the best birthday present ever!”

Quickly putting two and two together, I hugged her and wished her happy birthday. I looked toward her mom who mouthed the words “Thank you” to me. We moved over to the lobby, where we sat down in the lounge chairs and visited for about thirty minutes. The little girl’s name was Tanisha, and she told me about how she watched *Kids Time* every day and how much she loved the program.



Tanisha’s favorite singer on Kids Time is Joshua Lance. He’s very special to “Miss Brenda,” too!

She went into great detail, talking about her favorite singers and sharing her dream to someday meet Joshua, who sang on the “Praise Time” segment. She also loved “Cooking Time with Catie” and “Nature Time” with Ranger Jim. Tanisha rattled on and on, stopping now and then to give me another spontaneous hug. Her two friends were just as excited; each wanted special attention. They took turns sitting next to me, and I gave them some of my special bookmarks. I didn’t leave until photos were taken and I had signed everything they wanted me to sign!

As I turned to go, Tanisha ran after me for one more hug. “Miss Brenda,” she exclaimed, “I will never forget this birthday! You are the best present ever! I love you, Miss Brenda.”

One more hug, and they were gone. I learned that 3ABN is a very popular station on cable TV throughout the country. Tanisha lived

fifty miles away and had just come into the city to celebrate her birthday at the hotel restaurant.

Wow! I thought as I entered my room. God knew that I would be walking into this hotel lobby the very second that Tanisha and her mom and friends would be leaving! I marveled at God's perfect timing and also at the huge responsibility that He had entrusted to me. Thank You, Jesus, for allowing me the privilege of witnessing to these children.

MINISTERING IN BELIZE

A record number of women attended the weekend retreat. Instead of the thousand women the leaders were hoping for, almost two thousand came! It was wonderful to meet so many precious people eager for a spiritual feast! Several buses even came from Guatemala bringing a large number of Spanish-speaking women to the retreat. This meant that someone would need to translate.

As I listened to the translator during the preliminaries, it became quite apparent to me that she was having difficulty. Many times she would stop to clarify a word or thought with the speaker.

I began to pray, *God, please send someone to translate for me!* I looked around anxiously, *Lord, surely there must be someone here who knows both Spanish and English fluently.*

As I heard my name announced and began walking toward the platform, I was still praying, *Lord, I know You have everything under control. I am placing my faith and trust in You.* Just as I reached for the microphone, Rosinell Craig came forward and took it from my hand.

“Is Julie Archibold here?” she asked. A woman in a pale lavender suit raised her hand. “Julie, would you mind translating for Brenda, please?”

Seconds later, a beautiful, tall, poised, eloquent woman walked toward the platform. But the most striking thing about her was her face—I could see Jesus shining through her!

As I began to speak, Julie translated every word perfectly! She was so quick that I paused only briefly to give her time to interpret. She matched every expression in the tone of my voice, even making the identical hand gestures that I was making! As I continued speaking, it flowed so perfectly that I almost forgot that translation was necessary! I couldn't believe it! God answered my prayer far beyond my wildest dreams!

When the program was over I spoke to first one lady and then another as they shared their own personal experiences of domestic violence. Some were crying too hard to talk, so I would just hold them in my arms and say a prayer quietly in their ear. Others handed me letters that they had written prior to coming to the meeting, wanting me to read them later. Each of the women asked for prayer. I will never forget one lady with a swollen eye, bruised face, and lips so swollen that she could hardly talk.



Julie and me. God sent Julie in answer to my prayer. She has not only become a wonderful prayer warrior, but also a dear and treasured friend.

She wanted to tell me that after hearing my testimony she now had the courage to leave. Her husband had not wanted her to attend this event, and because she had insisted on going, he beat her very severely. Still, she was determined to come, and while her husband was sleeping, she left in the wee hours of the morning, walking a long distance since she had no money for bus fare. One after another, the women shared their burdens and thanked me for being willing to tell my story. By the end of the day, I was exhausted, but praising Jesus for the opportunity to witness for Him. I had prayed that God would use me in a special way, and He certainly did! I marveled at His goodness!



