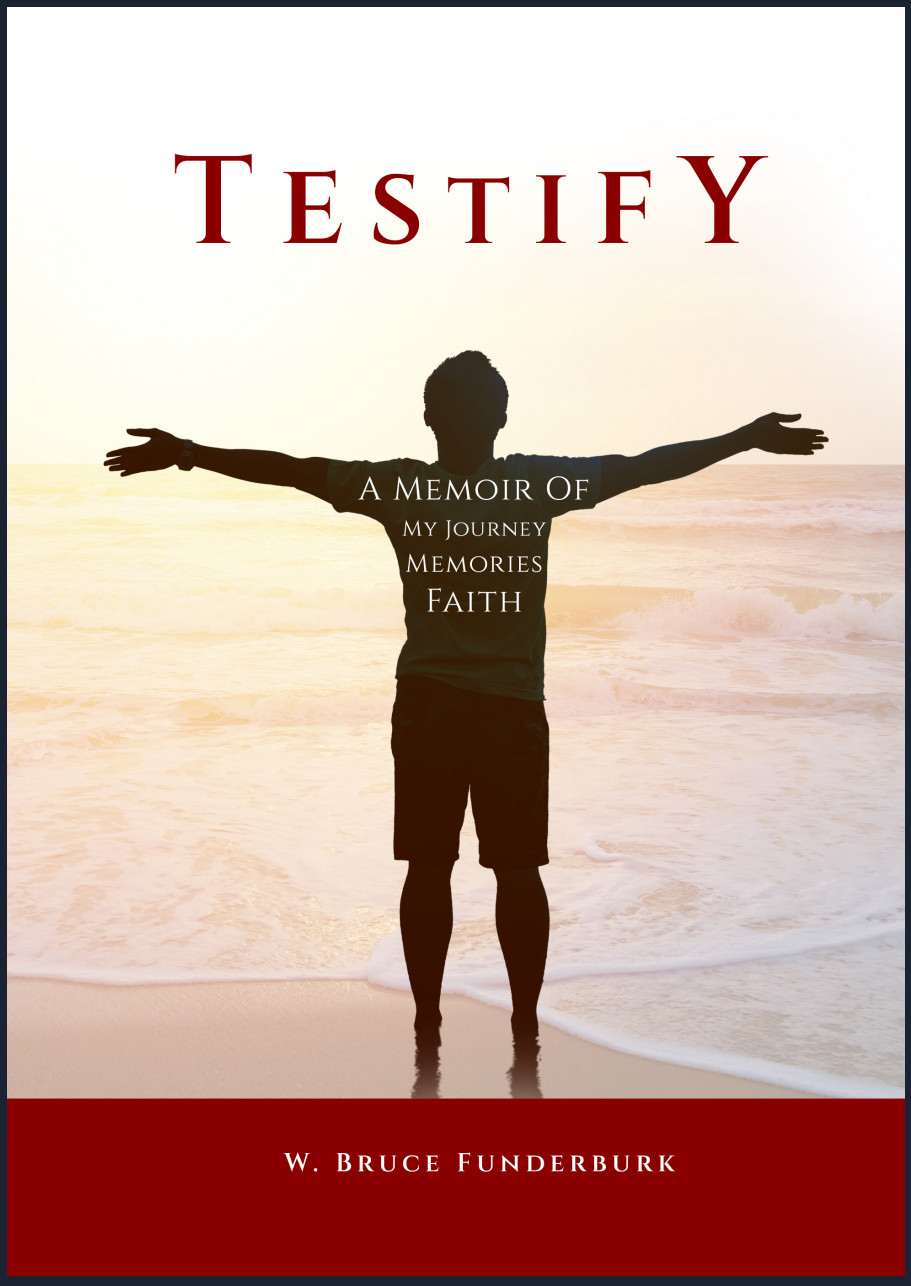
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Testify

W. Bruce Funderburk

BookGist Summary

Testify

by W. Bruce Funderburk

Genre: Biography & Memoir

Key Takeaways

• Ordinary lives contain extraordinary meaning when they are viewed through memory, faith, and honest reflection.

• Grace is the central lens of the memoir: saving grace rescues, sanctifying grace changes, sustaining grace strengthens, and serving grace equips us to help others.

• Childhood experiences—both painful and joyful—shape lifelong understanding of love, fear, responsibility, and trust.

• The author repeatedly learns that parents and grandparents often see dangers, burdens, and blessings that children cannot yet understand.

• Small acts of kindness matter: a whistle through the woods, a shared meal, a prayer while mowing grass, a card in the mail, or a stranger stopping to help can shape a life.

• Suffering, illness, and death do not erase faith; they often become the very places where faith becomes real and personal.

• Service is not about status or grand gestures, but about doing the next faithful thing with humility and consistency.

• Forgiveness is essential to a healthy spiritual life and must include truth, humility, repentance, and sometimes boundaries.

• The memoir emphasizes that perspective changes with age: what once felt like embarrassment, absence, or loss can later be understood as sacrifice, love, or grace.

• The book encourages readers to look beyond themselves, notice others, and recognize that the most meaningful lives are often the ones lived quietly and faithfully.

Who Should Read This Book

This memoir will resonate most with readers who value reflective, faith-centered storytelling grounded in real family life rather than abstract theology. If you appreciate books that find spiritual meaning in ordinary experiences—childhood embarrassments, work, grief, meals, friendships, and acts of service—this one offers a rich and emotionally honest journey. It is especially suited to Christian readers, parents, adult children processing family history, and anyone who has learned to reinterpret pain through the lens of age, gratitude, and grace. Readers who enjoy memoirs by authors like Frederick Buechner, Donald Miller, or Philip Yancey will likely appreciate the blend of narrative warmth, spiritual insight, and quiet conviction. Compared with more overtly instructional Christian books, this memoir is more personal and anecdotal; compared with purely literary memoirs, it is more openly devotional. Its strength lies in showing how faith is formed not by grand moments alone, but by scars, routines, losses, meals, accidents, and the people who love us through them.

Chapter Summaries

Preface: Testify

The preface explains that the book is meant to testify—to preserve moments that shaped the author, the lessons learned from them, and the ways God has worked in an ordinary life. The author frames writing as an act of faith: he cannot know who will read these stories or how they will matter, but he believes obedience is enough. The memoir is presented as both personal reflection and public offering, rooted in grace, honesty, and the conviction that ordinary lives carry wisdom worth sharing. The preface also defines the spiritual vocabulary that will recur throughout the book, especially grace. Grace is described in multiple forms: saving grace, sanctifying grace, sustaining grace, and serving grace. This framework sets the tone for the memoir, which is less about self-promotion than about noticing God in family, grief, work, friendship, and everyday events. The author invites readers to recognize their own stories inside his, and to see testimony as something that can help and comfort others.

Introduction: Reflecting My Life Journey

The introduction broadens the memoir's scope by showing how small sensory details—scars, smells, sounds, and meals—can unlock the deeper structure of a life. The author traces his upbringing in Charlotte, North Carolina, in a family marked by love and hardship, especially

his mother's mental illness and his father's exhausting work ethic. He emphasizes that this is not a perfect-life memoir; instead, it includes mistakes, regrets, family pain, laughter, and the ordinary rhythms that make a life meaningful. The introduction also establishes several major themes: memory is imperfect but emotionally truthful; faith often becomes clearer through grief; service is holy when it is ordinary and practical; and becoming a husband and father changes how one interprets the past. The author argues that the stories are not merely about where he has been, but about helping readers notice where they are. He hopes the reader will see grace as something that travels beside us quietly, often unnoticed until we look back.

