

Enthusiasm for John Collier's Books

Two Minutes to Live

“It’s been an opportunity to experience the many facets of the lives of two dedicated missionaries for Christ . . . I especially appreciate the authenticity of John’s writing—truth always seems a sign of Christ’s inspiration in any work.” —Diane Coffman Garvin, Dallas, Texas

“I just finished reading *Two Minutes to Live*. Awesome! Wonderful! I can think of more words to describe this book; I just don’t know how you had time to write! (At) thirty-nine, you had already done more than most people in a lifetime.” —Norma Jean Wolford, Wytheville Baptist Church, Wytheville, VA

“I read *Two Minutes to Live* on the plane ride to Belize, as our mission team was on the way down to spend nine days serving the people of Belize while being facilitated by John and Judy Collier and staying at their Mission House. The book kept my interest and was a fast read. I just couldn’t wait to see the next miracle God would be performing in the life of this obedient missionary. It was absolutely amazing to see the Lord’s hand in all of Mr. Collier’s endeavors. The book is a real testimony of what the Lord can do through the life of a willing servant. After meeting Mr. Collier and his lovely wife, Judy—it was comforting to know these are real people, true to the cause of Christ. The book had me laughing, crying, and hoping, but most of all it had me in awe of how great our God really is.” —Rita M. Pierce, Elizabethton, TN

“I had the distinct pleasure of meeting John Collier in person while in Belize. I can’t begin to express the genuine godly heart of the man. He is the true deal and his book is awesome. The book is well written and a great testimony of a heart on fire for God. I highly recommend *Two Minutes to Live* for personal, family, or classroom reading.” —P. Lennard, MT

Above the Thorns

“I . . . read the entire book *Above the Thorns* after getting home at about 7:30. Thoroughly enjoyed it. I didn’t finish it until 1:30 in the morning . . . You really should submit this book for a movie. It is truly inspiring, and I feel it made me a better person for having read it.” —Marcus Gilbert, Virginia

Josh

“Just wanted to tell John what a blessing it is for me to be reading *Josh* . . . like the last book, there is such a sense of goodness, authentic love for the Lord, simplicity . . . makes me want to be so vigilant in following His Way.” —Diane Coffman Garvin, Dallas, Texas

“I want to thank you for the opportunity to read your latest ‘masterpiece.’ I can honestly say I am so thankful for the tremendous talent our Lord has given to you and how well you use it . . . Josh is the son any mother would be proud of. He is a man of many talents. And he uses those talents to help others. I liked the way you placed caring people in His path who were willing to take the time to help him in so many ways. I know this book will be ‘A BEST SELLER.’” —Joyce Rose, member Edgewood Baptist Church, Durham, NC

“I have read all three of John’s books two times and am starting on my third reading now! The books are well written and easy to understand. The author makes it easy to lead others to Christ. He shares this with his readers, and this excites and humbles me. I want to do the same with others. I only met John once and very briefly while at church. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy. I look forward to seeing him again one day in eternity . . .” —Ann Collins, member Wytheville Baptist Church, Wytheville, Virginia

Josh

A House the Lord Built

Josh

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John E. Collier

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DEDICATION

Mildred Ormand and John E. Collier, Sr.

Although John wanted to dedicate this book to me, his wife, I believe it can only be dedicated to my aunt, Mildred (Midge) Ormond, a godly, loving person that everyone treasures, for the innumerable ways she assisted and brought comfort to John, especially during his last difficult years; and to John himself and the miracle-filled life he led in loving service of his God and Savior.

Before his death in 2016, my husband John Collier lived a life marked by a great love of Jesus and telling others about Him. He served as a missionary and in ministry in many places and many formats.

As founder and director of C.A. Outreach Ministries, Inc. (CAOM, Inc.), John served his Lord for forty years in Belize, Central America. For over eight years John lived and worked in the jungles of Belize with the Maya Indians doing agricultural and medical work and building a twelve-room medical clinic which served seven villages. John brought over 400 teams to Belize to serve the Belizean people and built and ran the Embassy Mission House and Hotel at the Belize International

Airport. He was nearing the completion of the Embassy River Lodge for pastor and discipleship training before he fell ill.