Rosinell Craig, Women's Ministries Director for the Belize Conference, organized a tour of orphanages in the area. Left to right: Sandra Augustus, Julie Archibold, me, Lisa Flores, Rosinell Craig, Tomassa Smith, and Michelle Smith. Incidentally, Sandra is an excellent cook; my mouth still waters for delicious eggplant recipe!

The next day, Rosinell, Tomasa, Julie, and a few others took me to visit orphanages as well as homes where children had been abused. It nearly broke my heart when one little boy wrapped his small arms around my legs and pleaded, "Please, Miss Brenda, will you be my mommy? I promise I'll be good, and I can work hard, too!" I desperately wanted to pick up that little boy and tell him that I

would love to be his mommy! But I knew that God had entrusted a world of children to me through *Kids Time* and that it would be impossible to focus on just one.

"Jesus loves you so much, and I do, too," I said, giving him a big hug. Before I could say anything more, other children were pushing toward me, eager for their hugs, too. I left with tears in my eyes and a



*Visiting at one of the orphanages. The children wanted me to know that *Kids Time* is their favorite TV show!*

heavy heart, knowing how needy the children were and knowing that I could offer only a hug. I prayed silently as we drove away that Jesus would come soon to put an end to all the suffering and sadness in this world!

The morning I was to fly home, Dr. Ranju took me to one more orphanage. She told me it was on our way to

the airport, but it seemed to me like a major detour. All of the kids there watched *Kids Time*, and she knew how much it would mean to them to be able to meet “Miss Brenda.”

Dr. Ranju is a medical doctor who could easily be making a fortune practicing medicine elsewhere. But God called her to Belize City, where she tirelessly tends to the medical needs of His children, the orphans, widows, and those unable to pay. Yet God has blessed her in ways that surpass any monetary compensation! She depends on donations from those more fortunate, and she shared with me how God always supplies her needs. I agreed that *total dependence* on God is what brings us close to Him!



Women's ministries leaders in Central America. From left to right: Coty de Calder'on (Women's Ministries Director, Guatemala), Sandra Augustus, me, Dr. Nesamony Prakasam (better known as Dr. Ranju), and Caroline Scott (wife of the president of the Belize Conference of Seventh-day Adventists).

MY RETURN FLIGHT

Before I knew it, I was back at the airport. I breezed through security and ran to my gate, barely making my flight. I settled into my first-class seat, struggling a little to get my carry-on bag to fit under the seat in front of me. I started to fasten my seat belt and then decided to wait to see if someone would sit next to me.

These sure are nice, comfortable seats, I thought to myself as I ran my hand across the soft leather. *I could sure get used to this*. Then I smiled to myself as I realized that this experience probably would never happen again! For now, I'd just settle back and enjoy the blessing of flying first class for the Lord.

I watched as the passengers passed by on their way to the coach

cabin. I wondered if anyone was going to sit next to me and began to pray that God would have someone special fill that seat! The flow of people stopped, and I was just beginning to think that no one else was coming, when a man showed up wearing a khaki shirt with some fishing lures sticking out of his pocket. He paused and said, "Excuse me, ma'am, I believe that is my seat by the window."

I quickly got up, let him in, and then took my seat again. We both fastened our seat belts as the flight attendant stood up to give the usual instructions. Since I fly frequently, I barely paid attention, but that wasn't the only reason for my inattentiveness. I was praying that God would give me an opportunity to witness to this man. I didn't have to wait long for an answer.

"Hi," he said, "my name is Charles."

