



COMPREHENSIVE CONFIDENCE

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WALKING DOWN the hill toward my office at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I saw him standing on the busiest corner of campus. He had a smile on his face and greeted each person who approached him. I recognized who he was and felt my heart drop. I didn't want another one of those little green New Testaments. However, as I watched student after student ignore him, I felt sorry for him and decided to let him add one more to my collection.

So I arrived at my office with two new acquisitions—the green Gideon Bible and the third set of questions for my doctoral comps. I was exhausted. It was Friday, the third of four days sitting at my computer writing for four hours. I had carefully chosen the sequence of exams so this day would be my easy day. The committee member who had prepared these questions had told me ahead of time what questions to expect, word for word. I had studied. I knew it.

I sat down at the computer and read the first question. Confusion hit. I read the second question. Panic hit. The third question was even worse. I was clueless. Anger quickly replaced my confusion and panic. Why would she tell me to study certain topics and then ask me completely different questions? I had actually studied additional material to impress her. Instead, I now found myself not even understanding the questions.

I picked up the telephone to call my chair and complain. A little voice said, “Stop.” I replaced the receiver and decided that as a highly-stressed female, my next best option was to cry. The little voice spoke again: “Stop.” My eyes fell on the little green book on my desk.

That New Testament I had reluctantly taken from the Gideon just moments earlier became my lifeline. A verse came to mind that I knew was somewhere in the fourth chapter of Philippians: “And my God shall supply all your need . . .”

I began at verse one in search of my “supply your need” verse. However, before I found it, I discovered verse 6: “Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing . . . let your requests be made known to God.”

Verse seven offered more encouragement. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Then I arrived at verse 13. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

In that moment, God showed Himself to me. Feeling His peace, I prayed and returned to the computer. I decided to answer a question, even

if it was not the question the professor had asked.

Somehow, I answered all three questions. Four hours later, I stopped writing and made the trek to my chair’s office to return the much thicker envelope. I didn’t say a word about the questions. I consider that to be one of my finest moments.

Several days later in my oral exams, the time came for me to defend my answers to the professor who had given me those questions for my written comps. She simply said, “I was very pleased with Pam’s answers. I have no further questions for her.” Obviously, God had given me the strength to do something I could not have done on my own.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 NKJV
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THE CRISIS OF THE PERFECT HYPOCRITE

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I GREW UP in East Kingston, a picturesque but too-small coastal New Hampshire town that had a one-room schoolhouse, fishing derbies, and an annual lobster festival. I often felt as if the potential

for my life was too large for the town’s boundaries.

In my first attempt to escape, I was denied entrance to the one and only college I applied to. After spending the next year in an upholstery shop, thinking about my life’s end while pulling tacks from old sofas, I was accepted into a college located in another too-small town: Montreat, North Carolina.

I had chosen Montreat College because it was a Christian school, and despite my casual approach to life, I had convinced myself that I was a Christian. I had been raised in a nominal Christian home. But like many teenagers, I was a perfect hypocrite, living one life during the week and another on Sunday mornings.

When I took my double standard to college with me, many people there quickly recognized it. Three such people were a beautiful Southern belle named Carrie, a worship leader named Jon, and Ed, the college chaplain. At the close of my freshman year, these three were planning to spend the summer leading a small-group ministry at youth conferences. The group needed another member, and the voice of God persistently badgered Ed until he reluctantly invited me to come along.

During the second week of the summer, far from home, friends, and vices, God broke me. Following a late-night meeting in Ocean City, New

Jersey, I was approached by a young girl who asked how to become a Christian. I lowered my head to walk her through a prayer I had mouthed myself many times before. But somewhere between “Jesus, I know I am a sinner,” and “Will you come into my heart?” I realized with a profound conviction that my faith was a sham, and that this very prayer needed to become my own for the first time.

Later that night, I shared the experience with the whole ministry group. Ed invited the team to gather around me for prayer. Through tear-soaked eyes, I saw them come. Jon literally fell at my feet and embraced them with his forehead resting against my bare toes. I felt Ed’s hands pressing hard on my shoulders. Carrie gently held my hand. It was one of the most tangible experiences of God’s love I had ever known.

When we returned to school in the fall, my new family embraced me as their new brother. I moved into a house with Jon, Ed became a strong mentor to me, and Carrie eventually became my wife.

What did I learn in college? I learned in the most concrete way that faith cannot develop in a vacuum. As much as I had prided myself in my ability to go it alone, God showed me another way. As I sit today on the other side of the chaplain’s desk at Montreat College, I smile in wonder at the availability of a few people, sold out to Jesus, who determined to be the body of Christ to a sinner in need.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ESV

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THE BLESSING OF A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT

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I HAD PLAYED baseball in high school and some semi-pro baseball during my Bible college days. I had a strong yearning to play professionally. I had been given an opportunity to play with a farm club of the Pittsburg Pirates, but I hesitated. My Christian worldview made me hesitate. But the desire to play did not go away.

Following college, I headed for Oregon to take on my first full-time youth ministry. I was nervous, challenged, insecure, yet hopeful. The youth ministry work went very well. I grew and so did the youth group, but it soon

T H E F O U R T H M E E T I N G

became evident that I needed more education to develop the potential God gave me. As I explored graduate possibilities, I discovered I could get the graduate studies I wanted at Pepperdine University, and they had a highly ranked NCAA baseball team. The coach encouraged me to enroll and play. It seemed a perfect fit—graduate school and baseball. I could have the best of both because I was still eligible under the NCAA rules at that time since my undergraduate degree was from an unaccredited college.

I moved my family to Southern California to play baseball and pursue a graduate degree at Pepperdine. But to my great disappointment, the NCAA rules changed that same summer to state that any undergraduate degree, whether from an accredited or unaccredited college, disqualified a player from collegiate sports. I was devastated.

I talked with one of my professors about it. I told him of my deep passion to play baseball and how I had become ineligible to play for Pepperdine. I also told him I still could exercise my option to play professional baseball, as it had a five-year window of opportunity. His comment startled me. He said, “Why don’t you go do it?”

It was the first time I fully realized I had a choice. It was all up to me. If I wanted to play pro ball, there was nothing stopping me. But deep down I felt it would be wrong to do it. That professor’s challenge forced me to seriously consider the ramifications of abandoning graduate school and ministry. By so doing, it clarified for me that I really *did* want to preach. From that day on I never looked back.

The change in NCAA rules that summer forced me to quit struggling between two options. I either had to give my life fully to baseball or fully to ministry. I no longer could have it both ways. In forcing me either to quit baseball or to go pro, the rule change clarified for me that my real passion was to serve the Lord by helping people to know and grow in Him. That hugely disappointing situation turned into a huge blessing that gave me needed direction for my life.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5, 6 NIV

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