A Scar Worth Remembering

A childhood scar on the author's hand becomes the doorway into his earliest memory of disobedience and parental protection. He remembers riding a bicycle in an apartment parking lot despite his mother's warning, colliding with another bike, falling onto pavement, and cutting his hand deeply on broken glass. The injury required stitches, and the punishment that followed reinforced the lesson that the danger was real even before its consequences appeared. As an adult, he interprets the scar differently: it records both hurt and healing. The memory of the scar leads him back to his father's darkroom, where a red light glowed from beneath a cellar door, reinforcing the memoir's idea that memory can be "developed" over time. What once seemed like a simple injury now symbolizes wisdom, love, and the patience required to understand that parental rules are often expressions of care.

I Lost Her At Twelve

This chapter recounts the devastating mental health crisis that transformed the author's relationship with his mother. He explains that at age twelve, her severe illness made her feel as if she had died, even though she remained physically alive. The narrative describes a terrifying weekend of delusion, violence, public humiliation, and emergency hospitalization, including the moment he saw her ride naked down the street and fall from her bicycle. The aftermath reshaped the whole family. Friends and relatives pulled away, the author's father worked to hold the household together, and the author carried anger, shame, confusion, and grief. Over time, he came to see his mother's behavior not as abandonment but as illness, and his father not as a failure but as a man enduring impossible burdens. The chapter becomes an exploration of how trauma freezes a child's understanding and how adulthood slowly makes room for compassion.

Whistle In the Woods

The author recalls a close boyhood friendship with Mike, a neighbor who lived down the hill through the woods. The boys communicated with a distinctive whistle, a kind of long-distance signal that predates phones and represents the simplicity of childhood connection. Their friendship included biking, tree houses, music, first crushes, and shared adventures that defined a season of life. As they grew older, the friendship drifted apart, though not without

some repair in high school. Years later, the author revisits the same woods with his own children and tries the old whistle again, only to hear no answer. The silence is bittersweet, but it confirms the chapter's central truth: some friendships do not last forever, yet they remain influential because they shaped who we became.

One More Day on the Lake

A summer at Lake Tillery with cousins becomes a formative memory of fear, kindness, and courage. The author describes bedwetting anxiety, his cousins' silence and acceptance, and his Aunt Vivian's discreet care, all of which protected him from shame. On the water, Uncle Tilden patiently encourages him to learn to ski, tube, and jump from the boathouse, gradually helping him move from fear to confidence. The lake becomes a symbol of how encouragement changes a child's sense of possibility. The author later returns to the lake as an adult with his own children, wanting to give them similar experiences of adventure and courage. The chapter shows that emotional safety and patient support can transform fear into resilience, and that childhood places remain powerful because they are associated with being accepted as we are.

Cutting the Grass

The author explains how mowing the yard became a spiritual practice because of time spent with his grandfather. While working alongside him as a boy, he noticed that his grandfather prayed while mowing. The grandfather's simple explanation—that he had time and therefore should use it to pray—shaped the author's understanding of how faith can inhabit ordinary labor. Years later, the author is still praying while mowing, and his wife briefly mistakes his conversation with God for talking to another person. The chapter emphasizes that spiritual discipline does not require special settings. The grandfather's example teaches that prayer can be woven into routine work, and that faith can be lived rather than merely discussed.

A Cheering Section

Baseball becomes an arena in which the author experiences embarrassment, perseverance, and maternal devotion. At first he is fearful at the plate and frequently strikes out, but the parents' applause and his mother's unwavering cheering help keep him engaged. One day, after he finally makes contact, his mother runs beside him all the way to first base, causing intense embarrassment but also revealing how fully she supports him. The author later becomes a strong player, and his mother remains his loudest supporter. With maturity, he recognizes that many children lack that kind of encouragement. What once felt mortifying now feels like love in action. The chapter reframes parental embarrassment as a form of devotion that stays with a child long after the game ends.

Red Eyed Surprise

Fishing, temptation, and an accidental miracle converge in a summer story about a red-eyed bass that jumps into the boat. The author and his friend Maz steal lures from a bait shop, rationalizing their wrongdoing as part of the thrill of fishing. Later, when an enormous fish unexpectedly lands in their aluminum boat, they take it to the shop where the owner identifies it as a potential state record. The record is disqualified because they did not catch it properly, and the author also comes close to confessing their theft. The owner responds with grace rather than condemnation. In hindsight, the author sees the incident as a moral lesson: the fish did not really belong to them, and the honest end of the story mattered more than the record. The chapter combines humor, conscience, and undeserved kindness.

A Father's Commitment

The chapter honors the author's father, who worked two jobs for years to support the family after the mother's illness kept her from working. The author remembers delivering dinner to his father at a gas station and helping with tasks there, gradually realizing how much unseen labor was required to keep a household stable. Only later, after having children of his own and taking on two jobs himself, does he fully understand the sacrifice. The chapter reinterprets the father's absence: he was not absent because he lacked love, but because he was carrying the family's survival on his back. The author now sees his father's long workdays as an act of commitment rather than neglect. What seemed like lack of presence in childhood becomes, in adulthood, a model of fatherhood based on endurance, responsibility, and love expressed through provision.

Watching the Pecans Drop

A quiet breakfast at the grandparents' table becomes a meditation on time, harvest, and attention. The author's grandfather watches pecans fall from the backyard trees, and the boy gradually learns about pecan season, the long bamboo pole used to shake down nuts, and the labor involved in producing something as simple as a pie. The family's annual rhythm turns the pecan harvest into a marker of seasons and a sign that school is about to begin. In adulthood, the author understands that his grandfather was not merely waiting; he was observing and appreciating. The chair by the window becomes a symbol of a life lived in attentive gratitude. The chapter's insight is that noticing is itself a form of wisdom, and that quiet moments often contain the deepest lessons.

Undefeated

The author's childhood game of Paddle Ball becomes a playful metaphor for persistence, boundaries, and spiritual victory. He practices alone against a wall, refines his skill, and eventually becomes so good that no one wants to play him. His imaginary undefeated record becomes a humorous childhood triumph, but the chapter shifts to a more serious spiritual claim: in Christ, defeat does not have the final word. The chapter uses the game to illustrate that life requires boundaries, community, and repeated practice. Mistakes, bad bounces, and

setbacks do not end the match. Instead, faith means getting back into position and serving again. The author connects his backyard victories to the larger reality of grace, insisting that believers are not abandoned when they lose rhythm because Christ's victory is greater than their failures.

A Lost Passport

A school trip to Europe becomes a lesson in vulnerability, help, and discernment when the author leaves his passport and wallet behind on a ferry. Without identification or money, he must rely on a guide, embassy staff, classmates, and his father to recover the documents needed to continue the journey. Along the way, he also faces a frightening encounter with a stranger who tries to lure him away, forcing him to recognize danger and ask for help. The chapter turns the lost passport into an image of spiritual drift. Just as a passport proves belonging and permission to travel, faith provides direction and identity. The author warns that it is easy to move through life without realizing what has been misplaced. He also emphasizes that trust must be paired with discernment, because not every voice offering help is safe.