"It's nice to meet you, Charles. My name is Brenda. Have you been down here fishing?" *Duh*, I thought to myself as I realized how silly that sounded. *He's obviously been fishing. Why else would a man have fishing lures in his pocket? What a foolish thing to say!*

Charles chuckled a little and replied, "Yes, I was here *trying* to fish, but it sure was a lousy trip. I didn't catch a thing. What were you doing here? Vacation?"

"No, not vacation. I was here to speak at a Christian women's retreat." I went on to tell him about the incredible weekend. I shared with him how I had written a book about my personal experience with domestic violence and how women had confided to me about the abuse they had suffered.

"Do you see this bag?" I pointed to my carry-on tucked under the seat in front of me. "That bag is full of letters from women who wanted to tell me their stories and also letters from their children. There were so many people and not enough time to talk to each of them that many brought letters and thrust them into my hands, wanting me to pray for them."

"Wow. That is really something. I'm not what you'd call a church-going man myself, although I know I should." Then out of the blue, he asked, "What church do you go to, anyway?"

“I’m a Seventh-day Adventist.”

“I’ve heard about that church; they’re pretty strict, huh? You don’t dance, drink, smoke, or basically do anything fun. How am I doing so far?”

Now it was my turn to laugh. “I can tell you this, that there is no greater joy than serving Jesus! And I don’t have a ‘left out’ feeling, if that’s what you mean.”

He grinned and asked, “What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?”

I could hardly believe my ears. God had given me an incredible opportunity to share! This is what I had been hoping for! I mentioned some of our basic doctrines, starting with believing in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and how He came to this earth to give His life so that we could have eternal life. I talked about God’s amazing love that enabled Him to leave heaven and take on the life of humanity subject to all the trials, temptations, and sins of this world. He didn’t have to do that! Jesus died on the cross because He loves each one of us so much!

Over the next hour we went all the way to Calvary and back, as I described God’s plan of salvation. Charles listened intently, taking in everything I said. Occasionally he would nod his head in agreement or ask a question, but for the most part, he just listened. That is, until he made one simple comment. “Well, I may not be a church-going man, but I’ve always known I don’t have to worry because my sweet mother is in heaven looking out for me.”

“No, she’s not,” I answered.

Charles looked up, and for the first time since he had sat down, he looked upset with me. He adjusted himself in his seat, sitting up a little straighter.

“Now, listen here,” he pointed his finger at me, “my mother was a saint! I’m talking about a wonderful woman. And I’m telling you right now my mother is in heaven!”

“No, she’s not.” I said again, this time with a little more firmness in my voice.

But before I could explain, Charles interrupted, looking angry. “Now listen here! I’ve agreed with everything you have said so far. But when you’re talking about my mother, who never missed a Sunday in church, then, then . . .” he cleared his throat, unable to continue.

“Charles, I’m sure your mother was a wonderful Christian woman, but she is not in heaven.” I put my hand up to allow time to explain. I leaned over to retrieve my Bible from my carry-on bag. “Let me show you what God says about what happens when a person dies.”

I read first one text and then another about how the dead know nothing, but are as a person who is asleep, waiting for Jesus to come. I read Psalm 146:4, “His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; / In that very day his plans perish.” I continued reading: Psalm 6:5; Psalm 115:17; Job 7:9, 10; Ecclesiastes 9:5–10; Ecclesiastes 12:7; and Matthew 27:52, which reads, “and the graves opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.”

I looked at Charles and softly said, “So you see, I’m not the one saying that your mom is not in heaven. That is what the Bible says. There are so many more texts to support this truth. You believe in the Bible, don’t you?”

He nodded his head. I could see him relax in his chair, taking in this shocking revelation.

“Why is this the first time that I am hearing this? It’s so clear after hearing you read it directly from the Bible. Why does most of the world believe that a person goes to heaven when he dies?”

“Charles, this is why it is so important to study the Bible. Don’t ever take what a pastor preaches or a friend says or even what I say, for that matter, as the gospel truth. Study the Bible yourself, and don’t forget to pray first because God *will* send His Holy Spirit to enlighten you and impress upon your heart the message He has for you.”