In Belize, John received the honorary title of Major in Her Majesty's Forces while doing counseling and debriefing of British soldiers in Belize. He planted eighteen churches, hosted two weekly programs on Belize Christian radio, taught discipleship seminar sessions, organized and taught men's discipleship classes as well as Christian financial planning seminars for churches and youth. John was a volunteer teacher for the Ladyville, Belize, police force and served as Chairman of the People's Coalition to help the Ladyville Police Department. He served in a Belizean governmental capacity as a member of the United Democratic Party Finance Committee.

John published two Christian books: *Two Minutes to Live* and *Above the Thorns*. The book in your hands, *Josh*, was particularly dear to his heart, and I hope you find it touches your heart, too. If it does, please "pray it forward," asking all who read his books to be led to a closer walk with the Lord Jesus, in whose very presence John is now rejoicing.

With gratitude to the Lord for honoring me with almost twenty-five years of marriage to this godly man,

Judy Collier

GRATITUDE

Thank you to Pearl L. Elmer, a retired English professor and the recipient of many awards, for her initial editorial pass through the manuscript. Ms. Elmer taught English at Durham Technical Community College in NC and English, Women's and Children's ministry classes at Davis College in NY and lives by the motto: "Praise God for everything." As a widow, she desires to encourage others to grow from grief to gain hope in God's special promises through her booklet, "A Widow's Path of Promise." She enjoys her three adult children, eleven grandchildren, and gardening.

I am so thankful for Kathy Smith, my (Judy Collier) cousin, for her unfailing and sacrificial help in whatever need we have had. Kathy taught in public schools for 35 years and also wrote curriculum for Neolithix, Inc., serving on curriculum committees for Math and Computer Literacy courses. Initiated as an Alpha Delta Kappa Honorary Sorority for Women Educators sister in 1987, Kathy served in many offices such as committee chair for the State Website Committee for over 16 years and was selected as *Texas AΔK of Distinction 2014-2016*. She has been married to Roy Smith 41 years, and they have two sons, each

with a daughter. They are long time members of St. Barnabas UMC in Arlington, Texas, and very involved in the church life. Kathy has published the newsletter for the church for many years.

Mildred Ormand, Judy Collier's aunt, is also known as Midge, and has been a godsend and blessing in every way. This book is dedicated to her. Midge has had several jobs in the publication industry, both in college and in Crockett, Texas, as the line-a-typist for the *Houston County Courier*. She is a gifted proofreader and has shared her expertise in many ways. She and her late husband, Alfred, have four children, seven grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. She has been very involved in the United Methodist Church over the years in all the communities they have lived, and is a member of St. Barnabas UMC currently. She has a beautiful voice which allowed her to be the vocal singer for a small local band during her early years and she often sang in her church's choir. She is greatly admired for her loving, giving and caring spirit.

A deep appreciation goes out to Diane Coffman Garvin, a high school classmate of Judy Collier's and a former film and restaurant columnist from Dallas, Texas, for her expert insight, and godly encouragement and advice.

I owe gratitude to Linda Laetz, my dear friend, for editing several drafts of *Josh*, going the first mile and even the second! Thanks, too, to Mary Ann Westphal, who typed and edited the first rough draft, even while her arm was in a sling, and to Janet Butler for her in-depth critique.

Finally, thank you to Sandra Byrd, who came along at the last stage of the editing process to refine and add the final touches. She expertly made the needed changes in a very caring manner, making it into a book that I know will make John smile in his new heavenly home.

PREFACE

By Judy Collier

This book came very close to not being finished. John had written a great deal of *Josh* when he developed severe neck pain followed by a hemorrhagic blood stroke on the right side of his brain. With blood flowing from his mouth, I rushed him to the hospital in Belize City. Though they could stop the bleeding, John became extremely ill with a septic urinary infection and pneumonia.