A Spider Hole

Three junior-high boys dig a secret underground fallout shelter in response to Cold War fears of nuclear war, tornadoes, and the general instability of the world. The project is both earnest and comical: they haul dirt into the woods, hide the hole carefully, and stockpile water that turns out to be useless because it is stored far from the shelter. Eventually the project dies out along with the Cold War, and years later a bulldozer accident exposes the hidden hole to the neighborhood. The story reveals how children try to control fear through planning, secrecy, and construction. In the end, the shelter proves inadequate, but the attempt itself teaches teamwork, persistence, and the limits of human preparation. The chapter suggests that fear often leads us to overengineer safety, even though life remains unpredictable above ground.

A Nap in the Grass

An unusual friendship between a boy and a goose named Ezzy begins at a neighborhood pond and develops into a beloved household relationship. The goose follows the author home, becomes protective, and even grooms him as though he were part of her flock. Their most memorable moment comes when she naps on his chest in cool grass while they blink at one another in quiet trust. Ezzy later disappears, and the author finds only feathers in the woods, suggesting she was taken by a predator. The grief feels real and childlike, but the memory remains tender rather than tragic. The chapter explores companionship, the mystery of why some creatures enter our lives, and the way memory preserves peaceful moments even after loss.

Part One: Asking Why?

The death of the author's grandfather in 1984 becomes the beginning of a long spiritual struggle. While working at a grocery store during a snowstorm, the author suddenly feels an overwhelming need to leave, and his father later receives the news that the grandfather died at 8:55 p.m.—the same time the author felt the internal alarm. At the hospital, the author holds his grandfather's hand, cries, and asks the question that will haunt him for twelve years: Why? The chapter captures the rawness of first grief and the inability of faith to eliminate confusion. Rather than receiving a neat answer, the author enters a long season of wondering whether God and heaven are real. The question itself becomes the spiritual catalyst for later experiences that will reshape his belief.

Part Two: The Answer

Twelve years later, the author's question about heaven is answered through the death of an elderly church member named Bill, whom he visits as a Stephen Minister. Bill's suffering and the strained relationship with his son create a sacred moment in which the author is able to bridge the emotional distance, pray with them, and guide father and son toward reconciliation before Bill dies peacefully. As Bill dies, the author sees something that convinces him of heaven's reality: a luminous, joyful expression that seems to reveal a glimpse of the world beyond. The experience does not solve all the mysteries of suffering, but it gives the author a certainty he had lacked since his grandfather's death. The chapter emphasizes both the reality of eternity and the urgency of making peace with others before it is too late.

The Humble One

A youth service trip to Hinton Rural Life Center becomes a lesson in humility. The author expects to give help to poor mountain families, but the experience overturns his assumptions. He sees people living with very little materially yet displaying deep faith, dignity, and generosity. The strongest lesson comes when Violet, a woman from the community, washes the youths' feet at the closing cookout, echoing Jesus' example. The author realizes that service is not a one-way transaction and that humility can come from those who seem to have the least. The chapter reframes Christian service as mutual gift rather than charity from the strong to the weak.

High and Tight

This chapter celebrates Henry Jones, the family barber whose shop functioned as a community hub and a rite of passage. The author remembers the old barber chairs, the glass bottle sodas, the stories, and the familiar rhythm of the place. Henry has cut hair for three generations of the family, and his presence makes the barbershop feel like extended family. The key moment arrives when Henry finally gives the author the traditional neck shave reserved for adult men. The gesture marks a transition from boyhood to manhood without fanfare. The chapter underscores how ordinary rituals can become symbolic thresholds, and how identity is shaped by trusted elders who quietly acknowledge growth.

Good Old Blue

The author inherits his grandmother's 1964 Buick LeSabre and transforms it into his first taste of independence, painting it blue and customizing it into "Old Blue." While the car becomes his own in style, it remains a vessel of family history and care. Driving it teaches him about responsibility, control, and the importance of understanding limitations. The car becomes a metaphor for adulthood: freedom exists, but it must be handled with respect. The author learns that power without judgment can be dangerous, and that passengers and companions influence direction. Old Blue teaches him that maturity means choosing where to go, who to bring along, and when to ease off the gas.

A Wakeup Call

A mission trip to Hinton Rural Life Center jolts the author awake spiritually and morally. He is beginning to feel consumed by his own problems, but the service work exposes him to the reality of poverty and need that exists close to home. Repairing homes and helping families forces him to see that hardship is not abstract—it belongs to actual people with dignity and resilience. The chapter's core message is that purpose is found in useful love. Service shifts faith from abstract belief to embodied action, and the author realizes that God is calling him outward rather than inward. The wake-up call is not dramatic punishment but grace placing him among people who need one another.

That Country Sky

This chapter is a meditation on the beauty of the country sky and its role in the author's childhood peace. Summers spent at his grandmother's rural home included long evenings outside, where the stars and moon offered him a sense of wonder, perspective, and closeness to God. The sky made him feel both small and known. As an adult, he chooses a home in the country so his children can also experience that gift. The chapter argues that natural beauty can steady a restless heart and remind us of our place in a larger creation. Looking up becomes a spiritual practice, a way of remembering blessing and awe.

Country Style Steak & Fresh Apple Crisp

Weekly Friday lunches at the grandmother's house become a ritual of nourishment, prayer, and belonging. The author and his father share a meal of country-style steak, mashed potatoes, green beans, macaroni and cheese, tea, and fresh apple crisp, all prepared by his grandmother with care and consistency. The meal is paired with prayer and conversation, making it both food and fellowship. The chapter explains that the meal's power is not merely in the recipe but in the love around the table. The grandmother's encouragement, concern, and faith in the author shape his identity as much as the food does. Friday lunch becomes a recurring affirmation that he is loved, expected, and accountable to the better self his grandmother sees in him.

That I Promise

Following Hurricane Hugo and later Hurricane Katrina, the author reflects on the meaning of disaster relief and the role of prayer in service. In 1989, he and others helped clear debris and tear down damaged homes on Isle of Palms after the hurricane. Years later, he prepares to join another relief effort in Louisiana after Katrina and asks readers for prayer for safety, effectiveness, and spiritual impact. The chapter emphasizes that service in disaster zones is both practical and spiritual. Roof repair, wall replacement, and cleanup matter because they help restore not just buildings but lives and worship communities. The author promises only that prayer will travel with the team and that good will come from willing hands in God's care.

My Palm Sunday Prayer

On a tired Palm Sunday morning, the author and his wife stay home from church nursery duty, only to learn later that a twelve-year-old girl from their congregation has been abducted between Sunday school and worship. The church fills with volunteers, prayer, police work, and fear. The author is overcome with guilt because the kidnapping occurred near the very place where he and his wife usually stood. Leah is eventually found alive, and the chapter becomes a long-term prayer rather than a closed story. The author continues to pray for Leah's healing, for her parents, and for the memory of that day to be softened by grace. The chapter explores guilt, survival, and the way a traumatic event can alter the meaning of a holy day forever.