The flight attendant interrupted, asking for our beverage glasses, since we were getting ready to land in a few minutes. I handed her my glass and asked, “But isn’t this a two-hour flight? We can’t be ready to land just yet.”

The flight attendant smiled, “It is a two-hour flight, but the two of you have been so absorbed in your conversation, that I’m sure it feels more like ten minutes!” Charles and I both laughed.

Now I began to pray fervently. *Lord, I know Charles is open to truth and that he needs to hear more. But we are running out of time. Please impress upon me what he needs to hear the most in the few minutes that we have left. What is it that You want me to share? Please, Jesus, give me the words You want me to say. Please use me, Lord, right now to win Charles’s heart for Your kingdom. Amen.*

Before I had even finished praying, the voice of the captain came over the loud speaker. “Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking.” Everyone stopped their conversations and began listening intently. “It seems there is a freak storm that has come up over Houston, and all three airports are closed. We’re going to hang out in the air here for a while and see if the storm passes. So just sit back and relax. This should just be a short delay.”

I could hardly believe my ears! The same God who held back the hands of time for Joshua in biblical times, was doing it again right now! God’s amazing power nearly took my breath away. *Thank You, Lord, for answering my prayer.*

Charles looked over at me, “Well, maybe I’ll get a chance to ask you a few more questions.”

I smiled and said, “I can’t help but think that God’s hand was in this delay.”

He nodded and said, “I wouldn’t be a bit surprised.”

For the next hour, I answered question after question, always letting the Bible give the answers. I keep a compact Bible study guide in the back of my Bible so that I can always give a Bible study on any topic at any time. My father had taught me not to miss even one opportunity to witness for Jesus. I have many memories as a child being in the car with Daddy when we stopped for gas. That stop could easily become a two-hour “fill up” because Daddy would be giving a Bible study to the man next to him at the

pump. I grew up knowing how important it is to share Jesus everywhere I go.

I could tell that Charles was deeply affected by the Bible truth he was hearing. His questions were thoughtful and earnest. An hour went by quickly, and the captain's voice came over the loud speaker once again. "Well folks, it seems this storm is in no hurry to move on so we are going to land temporarily in Corpus Christi to keep from using up our fuel. We'll stay on the ground until we get the all clear from Houston. Unfortunately, we will not be able to let you off the plane when we land since Corpus Christi does not have a Customs and Immigration Department to handle incoming international flights. So just sit tight in your seats and wait for the all clear."

I was overjoyed! Then suddenly I realized I was probably the *only* passenger on the plane that felt that way, so it would be a good idea to hide my excitement! God is so good! *Thank You so much for giving me more time to witness*, I prayed.

Our Bible study continued as we sat on the runway. During our discussion the flight attendant would interrupt occasionally handing us soft drinks and snacks. I had just finished telling in detail about the work that God had me doing now and how far-reaching the benefits were, when I looked down at my carry-on bag and noticed some letters that were sticking out. Without thinking, I reached for a handful of letters and handed some to Charles. "Here, do you want to help me read some of these?"

Without giving him time to respond, I heaped a big pile of letters onto his lap. We sat in silence, reading first one letter than another.

"Brenda, listen to this one," his hands were shaking as he began to read.

Dear Miss Brenda, I couldn't be at the retreat today so I asked my daughter to bring my letter to you. I wanted to come so badly to hear you speak, but when I told my husband that I was going to go, he forbade me. I told him that I was going