By the next day, I knew he had to be flown to the US if he was to have any chance of survival. After a day of arrangements, a wonderful air-ambulance service Air Medical from San Antonio, Texas, flew him to Zale Lipshy University Hospital of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. There he almost died from the septic infection, but the grace of God using an awesome medical team, pulled him through. He didn't know who anyone was—not even himself—and couldn't talk; in fact, the medical team couldn't even promise that he would ever speak again. And me? I was just glad he was alive.

Sometimes we doubt and question what we think God has shown us, especially when the circumstances all around seem to be saying it's

not possible. On July 1, 2010, when John was under anesthesia for a fourteen-hour heart surgery, he experienced the only vision of his life up to that point. A robed figure whom John knew was from God appeared to him, and John said, “I want to go home . . .” For most of his 76 years, John knew and loved the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and knew he would be with his Best Friend if he went home. He had experienced so much pain that he was weary and ready. But the “man” from God said, “No, I have something else for you to do.”

John said, “Yes, sir,” then the robed figure was gone. So, after awakening from a six-day induced coma with his chest cavity open except for a sponge bandage, during the next year and a half of recovery, John sought to serve God in the “something else,” not knowing exactly what that entailed. After much prayer, both John and I believed part of the “something else” was (1) to restructure our ministry of C. A. Outreach Ministries Inc. to focus on discipleship classes in Belize; (2) to make sure the ministry continued, locating staff to replace us in our older age; (3) to finish this book as well as the book, *God Kept Him Alive*, the recounting of God’s grace in John’s life since the time of his first book, *Two Minutes to Live*.

It seemed much headway was quickly being made in each of the three areas when, suddenly, my wonderful, loving and talented husband was once again lying at death’s door . . . with the “something else” left partially unfinished, and not even knowing if he would ever be able to speak or write again. But, as he slowly learned to speak and walk and write and tell time again, hope was reignited. John joyfully shared Jesus through it all. After three weeks of miraculous recovery, he was released to outpatient rehabilitation, but his personality was rather sedated, and he was still having difficulty putting his thoughts into words. Then, exactly one week later as I drove him to his first rehab session, he had another stroke, this time from a blood clot on the left side of his brain. He couldn’t even see anyone and was ambulated to the emergency room.

The staff strongly suggested I move my car to St. Paul's emergency room instead of riding with him in the ambulance, so I drove praying and trying to stay focused on God's grace in John's life, and how none of this made sense according to what we believed God had shown us. Successful to a point, my stomach still gripped in fear spasms . . . I had no idea what I would find when I got there . . . would he even be alive? As I rounded the hall in the emergency room, I heard a familiar voice and laughter; hope rose quickly. Walking up to his unit, I found my husband sitting up on the hospital bed with his long legs draped over the side, just laughing and cutting up as he always did before all this began about two months earlier. I was shocked and stood in awe outside the opened curtain to his room. Seeing me standing there speechless with wide eyes, a physician became concerned and quickly came up to me, "Are you Mrs. Collier? Are you okay? Do you think something is wrong with your husband? Is he worse than he was when they left Zale Lipshy with him?"

"Oh, no!" I suddenly exclaimed. "I've got my husband back! He's acting like his old self again! How could he possibly have had another stroke which actually healed the first one?" The doctor said he didn't know. The only thing he could think of was that a small blood clot might have been restricting a vessel in the brain, and when the clot broke loose it caused the stroke, but it also cleared the blood vessel to supply more blood to the brain. As far as I'm concerned, only God could use a cranial blood clot stroke to help clear up the damage from a hemorrhagic brain stroke!

John began to write again. Even after a grand mal seizure, three operations, and shingles John continued to write and share Jesus with every person who came into the hospital room.

A year following his surgery, Dr. Gallegos, John's heart surgeon who is now on our board, called John in Belize and said he was working at a different hospital. He said he called to let John know that it was touch

and go in the operating room . . . that John almost died several times. But he continued, “Somebody else was there beside me. I couldn’t see him, but I knew he was there—he was guiding my hands.”