He Sees Me

The author moves from childhood fears of monsters under the bed to a mature understanding of being fully seen by God. A Sunday school discussion about who deserves heaven triggers the realization that he is not worthy on his own. Yet instead of leading to despair, this awareness becomes a doorway to grace, because God sees every failure and still offers mercy. The chapter reframes divine sight as both warning and comfort. God sees the hidden motives, the private sins, and the unseen burdens, but He also sees the wounds and loneliness the world misses. The author concludes that the goal is not to become invisible, but to become honest before a God who already knows the truth and still calls him closer.

A Time for Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is used as a reflection on forgiveness. The author argues that one of the greatest blessings in life is the mercy we receive from God and from other people. Forgiveness is not denial or approval; it is truth paired with grace, and it often requires humility, repentance, and sometimes boundaries. The chapter emphasizes that relationships would be unbearable without forgiveness because every failure would become permanent. Instead, forgiveness leaves room for growth and second chances. The author connects gratitude to responsibility: if we have been forgiven, we must become more willing to extend that same mercy to others.

Waiting to Die

The author describes the painful process of moving his father into hospice care after years of lung and heart disease. Although the move is medically necessary, it feels like a loss of home, autonomy, and dignity. The author becomes his father's caregiver and wrestles with guilt, grief, and the emotional weight of making the "right" decision rather than the preferred one. As his father declines, the author visits daily, holds his hand, and finally receives a last squeeze just before death. The chapter reveals how death is quieter and more intimate than anticipated. The father dies surrounded by care, and the author is left with both grief and the comfort of knowing he did not die alone.

The Fuzzy Signal

Faith is compared to tuning an old radio signal amid static. Life's highs and lows, distractions, and competing voices can make God's guidance hard to hear. The author argues that clarity comes from attention: quiet, prayer, Scripture, honesty, and the willingness to turn down the noise. The chapter emphasizes that faith does not erase complexity or hardship; it provides a stable reference point. What matters is learning to listen well and to respond when God corrects us. The signal is always there, but we must become still enough to hear it clearly.

A Little Newborn Baby

The author revisits the Christmas story through John the Baptist's doubts and questions. John expected a Messiah who would bring visible judgment, but Jesus' ministry looked like healing, mercy, and good news to the marginalized. This tension helps the author see Christmas differently: the true King arrives not as a conqueror but as a vulnerable baby. The chapter urges readers to return to the manger with fresh eyes and to strip away assumptions, expectations, and hardened categories. The newborn Jesus reveals a different kind of power—one grounded in humility, compassion, and dependence. The author argues that faith often begins by seeing love in forms we did not expect.

Remembering Eulalia

This chapter serves as a funeral tribute to the author's grandmother, Eulalia, who lived to be one hundred. It includes a childhood poem he wrote about her and reflects on her steadfast faith, her love for family, and her role as a matriarch who made everyone feel special. He interprets her name and life through the image of eulalia grass—strong, flexible, and able to bend without breaking. The tribute emphasizes that her faith sustained her through a century of change and that she expanded her circle of love far beyond her immediate family. The chapter is both elegy and gratitude, concluding that she made those around her feel cherished. The author frames her life as a testament to enduring Christian strength expressed through tenderness.

The Pressure Washer

What appears to be a practical home-improvement purchase is actually a distraction from grief. After visiting his dying father, the author impulsively buys a pressure washer to clean smoke damage from the house, only to discover that he has chosen the wrong tool, the wrong method, and the wrong battle. His frustration culminates in a painful finger injury when he forgets the extreme pressure in the hose. The chapter reveals that the pressure washer was never the real issue. The author was overwhelmed by the impending death of his father and needed somewhere for his fear to land. The story becomes a lesson in how people often fixate on solvable problems to avoid deeper emotional pain.

It's Not About You!

Returning to his childhood church for a baptism prompts the author to reflect on a cultural and spiritual problem: self-centeredness. He argues that society increasingly teaches people to prioritize their own desires, gains, and comfort, often at the expense of service and responsibility. Faith, by contrast, calls believers to make room for others and to see life as shared rather than individual. The chapter warns that a life centered only on self becomes a prison. The author contrasts selfishness with generosity, burden-bearing, and service, insisting that true freedom comes from living for something greater than oneself. The title's bluntness underscores the urgency of the message.

The Trolley Man

An anniversary getaway goes hilariously wrong through a long chain of inconveniences: crowded stores, a bad hotel room, rain, wrong turns, and a painful walk through the city. At the height of frustration, the couple boards a trolley driven by a cheerful man whose humor and good spirits begin to change the atmosphere. His attitude helps them laugh at the disasters that had been spoiling the evening. The chapter shows how a stranger's joy can rescue a moment without fixing any of the underlying problems. The trolley man does not stop the rain, but he changes the emotional weather. The author sees in him the power of choosing joy and bringing it to others, especially when circumstances are miserable.

Undelivered

A Civil War book becomes an almost-symbolic gift for a dying uncle, but the timing fails and the chance is lost. The author's wife thinks of her uncle Larry as she falls asleep, while a coworker unexpectedly gives the author a Civil War book the next day. He intends to deliver it to Larry in the hospital, but Larry dies before the gift can be given. The chapter wrestles with coincidence, purpose, and regret. Although the book never reaches Larry, the author feels that its strange arrival was meaningful in itself because it turned the family's thoughts toward him before he died. The story captures the ache of wanting to offer comfort and arriving too late.

The Flip Side

A boy’s lesson at summer camp about a quarter and its two sides becomes an analogy for perspective. By turning the coin over, he learns that the same object can look different depending on where you stand. The story becomes a lesson about disagreement, humility, and the limits of our own viewpoint. The author uses the anecdote to encourage readers to ask what they are not seeing before deciding they understand a person or issue. The chapter does not deny conviction, but it cautions against arrogance. Wisdom may require looking again, because another angle can reveal truth hidden from the first.

I Knew You Would Stop By

While driving home from dinner, the author notices an elderly man mowing a steep yard with one hand while using a walker with the other. He turns around to offer help, only to be told that the man is fine and just getting exercise. As the author leaves, the man says, “I knew you would stop by,” a statement that lingers as if it carried deeper meaning. The chapter becomes a meditation on noticing people in need and offering help even when the offer is declined. The author concludes that compassion begins with slowing down and being willing to turn around. The encounter suggests that people may be waiting not necessarily for rescue, but for evidence that they are seen.

The Card Lady

The author’s mother becomes known as the Card Lady because of her ministry of sending handwritten cards to hundreds of people each month. What begins as a small habit of encouragement grows into a large, organized act of care that reaches people across many states. The ministry’s power lies in its consistency and personal touch, not in size or cost. The chapter highlights how one thank-you from a recipient helped catalyze the expansion of the card ministry. This becomes a lesson in the ripple effects of gratitude and encouragement. The author argues that small acts, repeated faithfully, can become a major form of care and ministry over time.

Little Sassy Girl

The author contrasts his childhood grief over losing a dog named Lady with his daughter’s grief over a cat named Sassy. Sassy, originally one of a litter of kittens, becomes the daughter’s beloved companion and the object of her daily care and affection. When Sassy becomes ill and dies, the family buries her carefully, creating a place of remembrance and goodbye. The chapter acknowledges that pet loss is real grief, especially for children. It also shows that new pets can help a child continue loving without erasing what was lost. The author sees in his daughter’s experience a version of his own childhood pain and recovery.