no matter what, and well, this made him very angry. Miss Brenda, he beat me so badly, I cannot walk. It is too painful even to move from the floor where he has left me. I need you to please pray for me that my husband will stop beating me and my children. Please pray for me; I need help. I am begging you to help me. I keep praying to God, but He does not hear me. I know that He listens to you. Please, please help me. Elmina.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I looked over at Charles and could see that I wasn't the only one touched by this desperate woman's letter. "Isn't it sad, Charles, that there are so many hurting people in this world? This just breaks my heart! And the saddest thing is, she doesn't even realize that God hears her when she prays. The prayers that God loves most are the simple, earnest pleas from a sincere heart! You don't have to have eloquent words or be highly educated. Just a simple cry for help will do. 'Jesus, save me' is the most powerful prayer when spoken to our Lord and Savior, yet it consists of only three words! Isn't that amazing? There is so much pain in this world. Can you see why I have such a passion to witness for Jesus? I'm so homesick for heaven, I want Jesus to come soon!

"Just think, when we get to heaven there will be no more sin, suffering, pain, or death, but each day will be more glorious than the day before!" I reached for a tissue from my purse and wiped my eyes.

"Would you mind if we said a quick prayer for Elmina?" I asked.

"Uh, sure, I guess that would be OK."

"Dear heavenly Father, thank You for the awesome God that You are. We know that You see, hear, and know everything. And, Lord, You know where Elmina is right now. You know the aches and physical pain she is experiencing, but also the ache in her heart. Please come into her life today. We're asking that You send Your Holy Spirit to give her the peace and comfort that she needs, that she will not have a shadow of doubt that You love her and are with her. Please let

her feel Your presence. And precious Lord, we are asking that You wrap her in Your arms of love because there is no better place for her to be! Thank You for hearing and answering our prayer. May Your will be done in her life. We pray all these things in Your precious holy name. Amen.”

Charles looked a bit uncomfortable. “Well, that was a first. I don’t think I have ever had prayer on a plane before. Matter of fact, I know I haven’t. I can’t even remember the last time I prayed in a church!” He chuckled nervously.

“You can pray anytime, anywhere, and God will hear you,” I explained. “How can you expect God to be your best Friend if you never talk to Him? God loves to hear from His children, and not just when we are in trouble!”

For the next couple hours we continued to read letters. Sometimes we would read them aloud. Others we read silently. I gently tore open another envelope lying in my lap. “Here, listen to this letter,” I said.

Dear Miss Brenda, I am thirteen years old, and I love Kids Time. I watch it every day. It is my favorite show. I especially like it when you read the letters. Could you read my letter sometime? I drew a flower on the envelope so you would know which one is mine. I want to give my heart to Jesus, but I don’t know how. My mom says that there is no God since my dad got killed and left us. I want to go to church, but my mom won’t let me. Miss Brenda, will you please pray that my mom will let me go to church? I believe you when you say that God loves me. Thank you for Kids Time. I love you, Jasmine.

P.S. Could you please send me an activity book to my grandma’s house. (She said it’s okay and lets me watch Kids Time at her house.)

“Wow! That one sure gets to me,” Charles commented. “I guess I’ve been just as guilty blaming God for the bad things that have hap-

pened in my life, including when my mother died. Brenda, I want you to know that I am not the same man that walked onto this plane. I don't think it was any accident that you sat next to me!"

He continued, "I am the president of an oil company, and I've been pretty blessed in my life. I've made a lot of money and can go or do anything that I set my mind to. Someone else runs the company for me now, and I spend my days pretty selfishly, although, I didn't think that way prior to this flight."

He looked over at me and smiled. "I was fishing down in Belize for the past week, and tomorrow I'm heading out to go duck hunting with some of my buddies. I fly around the world going from one sport to the next, and I never really thought about how meaningless my life is. If I died today, I don't think there is one person that I could point to and say I made a difference in their life."

He pointed to the stack of letters on my lap and said, "I look at how God is using you to help so many people around the world, and I can't help but think what a rich lady you are. You might be a volunteer, and you told me you haven't been paid in eight years, but you are far more wealthy than I am!"

The captain interrupted with, "Ladies and gentlemen, we just received the all clear from Houston. I apologize for any inconvenience this delay may have caused. Flight attendants, prepare for landing."