So, this book is a miracle, and I’m sure you can imagine what deep, abiding joy and peace I’m experiencing as I’m writing this, knowing this—his third book—is completed. To me, it is one more testimony to a very great and faithful God Who always keeps His promises, no matter what our circumstances try to tell us. I pray that, after reading this book, each reader is encouraged to never give up and to always reach for the Lord, even if it’s “on your tiptoes.”

With deep gratitude to a faithful, loving God,
Judy Collier

PROLOGUE

It was a clear, but chilly, January day, the kind of day that made a person quicken her step, exhale fog into the air, and feel glad to be alive—but warmly dressed! Mary Hendrix and her daughter, Beth, headed toward the entrance to the local mall to pick up some post-Christmas sale dresses. As they neared the entrance to the mall near their home, Beth noted two uniformed and armed guards emerge from a dark-gray armored truck. The bustling crowd parted like the Red Sea as the guards began to push a two-wheeled cart toward that same mall entrance. Beth turned toward her mother. “That cart is so large! I guess they’ll be transporting a lot of money from the mall today.” Her mom nodded, and they made their way inside and stopped at the first shop on the left.

Before Christmas, at this very shop, Beth had spied some dresses with which she had fallen in love. She’d hoped they’d go on sale after the holiday—and they had—they were now fifty percent off! She searched the racks and found the one she was looking for, a beautiful, pale-blue silk. “I have to buy this, Mother. I can wear it to church.”

Her mother smiled at her daughter, newly twenty-one. “Is that all you have in mind?”

Beth smiled back. “I do love this dress and . . . I want Josh to see me in it. I’d like to give him a picture of me wearing it.”

Her mother nodded knowingly. “I think you’ll be beautiful in that dress, honey.”

Beth tried it on, and as she twirled in it for her mother, it seemed it had been made just for her. It fit perfectly. Beth paid, proudly, with her new credit card and, elated, put the receipt in the shopping bag with her new dress. “Thank you so much for taking me shopping, Mom!”

As they had found what they’d come for and because they didn’t care to be caught up in the crowded rush of post-Christmas returns, they decided they would leave the mall.

As they walked out through the same door they’d used to enter, the two security guards passed by, their cart now filled with sacks of cash. As Beth turned toward her mother, her smile froze and the words she was about to speak halted. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw three men, guns drawn, racing toward the cart. Mrs. Hendrix let out a frightened scream as the gunmen grabbed the guards and insisted that the guards hand over both weapons and money. Suddenly, other passersby saw what was going on, too, and began to race from the scene.

Beth watched as the first guard tried to see the robbers drew his gun and tried to shoot one of the robbers, but missed. A second thief turned and shot that guard once, and then he fired again. Beth watched in disbelief as the bullet came toward her; she did not have time to scream before she crumpled to the ground. Although she was quickly losing consciousness, she could hear her mother screaming her name and turned her head just in time to see one of the robbers hit her mother in the head. Beth closed her eyes.

It all felt so quiet, and dreamlike, really. The day was no longer cold. The voices, though seemingly distant, were still present. She could hear her mother saying, “Beth . . . Beth.”

Beth could not answer her.

As the last echo of gunshots faded, she heard a young voice say, “Daddy? What is happening? Why is that pretty lady lying on the ground, Daddy? There is blood coming from her head. It’s making her brown hair red.”

My hair is brown, Beth thought. Is that me he is speaking of?

The voices grew more distant but Beth knew they were calling for help. Now Beth started to feel searing pain in her head. As she fluttered toward unconsciousness, she had strength only to pray aloud in a whisper. “Oh no, not now, Lord . . . Not when . . . Oh, Josh . . . Josh . . .”