The Going Price for a Beautiful Life?

This chapter responds to the death of the author’s wife’s cousin Kelly, who was killed by a drunk driver. The family is forced to endure the slow, inadequate pace of legal proceedings

and the possibility of a sentence that seems far too light compared with the value of a human life. The author and family are left angry, grieving, and powerless before the limits of the justice system. The chapter insists that no legal punishment can equal the value of Kelly's life or heal the damage caused by her death. Yet it also reaffirms faith in eternal life and Kelly's place with God. The story becomes an indictment of shallow measures of justice and a lament for the incalculable loss of a beautiful life.

Keep It Simple

A simple Valentine's ritual between husband and wife becomes a lesson in what love really needs. Rather than expensive gifts, the couple exchanges a whispered "I love you" and a handwritten note on the steering wheel. The author explains that they intentionally chose to stop participating in the pressure and expense of holiday gift exchanges. The chapter argues that love is best measured by attention, honesty, and personal understanding rather than by cost. Simplicity is not laziness; it is the result of knowing what actually communicates care to the other person. The author connects this to faith, suggesting that the deepest truths often remain simple enough to practice before they are fully understood.

You Have to Start Somewhere

A hurricane relief trip to Houma, Louisiana, demonstrates that even overwhelming problems begin with one small task. The author and a team of volunteers from several churches arrive to repair a damaged church roof after Hurricane Katrina. At first the damage seems manageable; by daylight, they realize the interior destruction is severe, and the project becomes much larger than expected. The chapter highlights a little girl sweeping mud from her driveway in the disaster zone as a symbol of what recovery looks like: one manageable act at a time. The roof team's work, combined with help from local church members, shows that restoration is built through persistence, cooperation, and the courage to begin. The lesson is that no task is too large to start if one is willing to take the first step.

Hotcakes and Sausage

Fast food breakfasts become a generational family tradition, first through the author's own childhood memories of KFC and IHOP and later through his children's love of McDonald's hotcakes and sausage. The Saturday and Sunday breakfast routine gives the author unhurried time with his children and echoes the simple, stable pleasure of family outings from his youth. The chapter emphasizes that these routines are not memorable because they are dramatic; they are memorable because they are shared. The children's participation in small acts—paying, tipping, ordering, and choosing their food—gives them ownership of the memory. The author hopes they will carry forward the feeling of being together, loved, and expected.

Give a Little, Receive a Lot

The author wrestles with whether to give $500 from family vacation savings to a mission project in West Virginia. Remembering his grandfather's bold financial pledge to a church building fund helps him decide to give. Though the money later seems to return through unrelated work, the deeper gift is the freedom and peace that come from releasing control. The chapter argues that generosity is not a transaction designed to guarantee return. Instead, giving loosens fear's grip and opens the heart. The author discovers that the real reward is not the money that comes back, but the peace, presence, and trust that flow from having given.

Don't Stand in My Way

A blind baby bird found in the yard leads the author into a conversation with his daughter about heaven and death. Unable to see, the bird is vulnerable and likely dying, but the author frames its likely passing as a release into a better place where it can see and be whole. The child's innocence helps him articulate a hopeful theology of death. The chapter then shifts to a reflection on end-of-life decisions and the Terri Schiavo case, asking where faithful care ends and the refusal to release begins. The author concludes that while we should care for life faithfully, we should not insist on prolonging it at any cost when death comes. The title becomes a prayerful plea: when his own time comes, he wants loved ones to trust God and not obstruct the journey home.

Notable Quotes

> *"“The title Testify for this memoir is what these stories are meant to do.”"*

> *"“Grace is not a simple word with a simple meaning.”"*

> *"“The glass left a scar. Time developed it into wisdom worth remembering.”"*

> *"“I lost her at twelve, and I have spent many years learning how to love the mother who remained.”"*

> *"“He taught me to pray without asking me to kneel.”"*

> *"“The humble one was Violet, kneeling with a washcloth and a pan of water.”"*

> *"“A lost passport left me stranded; grace taught me that none of us is meant to find the way home alone.”"*

Full Summary

The memoir opens by explaining that these stories are meant to testify, preserving the moments that shaped the author, the lessons he learned, and the ways he has seen God at work in an ordinary life. He writes because memory fades and because he believes even a

regular person can offer something useful if he is honest about where grace found him. Testimony, in his view, is not about perfection but about telling the truth: what he struggled with, what he learned, and how God met him there. That honesty is rooted in his understanding of grace, which he describes as saving grace, sanctifying grace, sustaining grace, and serving grace. Saving grace rescues from sin, sanctifying grace changes a person, sustaining grace strengthens through pain, and serving grace equips a person to help others. He also frames the whole book as an invitation for readers to remember their own lives differently, because ordinary experiences can carry extraordinary meaning when seen through faith, memory, and reflection.

He then situates the memoir as a journey through small, formative moments rather than headline events. Growing up in Charlotte, he lived in a family where love and hardship shared the same space. His mother's mental illness, his father's long work hours, and the steady presence of grandparents all shaped the person he became. He stresses that memory is not a camera; it returns feelings and fragments, not complete records. What he has tried to preserve are the meanings of those moments. The book is also about faith that does not avoid questions. He names the deaths and illness that forced him to wrestle with God, and he says he saw faith embodied again and again in ordinary acts: washing feet, repairing roofs, sending cards, mowing grass, or simply showing up for one another. Service, he insists, is not grandiosity but doing the next faithful thing with humility.

That point is illustrated immediately in the memory of the scar on his right hand, the thin line beneath his pinky that brought back his earliest recollections. He remembers first the scar itself, then the bicycle accident that caused it, and then, even earlier, the hidden cellar beneath the kitchen floor of his first home on Crater Street. His father used that dug-out space as a photography darkroom, lit by a red bulb that made the cellar mysterious and frightening to a small child. The scar takes him back to the apartment where the family lived while the house was being built. There, he broke his mother's strict rule not to ride his bicycle in the parking lot. Wanting to join other children, he turned off the sidewalk, collided with another bicycle, flew over his handlebars, and landed face-first on the pavement. His right hand struck broken glass, and a long shard drove into his palm. His mother pulled it out while blood ran down his wrist, and a doctor later removed another fragment and stitched the wound. The event taught him that parents sometimes see dangers children cannot imagine, and that rules often exist because love sees farther than desire.

The chapter about losing his mother at twelve deepens that lesson in a far more painful register. His mother, once loving and involved, began changing in his late childhood. She became irritable, withdrew from people, wrote strange prayers and stories, and grew increasingly hostile. By age twelve, she suffered a severe mental health crisis that the author experienced as a kind of death, because the mother he knew was no longer accessible to him. In the terrifying weekend that followed, she kept the boys in darkness, lit candles, recited

Bible passages, screamed at him, and called him the devil. Later she ran naked down the street on a bicycle, lost control, and overturned, an image seared into his memory as a mix of horror and humiliation. A neighbor calmed her, helped get her into a car, and called his father, who arranged for hospitalization. After that, she remained under care and on strong medication, and many friends and relatives drifted away. The author felt shame, anger, guilt, and grief all at once, especially because he could not explain her illness or bear the public embarrassment it caused. Looking back, he sees two overwhelmed parents and two boys caught inside an illness nobody understood. He says that losing her at twelve left a wound he has spent years learning how to love around.