We spent the next few minutes talking about our families and plans for the next day, as I replaced all the letters into my carry-on bag. It wasn't long before we had landed in Houston and had taxied to the gate. As soon as the seat belt sign went off, people immediately stood up and started retrieving their personal items from the overhead racks. You would think after spending seven hours on the plane we would be jumping out of our seats to exit the aircraft. But not Charles or me.

"Charles, would you mind if I sent you some books so you could learn more about God's truth? I'd also like to send you my book, *Battered to Blessed*. But I don't want to send it if you won't read it."

“Brenda, I don’t think you heard me when I said I was not the same man that walked onto this plane. Yes, please send any book you want, and I promise I’ll read it. Besides, I know that you’ll pray about it first.” He gave me a smile. “You are the praying-est lady I’ve ever met!”

I laughed and said, “Well, that’s not a bad thing to be called now, is it?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Would you mind if I prayed with you right now?”

“Sure, I’d like that,” he said. I reached over and took Charles’s hand and began to pray. “Dear Heavenly Father, thank You so much for this flight and for the time that You have given us to talk about You. Lord, I know it was no accident that we are sitting here today, and I want to thank You for choosing our seats. I ask that You would be with Charles in a very special way and that You will give him no peace or rest until he fully surrenders his heart to You! Please let him fully realize how much You love him and want to save him! Give him the desire to learn more about You, and as he reads the books that I will send, please give him understanding and an open heart for truth. I pray that someday soon, when You come in those clouds of glory, that Charles will be there along with his entire family and we can be neighbors in heaven! Oh, what a reunion that will be! In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.”

When I finished praying, tears were rolling down Charles’s cheeks—and mine too. Neither of us cared that the first-class section had already exited the plane and now streams of coach passengers were rushing past us to finally leave the aircraft!

I reached down into my bag and fumbled around until I found what I was looking for. I handed a Micheff Sisters CD to Charles. “This is one of my CDs I told you about. I’d like to give it to you as a special gift. The name of this CD is *Leaning on Jesus*, and that is something that I’d like to encourage you to do every day. I pray that it will be a blessing to you and that every time you listen to it, you’ll think about how much Jesus loves you.”

“Well, at least let me pay you for it,” he began to pull his wallet from his pocket.

“And let you steal my blessing? Not a chance!” I smiled as I gathered my belongings and leaned over to give him a hug. “I want to make an appointment with you right now, for us to meet in heaven at Jesus’ feet!”

As I walked toward the baggage carousel, I wasn’t a bit tired. I marveled at the miracle that God had just performed. What should have been a two-hour flight had turned into a seven-hour Bible study! I couldn’t have had a more captive listener. Charles couldn’t have moved out of his seat even if he had wanted to! I smiled to myself. *Lord, You sure know what You’re doing! I now understand why You had me flying first class!* I would have never met Charles in the coach section. It’s amazing how God orchestrates circumstances to accomplish His purpose in our lives if we are willing. *Lord, I prayed, I’ll fly first class for You anytime!*



CHAPTER 12

WHEN YOU REALLY NEED A MIRACLE

The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

—Luke 18:27

Over the years there have been countless discussions and debates about miracles. Most Christians are firm believers in miracles while non-Christians aren't quite so sure. Some admit there are certain events or happenings that can't be explained, but are not willing to give God the credit. To deny the possibility of miracles is to discredit the Bible, and that is what many atheists have been doing for centuries.

So, just what is a miracle? The dictionary gives this definition: "An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." Wow! Amazing, isn't it, that even a nonreligious book such as a dictionary gives God the credit?

Someone once said that miracles are when God makes something spectacular happen and yet chooses to remain anonymous. But I see it quite differently. Miracles are when God reveals Himself! It is often when we are in our darkest hour and crying out to Him, acknowledging Him as our Lord and Savior, that we experience His divine intervention.