Somehow, her desperate whispered cries mysteriously floated through the mind of a young man who sat at his desk diligently working. The cries alarmed him, and instinctively, he knew he needed to call Beth. “I have to get this plan finished first,” he reasoned aloud. Josh worked very hard—not only due to his fine work ethic, but because the harder Josh worked the less his childhood memories haunted him.

CHAPTER ONE

Josh Woods was a scared and angry little boy, and no wonder, when one considered his so-called father, a man who was the opposite of the godly influence so badly needed in the Woods home. Josh's fear and anger sometimes turned to bitterness toward the man he had to call father—the man who got drunk and beat him and his mother, Maley Woods. Josh's home in Johnson City, Tennessee, was filled with broken whiskey bottles and yelling, hardly an ideal environment for a child. And yet . . . the child still craved love from his unwilling father.

Everything changed on Josh's ninth birthday. To make this a special day for her son, despite the family turmoil, Maley had made Josh a birthday cake. When Josh came into the living area and saw his cake proudly displayed on their dining table, a huge grin crossed his face. He ran and hugged his mother. "Wow! Gee thanks, Mom! This is the best birthday ever!"

Then his father, Russ Woods, staggered in the front door, drunk again. When Russ saw the cake, he raced past the boy and slapped his wife on the face, knocking her down.

“Stop it!” Josh shouted as he raced to place himself, protectively, in front of his mother.

“You see here, boy!” Mr. Woods turned on Josh and threw a fist, connecting with the boy, who then hit the floor, hard. Josh pushed himself up as his father made his way back to Maley. “You ain’t never made *me* a cake!” he drunkenly slurred to his wife as he became even more enraged. The man turned to curse his son, on his birthday, once more before he walked out of the house, leaving his family to fend for themselves.

Though the home was more peaceful with his father gone, Josh’s anger toward his father increased—abandonment had been added to his father’s list of wrongdoings. Because of their newly difficult straits, Josh, the only child, now lived with his mother in a very small apartment; he slept in the living room on the couch. They had no TV, just a radio a friend had left them when he’d moved. Money was hard to come by, so his mother worked at a restaurant and cooked, waited on tables, and sometimes collected money. The hours were long but Maley was used to hard work. She had only a ninth-grade education so it was a position in which she felt comfortable.

From an early age, Josh loved to draw. With a pencil, paper, and ruler in hand, he felt like he was in a different world, one in which he could escape both the drunken tirades of his father and his anger at God for allowing those tirades. Whenever Josh found a magazine that had been thrown away, he retrieved it from the garbage. Once, he found one that contained the floor plans for a house. Intrigued, Josh began redrawing the plans, changing them, because he thought they wasted too much space. Inspired, his next project was to draw a subdivision with houses next to each other; next he added a small shopping mall with apartments on top of each store. Josh poured himself into his drawings, driving himself toward a future, working with a vengeance accumulated from years of anger and even hatred. Sometimes he would cry out, “No! I’m

not going to be like my father! I'll make something of myself. I'll take care of *my* family!"

And yet, each time he indulged himself in an outburst, he became fearful that those loud, strong words meant he was destined to become just like his loud, angry father.

As he grew older, Josh began visiting the library, a place where he could withdraw from the memories that plagued him. There, he found a wealth of information about drafting and architecture, books that helped him on his drawings at home. One day he came across a book on building bridges; it took his fascination with building to a new height. He checked the book out and raced home to read it. While browsing the various bridges, his mother's words echoed in his head.

Jesus is the only bridge to eternal life.

Josh thought, *That's an odd thought to come to my mind.*

Week by week, Josh constructed bridges with toothpicks; he had to do it in sections since he always had to stop for homework, to help around the house, or for his outside activities. His time while working on other tasks was not wasted, though. He would wonder how soldiers built bridges during wartime, which led to more studies and . . . more toothpicks. Thankfully, Josh's new hobby only cost him a box of toothpicks and some glue—things he could afford. And it was a good thing they didn't cost much because when Josh couldn't get the toothpicks right, he'd just get mad and destroy everything he'd completed with a sweeping blow from his fist.