The whistle in the woods offers a gentler childhood memory built around friendship. When his close friends the Coopers moved away, the emptiness was partly filled by the Haiglers, who moved in behind them near the pond. Mike Haigler became his new companion, and for years the two boys explored their neighborhood together, riding bikes, climbing trees, fishing, building tree houses, and even trading a first kiss from a girl named Kim. Because their houses were separated by woods, they developed their own calling system: a whistle or high screech sent from one yard to the other, answered in kind if the other boy was free. As they grew older, the friendship cooled under teenage pressures and drifted apart, though they later repaired some of the distance. Years later, while mowing at his parents' house with his own children riding on his lap, he stood at the edge of the yard and tried the old whistle again. The sound came back almost perfectly, but there was no answer. The silence made him grateful and sad at once, because the friendship lived on in memory even if the call did not return.

The lake memories carry that same mingling of joy, embarrassment, and kindness. Visiting Lake Tillery with his aunts, uncles, and cousins meant excitement, boats, and the wide water, but also a deep private shame: he wet the bed and feared discovery. Aunt Vivian and his cousins never mentioned it, and that silence became an unrecognized kindness. By day, Uncle Tilden gently encouraged him to overcome fear of the water. Eventually he learned to ski, then to tube on a crude tire with no handles, and finally to jump from the boathouse, first with his eyes shut and then again with growing confidence. The lake became a place where courage was built through patience, family, and reassurance. As an adult with children of his own, he bought a boat so he could share those same waters, hoping they would learn fear does not need to dictate possibility.

Part One: Asking Why?

I remember January 16, 1984, with a clarity that has never faded. I was sixteen years old and in high school, and a winter storm was moving toward the city. I worked as a bagger at a local grocery store, and the store called to ask if I could come in on my day off. Shoppers were stocking up before the storm, and they needed extra help.

The weather was not bad yet. I could use the money, and unlike many people, I had always enjoyed being out in the snow. I put on my jacket and headed to work.

As soon as I arrived, I realized I might be there for a while. Customers were coming in faster than usual, hurrying to get what they needed before the storm arrived. The store was hectic, and I do not remember taking a break. Sleet and snow came and went through the evening, although the worst of the storm was not expected until after midnight.

Our manager announced that we would close an hour early because of the weather. We normally closed at 10:00 p.m. on weekdays, but that night we would close at 9:00. I decided to stay and help until then.

Around 8:30, the store finally began to clear. I started sweeping the aisles before they were mopped while the other baggers went outside to gather the shopping carts. Everything seemed to be going smoothly. Everyone was in a good mood, and I was excited by the thought that the snow might close school the next day.

Then, as I started down the frozen food aisle, I began thinking about my grandfather. He had been in the hospital for six weeks. He had gone in with a heart problem complicated by emphysema. For a while, he seemed to be recovering, but then he developed a staph infection and, eventually, pneumonia. The prognosis was not good.

My father and I had been taking turns visiting him in the evenings and sitting beside him. The nurses came in every hour and tried to clear his lungs. He drifted in and out of consciousness and was never fully coherent. The hardest part was watching him struggle to breathe. Something that came so naturally to me had become a painful, exhausting battle for him.

I was supposed to visit him that evening. In my excitement over the weather and the unexpected call from work, I completely forgot. My father knew it was my night to go, so he came straight home from work. When he realized that neither of us had gone to the hospital, he considered going himself. Instead, he called the nurses' station to ask whether anything had changed. They told him there had been no change, so he stayed home rather than drive in the worsening weather.

At about five minutes before 9:00, while I was thinking about my grandfather, a sick feeling came over me. I grew hot and sweaty and felt as though I were on the edge of a panic attack. Then I was seized by an overwhelming need to go home. I dropped the broom, ran out of the store, and drove home as fast as I could.

The first room I entered was the kitchen dining room. My father was hanging up the telephone. When he turned and saw me, he began to cry. In that instant, I knew.

We got into his car and headed for the hospital, overcome with guilt that neither of us had visited Grandpa that evening. As we drove, the snow finally began to fall. Only a short time

earlier, I had been excited by the possibility of snow. Now I did not care about it at all.

The drive seemed endless, and the walk down the long hospital hallway felt even longer. It was after 10:00 p.m., and only the patients and hospital staff remained. A nurse met us outside Grandpa's door and walked in with us.

He was lying there just as he had been for weeks, except that the struggle to breathe was gone. The machines no longer hummed. He looked as though he were asleep, and his hands were still warm. I held them and cried so hard I could barely see. Then I leaned over and kissed his forehead one last time.

My next vivid memory is of standing by the window in his room and watching the snow fall while my grandmother and father sobbed behind me. My father asked the nurse when Grandpa had died. Her answer fixed that moment in my memory: he had stopped breathing at 8:55 that evening.

That was the same time I had been overwhelmed by the need to leave the store. I could not explain the timing, and I could not understand why someone so special to me was gone. Anger began to rise inside me, and before long I was asking God the question so many people ask in grief: Why? Why did this have to happen? Why my grandfather? Why me?

I was young. I am sure I believed I understood far more than I actually did, but the anger was overwhelming. I shut down for several days. I remember the visitation, the preparations, and the funeral. For more than a week, I went to the gravesite several times a day and cried.

This was my first real experience with the death of someone close to me, and I did not know how to process it. In my grief, I lost sight of my beliefs and religious convictions. I kept returning to the questions I had asked in the hospital room - questions that people before me had asked and that others after me would continue to ask.

That night did not answer my questions. It began them. For the next twelve years, I would keep asking why.

Many years had passed since I lost my grandfather, yet the question I asked on the night he died had never left me. Over time, "Why?" became something larger. I was no longer asking only why my grandfather had died. I was asking whether heaven and an afterlife were truly real.

The answer came on a warm spring evening after a fresh rain, when a phone call led to one of the most memorable experiences of my life. To understand that evening, however, I need to step back about a year.

My church had started a program called Stephen Ministry. It trained lay members to offer spiritual support to people facing grief, illness, divorce, or another difficult season. Our

purpose was not to fix anyone's problems. We were there to listen, pray, and walk beside people through their struggles.

Ten of us volunteered for the first year of the program. We spent that year training in prayer, Scripture, listening, and spiritual care. At twenty-nine, I was the youngest person in the group.

After the training, each Stephen Minister was to be matched with someone who had asked for support. The pastor considered age, gender, and circumstances before making an assignment. Because I was only twenty-nine, several months passed before an appropriate match was found.

Then our minister, Peggy, called me at work. She told me about Bill, an elderly man and a charter member of our church. After Bill suffered a stroke, he and his wife had moved into an assisted living facility in town. More recently, they had been separated because his wife's health needs required her to live at another facility a few miles away.

Bill had two daughters and a son. One daughter lived out of town, and the other was busy running her business. His son lived nearby but, for reasons I did not fully understand, was not very involved. I told Peggy I would meet Bill and see whether the arrangement might work.

Privately, I wondered what I could possibly say to a man so much older than I was. What would we have in common? What could I offer him at my age? I was nervous, but I agreed to go.

