

*God Said,*  
“LIVE!”



HARVEY J. MORGAN

  
WESTBOW  
PRESS  
A DIVISION OF THOMAS NELSON  
& ZONDERVAN

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# THE BEGINNING

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God guides us through life in mysterious ways. We like to plan out how we think things should progress, but then we realize that we see only the circumstances that directly affect us. If we solely determined life's plans, we would choose the high road with the least amount of resistance every time. As Christians, though, we come face-to-face with times that shape and mold us into vessels God can work through. Those times of smooth sailing and storm-free days are easy to take for granted. We breathe in as though we are going to breathe and walk around like everything our feet touch will always be ours. This feeling of entitlement, where all feel like they have ownership over their lives and bodies, is often misplaced. After all, we Christians live surrendered lives.

We are guaranteed nothing, except that all things work for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). No one knows when he or she is going to die or when he or she might be involved in a terrible accident. Similarly, we don't know whether the next moment might bring the news that could change our lives forever.

Such was the case for me. Before we begin, let me tell you a little about myself.

For my whole life, almost everyone has referred to me as “Junior” except when at school or in places where my official name had to be used. Honestly, my life was as happy and fulfilled as it could be. I was a loving son to my parents, a devoted husband to my wife, a caring father to my children, and a granddaddy. At the same time, I was a brother, uncle, friend, counselor, prayer warrior, pastor, barber and—a bit more humorously—a “tub doctor” by trade. I was a simple man with many hats living an incredibly happy life. For some reason, harsh things can seem magnified when there is so much good happening and smooth sailing on the horizon.

Things were going quite well when the bad news arrived.

Before we get more into that, let me elaborate more so you have an idea where I’m coming from and will understand more about my fight with calamity. I was born on September 11, 1949, to Clayton and Ada Morgan in Coffee County, Georgia. I had a sister, Doris, who was almost two years older than I. We were the typical brother and sister duo. We fought a lot and shared everything. We took each other’s snacks and teased each other relentlessly.

When I was five, my family moved to Valdosta, Georgia, so my father could get a better job. He was a barber by trade, and he was also a deacon in our church, which required him to help run the church operations. My mom was our church secretary and a homemaker. Her church position required her to keep minutes (records) of business meetings and to be responsible for the church’s financial operations. From the time since I was small, I have been part of what we call “the church.”

People may call it naive, but there is something wonderfully mysterious about our world. When we think we begin to understand it, we come across something truly baffling but ultimately amazing. Maybe it’s just my way of rationalizing the situation, but I believe that what happened to me played right into the mystery of the world. From the time I was a young child, I witnessed miracles and saw my parents, friends, and family worship the Lord through songs, prayer, and preaching. I am so glad now that I had the

opportunity to grow up in the church age that I was raised in—to personally witness the miraculous and unexplainable.

I grew up attending Unity Church in Valdosta, which was part of a larger organization of churches, mainly in Georgia and Florida. The people in those churches were rural, country people who weren't wealthy, yet they valued family, faith, and freedom. They interpreted the Bible both literally and allegorically, which meant they applied it to their everyday lives. During those growing-up years, I wasn't necessarily fully interested in the actual church services. Like most boys and girls my age, I was more interested in spending time hanging out with my friends. Even in that part of my life, though, I understood what was going on in church services and in the world around me. Nevertheless, I didn't claim to be a Christian. I saw what was happening in the services, and I knew what my parents and friends were doing in their worship, but I didn't commit myself to do the same at a young age.

All I knew was that when I did become a Christian, I wanted to have as dedicated and faithful experiences as the people I had witnessed in my family, and this included serving a powerful God. If God brought you to it, He will bring you through it (as He did for the children of Israel). These churches believed in the saving power of the blood of Jesus, as described in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” They also believed that with His stripes, we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Church wasn't just something they had to attend on a Sunday morning. Instead, church was a daily walk of submission to the will and purpose of God. We usually gathered for Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and a midweek service. Also there was usually Sunday school an hour before the morning service and church revival at least four times a year. Revival times were where people were fervently stirred to rededicate their lives to Christ if they had become slack and prayed for lost people in their communities to come to know the Lord. Their lives inspired me to search for that

“highway of Holiness” Isaiah talked about in Isaiah 35:8. I admired how they lived, worshipped, and praised God, and I wanted to join them.

I feel I am truly blessed by God to have such a foundation of faith.

The age of seventeen was a turning point in my life. There was such a vivid memory for me that I still remember the exact date: October 18, 1966. On that day, I decided that I would dedicate my entire life to the Lord; thus, I was “born again,” according to John 3:16. My life was transformed by the power of the blood of Jesus, and several changes were made. For instance, I was somewhat mischievous back then, like most kids in their teens. As somewhat of a prankster, I spent time with my buddies, who were like me: a troublemaker. When I became a new creature in Christ, the old things passed away, and my life changed for the better. My friends could tell my life was different now.

After my conversion to Christ, I was usually quiet in a crowd. I didn’t like being the center of attention in most cases. My nature is still somewhat shy in that I don’t like to be in the spotlight. Several months after my born-again experience, I understood that my simple church attendance wasn’t enough for me to live a fully consecrated life. I wasn’t interested in fulfilling some form of formality. Instead, I felt a yearning inside me to do more.

Thus, in April 1967, I felt the call to preach the gospel. I wanted to carry the good message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, who didn’t know Him as their personal Savior. I began to reach out to people to let them know the Lord would like to be their personal guide through life. I found that many people will initially reject the call of God to become His child, but when calamity strikes, they are often found trying to find God. My message is for them to seek the Lord while He is near. It is wonderful to have Him already as your Lord before the time of trouble comes.

In November 1967, I met Brenda Watson from Nashville, Georgia, and we married in 1968. Little did she know that she

would become part of a ministry team. Wherever I went, she would follow. In 1969 and 1970, I pastored my first church in Iron City, Georgia. My wife and I were itinerant pastors, traveling 102 miles one way, two Sundays a month. Sometimes crowds were small, but that fact didn't discourage us, and we remained faithful.

Most of my experience in preaching and pastoring was birthed at this church. On Sundays, we went home with someone from the church for lunch and remain there until the night's service. After the evening service, we drove back to Valdosta to start the workweek again early Monday morning.

As time went on, I pastored several small country churches. I preached revivals, youth camps, and camp meetings. I also conducted funerals and weddings, and my family expanded to include our first daughter, Becky; a son, Mark; and twins: a boy and a girl, Terry and Sherry.

Besides all the pastoral duties I attended, I also went on mission trips to Trinidad and Costa Rica. I preached in brush arbor meetings, outdoor tent meetings, and in-home prayer services.

In 1976, when the twins were about six weeks old, a great tragedy happened to me. Though many considered it to be an expected part of life, it was very difficult for me to bear as I watched my mother die from lymphoma. This was a devastating time, which tried the foundations of my faith.

My parents had lived next door to us for many years. My mother was our babysitter when my wife went to college and later began teaching. The fact that she died broke my heart, even though I knew it was what God intended. Yet it still caused me much grief. I watched my mother suffer, but I made peace with the fact that God's will must be done, no matter what the circumstances. There are a lot of times in life when a person just doesn't understand the chaos around him or her. However, in these times, he or she must trust God because even in the chaos, there is order. It might not be noticeably clear, but it is always right there. As time went on and