It scared him. But it didn't stop him—perhaps he couldn't stop. He did not know.

As time went by, Josh's anger, fear, and bitterness toward his dad continued to build. He still wanted a father, of course, but not *that* kind. When he thought of his father, fear struck him. His response, then, was to strike out, himself.

One day, Josh returned home from school and slammed his books on the kitchen counter. As he raised his eyes he saw his mother sitting at their kitchen table with her clasped hands supporting her forehead. “Hey, are you okay?” he asked her.

She shook her head. “Well . . . Josh, I guess I need to talk to you.” Josh slid into the chair next to his mother. “Son, I’m concerned about your temper. It can only hurt you. It will do you no good to be angry all the time like your father was.”

Tears welling in his eyes, Josh knew his mother was not only right but that she was hurting, too. “Mom, I’m sorry. I’ve tried and just can’t seem to change. Everything seems to make me mad.” *I’m scared I’m becoming like him*, Josh thought.

“I know. You haven’t had it easy. You haven’t had the life I wish I could have given you. But neither you nor I can change our lives nor our feelings on our own. The Lord doesn’t expect us to, but *He* can change us. Josh, I think it’s time we both quit trying to do things on our own and turned our lives over to Jesus.”

In his mind, Josh relived the many scenes he had created with his anger, the many friends he had alienated, and the many times he had tried to control his temper but couldn’t—at least not on his own. His mother waited in quiet patience until Josh finally said, “You’re right; I do need help. I need Jesus. I don’t like what I’m doing with my life.”

So, mother and son bowed in prayer, giving their lives to the Lord and asking Jesus to change their hearts. It had taken him a long time to begin to understand the true meaning of forgiveness, but now he had begun and two much more peaceful hearts rose from the table.

But would it last? Or would he, too, eventually hurt everyone who loved him?

CHAPTER TWO

The more Josh's temper began to soften and the more his anger abated, the more outgoing he became. He no longer just wanted to bury himself in the library away from everyone else. By the time he was twelve-years-old, the youngest age at which he could join, Josh wanted to be in the Scouts. Some of his friends went to a church that offered a Scouting program, so Josh started attending both the church and their Scouting program. No longer angry, Josh could keep friends, and he loved camping with his troop every month. As time went by, Josh became more and more involved with his new friends. He studied the Boy Scout Handbook and started earning merit badges.

Finally, the day he'd long waited for arrived. When he turned fourteen, Josh was old enough to get a paper route to help his mother financially.

"You'll have to get up every morning at three o'clock, seven days a week, son," his mother said.

Josh just grinned. Sure, it was hard at first; but after he had made it his routine, Josh would wake up every morning even before the alarm clock sounded off. When he wanted to go on the Scouts' monthly

camping trips and week-long summer camps, Josh paid his friend Newell his salary of three dollars a day to throw his route for him. Newell had a bike, so he could throw it in only twenty-five minutes.

With his mother's permission, Josh started saving money from his first job. Then he could buy his Scout uniform and his camping gear, with some money left over for socks, a shirt, and blue jeans. He felt good about being able to help with the finances, and his confidence grew when he realized that his mother no longer had to give him an allowance. Later, Josh started working at a gas station in the afternoons: washing cars, pumping gas, and cleaning up the yard. This, along with his paper route, gave him more money. Josh's schooling was coming along fine and he could still spend many hours drawing—a true passion. When he entered the ninth grade, he took woodshop. He enjoyed it because he could use the electric tools, including a lathe. His first project was making a rolling pin for his mother.

“Mom?” he called into the house one day. His mother, tired from work, beckoned him forward to the chair in which she sat. He handed her the wrapped rolling pin and when she opened it she exclaimed, “What a beauty! Did you make this?”

Josh nodded, and she gave him the biggest hug he could remember. For his next project, he made a rocking chair.

“This took some time, didn't it?” his instructor asked him, in front of the whole class. Josh just nodded. “Well, it's the finest thing built in the shop this year.” His teacher praised him and awarded him an A+. In fact, it was the highest grade given in the class that year.