That evening, I checked in at the facility's front desk. A nurse told me to take the elevator down one floor and walk along the hall to Bill's small apartment. She called ahead to let him know I was coming. With plenty of anxiety, I stepped into the elevator.

When the doors opened, a very frail man was standing in front of me. He wore thick glasses and was extremely thin. He looked weak and ill, but one thing stood out immediately: his smile. Bill reached out to shake my hand, and the warmth of that smile eased my anxiety.

We walked to his apartment and sat down. The television was on, and I was not sure what to say, so I told him about my wife, my life, and what was happening at church. I did not stay long. That first visit was simply a chance for us to meet and discover whether we could share fellowship.

Before leaving, I asked whether he would like me to pray with him. He welcomed the idea, and I could tell prayer meant a great deal to him. I did the best I could, prayed with him, and drove home still wondering what Bill could possibly gain from me. Peggy encouraged me when I called her, so I scheduled another visit.

Over time, something meaningful grew between Bill and me. Church and the youth group gave us plenty to talk about. I eventually met the daughter who lived in town, and she helped

me understand more about Bill, his family, and his wife.

The stroke had left Bill with difficulty eating and controlling his lower jaw. Sometimes I gently wiped the drool from his chin. When I visited during dinner, I occasionally helped him at the table. Bill had spent much of his life doing things for himself, so I tried to help without taking away his dignity or crossing his boundaries.

For years, Bill had run a successful upscale clothing store in the South End of town. After he retired, his son took over the business. I never learned the full story, but the store eventually closed, leaving a deep wedge between father and son. During the six months I visited Bill, I do not remember seeing his son at all.

Just before a family vacation, Peggy called to say that Bill's health had taken another turn for the worse. I tried to visit before we left town, but my schedule would not allow it. I called Bill instead and promised to see him after we returned. I worried that something might happen while I was away, but nothing did.

We came home on a Sunday afternoon, and I called Bill to arrange a visit later that week. He sounded fairly upbeat. A couple of days later, however, I came home from work and immediately received another call. This time it was the nursing home.

Bill was doing very poorly. Both ministers from my church were unavailable, so the nursing home called me. I did not know what I could do. I only knew the situation was serious and that Bill was dying.

I drove there with my stomach in knots. Memories of sitting in my grandfather's hospital room twelve years earlier came flooding back, and I felt close to panic. When I reached the parking lot, I sat in the car for several minutes, afraid of what I would find and unsure what I could possibly offer. Then I did the only thing I knew to do: I prayed for guidance and strength.

The sun was going down when I entered the building. Most of the residents were already in their rooms, and the hallway looked unusually dark. When I opened Bill's door, I found him lying on the bed, struggling to breathe. A man sat beside him, and a nurse waited quietly in a corner. Only one small lamp was on. The room felt cold and empty.

I introduced myself to the man beside the bed and learned that he was Bill's son. I was taken aback. I explained who I was and how I knew his father, then pulled a chair near the bed. This was a moment between a father and son, and I wanted to respect their space.

For several minutes, we sat in silence. Every so often, Bill's son told him I was there, but he kept calling me Brad. My name is Bruce, yet I did not correct him. This was not the time to point out a mistake.

As I watched, it seemed that Bill's son wanted to connect with his father but did not know how. He kept his distance and did not touch him. I closed my eyes for a moment and silently asked God to help me.

Then Bill's son told him once more that Brad was there. Bill looked at him and, in a soft but firm voice, said, "His name is Bruce." He turned toward me and smiled. In that moment, I sensed that an opportunity had opened for this wounded father and son to move toward each other.

I told Bill we were going to move closer beside him. With one hand, I held Bill's hand; with the other, I gently guided his son's hand into his father's. Then I moved to the other side of the bed with his son and began speaking with them about the love they shared. I do not remember the exact words. I only remember that the distance between them seemed to soften.

About thirty minutes passed, and Bill's breathing grew worse. He seemed to be holding on for his daughters, who were still hours away. I told him he did not need to worry about them and that they were with him in spirit.

It was clear that Bill did not have much time. I offered to pray with him and his son, and they agreed. I cannot recall the words of that prayer, but I believed God was helping me speak. When it ended, Bill looked at me, and I could see the struggle in his eyes.

Still holding hands, I leaned closer and said, "It's okay, Bill. You can go now. Your suffering is over. God is waiting."

Bill looked at his son and then back at me. A peaceful expression settled across his face. He took one long breath, then looked upward over our shoulders for what felt like minutes. A soft, gentle exhale followed.

Then the most glorious expression came over his face. It seemed as though he was glowing from within. His eyes opened wide, like those of a newborn child seeing the world for the first time. Wonder filled his face, and he smiled softly at whatever he was seeing. In that brief and sacred moment, his life slipped away.

The room felt empty. I continued holding Bill's hand, just as I had held my grandfather's hand twelve years earlier. Then I took his son's hand and prayed for Bill and his family. I prayed for what felt like an hour. I ended with the Lord's Prayer, and his son joined me.

I could never have imagined being part of such a moment. I had come into the room carrying years of questions, yet I found myself helping a father and son draw close and accompanying Bill as he left this life.

My minister arrived soon afterward, followed by Bill's two daughters. I shared the news with them one at a time. We hugged and cried, but we also rejoiced.

That night, I believed God gave me the answer I had been seeking. I saw heaven through Bill's eyes. What I witnessed did not explain every mystery of suffering or death, but it gave me a certainty I had not known before: heaven was real to me, and it was more than I could imagine.

We like to believe that we should be able to understand everything, but we cannot. We are not the Maker; He is. Because of Bill, I no longer fear what waits beyond this life. When my own time comes, I look forward to standing in awe before my Lord.

Bill also taught me how brief this life is. I think about the hurt between him and his son and how close they came to losing the chance to reach for each other. We often assume we will have tomorrow to mend a relationship, speak the truth, offer forgiveness, or say, "I love you." We do not know what tomorrow will hold.

I was honored to be with Bill that night and to share in a Christian's final walk home. After more than twelve years of asking, I finally knew what I had been searching for.

For many years, I asked whether heaven was real. That night, through Bill's eyes, I received my answer.

I was seventeen years old, energetic, certain I would live forever, and convinced I already knew most of what I needed to know. Then a man from our church named Buddy invited the youth group into the rural mountains of North Carolina for a week of service at Hinton Rural Life Center. That trip became one of my first truly life-changing experiences.

The center was in Hayesville, near Murphy and Franklin, in one of the poorest areas of the state. I had never traveled to that part of North Carolina and had little idea what we would find. We raised the money, packed our things, and finally gathered for the long ride west.

Before we left, Buddy led us in prayer. He reminded us that we were going to serve people in need and expected us to put ourselves last for the week. We represented our church and community, he said, and our conduct needed to reflect that responsibility. I listened, although I did not yet understand how much the lesson would ask of me.

The deeper we drove into the Blue Ridge Mountains, the more beautiful the land became. At the center, we met two other groups that would work with us: a small group from Danville, Virginia, and a group of six from Mt. Sterling, Illinois. We divided into teams and spent the first day in activities designed to prepare us for the work ahead.

Each morning began at 6:00. We ate breakfast, packed lunches and supplies, and left for the work sites by 8:00. On the first day, I felt as if I had entered another world. It was 1984, and I

had not realized that families in my own state were still living in homes without running water or electricity.