Josh varnished and waxed the chair. He couldn't wait to get out of school to take it home. He sneaked it into his mother's bedroom before leaving to go to the gas station to work. When Josh got home, his mother was sitting again, but this time, she rocked in her new chair. Smiling, she looked up at Josh with tears in her eyes and said, “Son, this is the most beautiful thing I've ever had. Except for you, of course.”

By age sixteen, Josh had become an Eagle Scout. His girlfriend, Beth, flicked a bit of dust off his uniform. "I'm so proud of you," she said, and he beamed at her in response. "It's not everyone who is chosen to be inducted into the Order of the Arrow Brotherhood, the highest honor in Scouting!" she exclaimed. "It's all due to your hard work," Beth continued.

Josh nodded. "And the help of Mr. Carnikee!" Josh held his Scoutmaster, Mr. Carnikee, in high regard. In fact, secretly, Josh wanted to be just like him. Over time, Mr. Carnikee had become a role model, a father figure, and Josh's best friend. Under his influence, Josh seemed to forget his dad for long periods of time. Mr. Carnikee had a real insight for all the boys in his troop. He knew Josh was hurting and suspected it had something to do with his father. Josh knew it was because too often, his bitterness toward his dad would surface when he least expected it.

Mr. Carnikee must have noticed that when anyone asked Josh about his dad, Josh would only say that his dad did a lot of traveling, and then just walk off. One day, on one of the monthly camping trips, Mr. Carnikee pulled Josh aside. "Tell me about your father," he said.

Josh lowered his head and didn't respond for a while. When he did raise his eyes, Josh began speaking softly, "My father left us on my ninth birthday, and I keep thinking it was because my mother made me a birthday cake. He was drunk as usual and told my mom that she had never made him a cake. Then he hit her and knocked her to the floor. I ran over to stop him, but he hit me with his fist and knocked me to the ground too. He was using some awful bad words, and then he got so mad he walked out of the house. We've never seen him since." Tears began to fill Josh's eyes, and his Scoutmaster gave him some time to recover before speaking.

Mr. Carnikee rested his large hand on Josh's shoulder and simply said, "Son, you've got to learn to forgive."

Nothing was said after that. Josh just nodded to Mr. Carnikee, then slowly stood up and walked over to join the other scouts. Later, Josh learned that Mr. Carnikee put Josh on his prayer list and wrote one word beside his name: “Forgiveness.” He knew Josh had to forgive his father to have peace—a process Josh had started years earlier while praying with his mother, but had not yet fully committed to it. After his talk with Mr. Carnikee, Josh still struggled to forgive his father. He was older now, and wiser, and clearly understood what refusing to forgive did to him. But to Josh’s dismay, the bitterness would return again and again. This agonizing cycle of forgiveness, backtracking, and the inevitable bitterness it caused continued until one day, after much prayer, the Lord allowed Josh to realize something startling: he didn’t *want* to forgive his dad.

Josh unleashed his feelings in prayer. *Lord, my dad doesn’t deserve to be forgiven! And what if I did forgive him, Lord, and he came back, maybe I’d be too soft on him, and he would just do it to us all over again . . . Oh, Father, I guess I’ve been praying over and over for something that I don’t even want and that I’m even afraid of. Is that what you might call being doubled-minded? Forgive me, Father, and please help me to want to forgive . . . no, I need to want to want to want to forgive . . . that’s how bad off I am, Lord . . . but then You know that. So, Father, I need to want to forgive my dad . . . I can’t do it on my own . . . and I need greater faith to trust You to help me.*

Did God answer him? It didn’t seem like it until, not long after, Josh got a call from one of his Sunday school friends at church.

“Hey Josh,” Cory said, “the church is going to put on an Easter play about the crucifixion of Christ. Wasn’t one of your classes drama?”

“Yes,” Josh answered.

“I thought so. And if I remember right, you did very well in it.”

Josh remained silent, but Cory was right. Josh had done very well in drama. Having experienced so much pain in his life, Josh could easily identify with the troubles the characters went through.

“I have an idea,” Cory said. And just like that, it was done.

Josh was a good actor, and as a tall, strong presence, he looked the part; he was chosen to play Jesus in the church’s Easter performance, if he’d like the part. There was one catch—the script called for Josh to be put on the cross, hanging there, just like Jesus had. Josh had only had a few minutes to say “yes” or “no,” and he surprised himself by quickly agreeing.

He sensed he was supposed to accept the role—and that God had something to say to him in it. The thought made him a little nervous.

The play took place in the open air. All four hundred seats were filled and people stood along the sides and back of the seating area, overflowing into the margins of the viewing area. More people were still arriving as the play began. The performance went well and then—the last scene.

Josh carried the cross, then fell, involuntarily crying out. Another man picked up the cross and carried it to the crucifixion site, “Jesus” walking alongside him. When they arrived at the site, soldiers stood with spears aiming toward Jesus, played by Josh. Other soldiers took off Josh’s robe, allowing the audience to see the whip marks covering his back. After he was laid on the cross and tied there, the soldiers put nails into his hands and feet. For a moment, Josh forgot who he was. He felt and understood what Jesus must have felt, just like he’d been able to identify with all the other people he had played.

This time, though, was different. The nails had hooks on them, making it look like they were going into Josh’s hands and feet. Small packets filled with a blood-like substance were broken, making it appear like blood was flowing from the nails in his hands. The sound of the hammers hitting the cross was chilling; the hits sounded real. Josh felt them and he heard the moans and murmurs in the crowd. Then, they

raised the cross with Josh on it. When it fell into the ground about three feet, the ground shook; Josh did, too. The men piled dirt and rocks to hold it in. The sign over his head read, "This is the King of the Jews."

Josh, as Jesus, hung on the cross for a very long time while the narrator and choir performed the passion segment of their cantata. Earlier, the soldiers had put a crown of thorns on his head; one of the thorns pierced Josh's scalp. He hadn't felt it until the cross was raised . . . and then a small drop ran down his forehead into his left ear for all to see. One of the men ran over to Josh, took a long stick with a sponge on it with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. But he did not taste it.

At the end of ten minutes, Josh knew he had to say the lines he had memorized, but all he could think of was, *Dear God, please help me to endure this*. Breathing hard, he felt faint. His arms were aching; his legs were throbbing. *Dear God, help me!* Then he began to think of Jesus hanging on the real cross: the pain He endured, the suffering, the shame. Tears came to Josh's eyes and the people up close could see they were real.

The jeers of the mockers began, "If you are the Christ, come down from the cross!"

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Josh cried. Was he saying this as Jesus? Or as Josh, who had felt so utterly abandoned by God so many times. Perhaps both. Josh pushed himself to speak his final lines. "Into your hands, I commit my spirit."

Have I really given my spirit, my life, to you, Lord? Then he dropped his head.

Josh was not given the whip lashes nor the licks from the rod. He had not stayed up all night as had Jesus, nor did he sweat drops of blood. This was only a play, but he had hardly been able to stand the suffering of just being tied to a cross. Finally, the soldiers came and took his body down.

While the physical pain eased, the inner pain increased. In his heart, Josh hurt and wept bitterly. He realized that he could never know all the agony that Jesus suffered for him. The depravity of his sin came

before him, and Josh realized that Jesus had to hang on the cross for the anger and bitterness Josh had for his father and the forgiveness Josh had stubbornly withheld. *Lord, forgive me . . . I do want to forgive my dad now. You had to go through as much for me as you did for him. You must love him a lot even though I don't. I need to learn to love like you and pray for those who have hurt me, just like you did. Lord, I need to see my dad through your eyes. Please save him. You've changed my life so I know you can change his . . . and he needs you so much. Once and for all, I now hand him over to you.*

Josh never forgot the forty-five minutes he spent on that cross. But could he live the lesson, the life, this time?