My team worked on the home of a gentleman whose house had no insulation. We hung drywall and installed insulation to help prepare it for winter. By the standards I knew, he possessed very little. Yet he carried deep faith, compassion, and hope, and throughout the week he seemed more concerned about the needs of the young people helping him than about his own.

Another team replaced the roof of a nearby woman named Violet, a cousin of country singer Ronnie Milsap. The stories that team brought back made all of us eager to meet her. She had little in material terms, but she possessed an abundance of wisdom, warmth, and life. We invited her to the closing cookout at the center.

The final evening was nearly perfect. We sat outdoors with home-cooked food, pleasant weather, and the fellowship that had grown among us during the week. We sang, read Scripture, and prayed together. Then, just as we thought the evening had ended, Violet stood and said she wanted to do something for us.

My first thought exposed how much I still had to learn: What could she possibly do for us that we did not already have?

Violet reached into her picnic basket and lifted out a washcloth and a pan of water. She asked us to come forward one at a time, in silence, with our shoes removed and our pant legs rolled up. She intended to wash our feet, just as Jesus had washed the feet of His disciples.

One by one, we went to her. Violet thanked each of us, prayed for us, and washed our feet. No one walked away with dry eyes. In a few quiet moments, she gave us something no work project or group activity could have taught: humility made

The story of Eulalia, the author’s grandmother, returns through the papers she saved and the words he had once written for her. After she died at one hundred in 2001, he tried to find a childhood poem she had kept on her refrigerator, but instead discovered a sixth-grade English assignment that said he wanted to be his grandmother’s Valentine because she had always taught that every person is special and that love should be shared all year long. The rediscovered piece becomes a window into what she meant to him: a woman whose faith, affection, and steady presence had shaped an entire family. He reflects on her name, learning that eulalia is a strong kind of grass that bends without breaking, and sees in that image the whole arc of her life. She lived through change for a century, carried her family through it, and never lost her faith or her tenderness. He imagines the young father who once held her as a baby and could not have known the long life, the many descendants, and the wide circle of love that would grow from that little girl. The remembrance turns intimate and thankful, ending with the sense that if someone could simply close their eyes, breathe, and smile for a

moment, they would feel something of what it was like to have been loved by her.

The next memory begins with his father under hospice care after years of lung disease. While the family was visiting him and grief was already pressing in, the author and his wife stopped at Lowe's, where he became fixated on a pressure washer and convinced himself that buying it would solve the smoke stains on the outside trim of their house. The purchase becomes a comic but revealing failure. His wife doubts that the box will fit in their Civic trunk, and she is right. At home, he assembles the machine, sprays the trim, and finds that it does little to remove the smoke. His father-in-law arrives with a simple cleaner and sprayer that work better than the expensive washer. Then, while trying to fix a leak, he places a finger over a pressurized hose and cuts himself badly, learning the hard way that the water is not harmless at all. The real point of the episode is not the foolish purchase but the emotional pressure underneath it. He breaks down because the pressure washer was a distraction from the deeper fear he was carrying about his dying father. The machine becomes a symbol of how people reach for busy work, projects, or possessions when they cannot yet face sorrow directly. The lesson is plain: the visible problem is not always the real one, and sometimes what seems like stubbornness or nonsense is really grief looking for somewhere to go.

That insight leads into a meditation on selfishness, framed by a sermon the author heard after returning to church for a baptism. The pastor's message made him think about a culture increasingly shaped by "it's all about me." He argues that healthy self-care is not the same as a life centered only on personal wants and immediate gratification. When service disappears, people become trapped inside their own anxieties, purchases, ambitions, and disappointments. A man who brags that losing his job has made him "free" seems to him deeply mistaken, because freedom without responsibility or concern for others becomes another kind of prison. Faith, by contrast, calls people outward: to ask whom they can encourage, what burden they can help carry, and how their own life can become useful to someone else. Service is not about status or dramatic sacrifice. It is about making room for someone else's need and discovering that a life becomes larger when it is offered beyond itself.

The tenderness of ordinary help becomes personal again in the memory of the trolley man. On an anniversary getaway in downtown Charlotte, nearly everything goes wrong: the children make picture-taking difficult, the lunch line drags on, the truck inspection and parking plan unravel, the hotel room is wet, and the couple is forced to change rooms. When they board a trolley to dinner, rain begins, they get off too far from the restaurant, and after a good meal the storm returns harder. A wrong turn leads them to the bus station, and the author's foot drops into a pothole nearly to his knee. By the time they finally board the trolley again, they are cold, soaked, and barely speaking. But the driver is cheerful, joking and greeting people with infectious energy. At first his cheerfulness irritates them; then, slowly, it changes the mood. They begin laughing at the disaster of the day, at each other, and even at the

mistakes themselves. The ride becomes the turning point of the evening. The trolley man never fixes the rain or the problems, but his joy gives the couple enough lift to recover from their frustration. That simple presence, the author suggests, is its own kind of kindness: someone willing to smile first so others can remember that a bad moment does not have to become a ruined night.

The theme of being remembered returns more solemnly in the account of an undelivered book. While his wife's uncle Larry Baker was dying of cancer, her thoughts turned to his love of Civil War history. Before she could ask the author to look for a book to bring him, a coworker unexpectedly handed him a Civil War title from a closet cleaning. The timing seemed uncanny, as if the book had arrived for Larry through a route neither of them could have planned. The author nearly took it to the hospital, but Larry died that evening before the delivery could happen. The gift never reached its intended hands, yet it still mattered because it turned their thoughts toward him on the day of his death. The disappointment remains, but so does the sense that some gifts have a purpose even when they do not arrive on time.

That idea of perspective shifts into a lesson learned from a boy flipping a quarter at a summer camp in Washington, D.C. during a heated debate. The boy asked what year was stamped on the quarter, then flipped it over and asked again. The answer never changed, because the coin was the same. What changed was the angle of vision. The author uses the story to argue that people too often treat their own perspective as if it were the whole truth. Wisdom requires looking at the flip side before deciding we understand a person, argument, or situation. It is a call to curiosity over certainty, especially when disagreement tempts people to ignore what they cannot see from where they stand.

The final stories in the section move from noticing to stopping. While driving home from Bojangles one Friday evening, the author and his family spot an elderly man at the bottom of a steep yard pushing a mower while holding a walker. They turn around and come back, unsure whether to offer help. The man refuses, saying his son usually handles the yard and that he is already finished. Still, as the author walks away, the man calls after him, "I knew you would stop by." The words stay with him, not because he had actually helped with the mowing, but because he had at least been willing to turn around, notice, and ask. Compassion, he reflects, begins when we stop passing by people who may need us. The companion memory of his mother as the Card Lady extends that same idea across years and states. A simple thank-you from one woman encouraged her to keep sending cards, and what began as a few notes grew into a ministry reaching hundreds of people each month. Birthday cards, get-well cards, notes to grandchildren, and brief messages of encouragement became proof that no one had been forgotten. The lesson is that small acts can multiply in ways no one can predict. A card, a turn-around on a country road, a few minutes of attention, a smile on a trolley, a borrowed book, or a rediscovered grandmother's love can quietly carry grace farther than anyone expects.

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