

A long time ago, in a land far away, a child was born. {November 12, 1951, Urbana Ohio, Scott Curtis Medlong} He was like any other child, that is to say, a son of Adam, prone to sin, yet; he was predestined to be called by grace through faith to salvation.

His parents raised him in the care and admonition of the Lord. His father, John, had told him many years ago that he tried to pattern his life after Micah 6:8. “*He has shown thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.*”

John not only told him this, but, true to his word, lived his life so. His mother, Nancy, taught him to sing and pray from infancy. She took him with her to a prayer meeting when he was about three years old. At one point a woman was prayed for and was healed, the young lad jumped to his feet and ran around the room crying, “Jesus is here, Jesus is here!”

All went well. He attended many years of Sunday School and even would go to Vacation Bible Schools at other churches, just because he loved to sing and pray and hear about Jesus. He was persecuted by other children in his neighborhood because he attended a church different than theirs. He would not fight because he believed that, as a Christian, he should turn the other cheek. As he grew older, he became confused. So many people talked of religion and yet used it to hurt, rather than heal, to separate, rather than join.

Then came the worst part of his life. It started with a Sunday School class. The pastor of his church taught the class and it was for the purpose of becoming confirmed as a member of the church. For the first time, he heard things about the Bible and the Church never before spoken by the teachers of the past. “Allegory,” he said. “Noah didn’t really build the Ark. God didn’t really part the Red Sea for Moses to cross.” It was hard to swallow. Had all of his teachers lied to him? “Not lies, Allegory.”

Well, the lad could learn to live with it, after all, it happened so long ago and really didn’t matter. What was important was Jesus and what he did. After all, we’re Christians, not Jews.

As the weeks unfolded it became muddier and muddier. “The miracles *might* not have happened exactly the way we had been told. The people in those days were superstitious and may have misinterpreted what they saw. After all, it is the principals that matter, not the words. *Allegory!*”

Towards the end came the worst blow of all. “Jesus may not have actually been born of a virgin, and the resurrection . . . well maybe the Apostles just thought he’d died, it doesn’t matter, it’s the principal, the principal.”

Time passed and the classes ended. The bishop came and laid his hands on the lad and he became a man in the eyes of the church. With manhood came much confusion. The foundation of his moral standards had been shaken to the very root.

The “Sixties” were in full bloom. “Do your own thing, if it feels good, do it,” became the new standard of behavior. Oh, he still went to church, in fact his life and friends still revolved around it.

Summer mission trips were places to learn new thing, like the ways of boys and girls. Experimentation in *adult* behavior and habits was officially discouraged, but a different lesson was taught by overt action. A lie was only a lie if it hurt someone. Theft was only theft if one was caught. The social gospel was the most important one. Jesus came to set people free, after all, so we must work to make personal choice the highest priority.

Through the cacophony of divergent moral choices and viewpoints came a couple of youth advisors from a summer mission’s trip. As they all traveled across the country, bound for Alaska, books were passed around to make the time pass. The Cross and the Switchblade was read by most, along with other books by David Wilkerson and his followers in Teen Challenge.

The young man felt a glimmer of the old faith kindle in his heart. In Alaska he met a college student who actually read his Bible every day and even carried it with him, seemingly without embarrassment. Quickly the fire was extinguished. There were so many different life-styles to try. After all, God looks at the good that you do for your fellow man (er. . . person) not at the little white lies or peccadilloes. Sin is relative, after all, isn’t it?

Short years passed quickly. High School was passed (barely) and ambition became the center of life. A job started while still in school was rapidly turning into a career. A willingness to give a little extra and the ability to learn new tasks set him apart from his peers. Promotions were swift. Life was good.

All the while, the young man still felt alone. Something was missing from his life. Perhaps he needed to do more good deeds. One last mission trip after graduation might do it.

He obtained a leave of absence from work and headed to California to work with migrant farm workers. After the trip, life continued to improve. A promotion to train new employees, out of state, was to be a fast track to an assistant manager’s job. Promises of free education and large salaries should soon follow.

While on the road, a vice-president of the parent corporation took time to seek him out and ask him about his life and goals, offering great encouragement. Then things started to go wrong. Projects carefully planned and executed failed for no visible reason. The quality of his work seemed to wane in the eyes of his

employer. The young man became confused. He knew that he was working harder than ever. He complained that others must have been sabotaging his work. "Paranoid," they said. You're losing your mind. Finally, in disgrace, he was sent home.

Although he still had a job (and the same rate of pay) he was given menial duties and was not allowed to progress. He began to doubt his own sanity.

Finally, after several weeks, a supervisor told him the truth. While talking to vice-president he had been asked, in passing, about a bumper sticker on the back of his car. It was in support of the farm workers plight in California. It seems that the executive neglected to mention that another branch of the corporation was directly involved in the struggle of the farm workers to organize into a union. That was the real reason for the conversation.

The supervisor told him that if he stayed, the shop manager would be fired for not forcing him out. He confronted the manager who confirmed the facts but still refused to make him leave.

Rather than harm his friend, the young man quit. In a few short weeks he had gone from the top of the world to the bottom of the heap.

Humiliated by the boasts of future achievements, never to be realized, he decided to make a total break with his past. Against all sound counsel, he took his guitar, the tools of his trade and a few personal belongings and left home.

Promising to write or call, he began to hitchhike west. As almost an afterthought, he packed a New Testament to read along the way.

His first ride, to Chicago, was with a friend and his father who told him about their faith in Christ. They prayed with him but the young man didn't see the need for the kind of religion that they talked about.

Odd jobs were picked up along the way, one lasting several months. He often tried reading the Bible but found that a wall was erected between him and understanding. Along the way he met several groups of "Jesus Freaks," hippies with Bibles and guitars, living in vans and passing out tracts. "Not for me," he said.

Finally the journey ended in California. All-night "rap sessions" with other wayfarers, often produced a glimmer of hope, but it faded rapidly at the coming of the dawn. He ended up in an encampment of farm workers and union organizers. There he was able to catch a ride home to Ohio with a mission team from the group that he had traveled with before.

Back home, life did not seem to improve much. Having lived on his own, it was difficult to live with his parents again. A few bad financial choices thrust him into debt. Jobs didn't seem to last long and he couldn't regain the fervor for work of days past. Suicide became an increasingly attractive option. Life held fewer and

fewer pleasures. A God who couldn't really work miracles didn't seem to have much value. After all, if there really was a God, why were people being killed in Vietnam, or the streets of Cleveland, for that matter?

### **January 1st. 1972 2:00 AM**

“What to do, What to do?” The young man was driving the rain-slick streets of Parma. The fancy red sports car that had become that black hole that sucked away almost everything he earned was leaking a little from the passenger side. “What to do?” A bitter fight at work, just a half an hour before, resulted in him walking off of the job, quitting at the peak of shift with mountains of work still to be done. “How can I ever pay my bills now? I know, it's early New Years morning. I'll find some rich drunk in a new Cadillac, I'll get in front of him at a light and pound my brakes and *POW*, all my troubles will be over. Mom and Dad can collect the insurance. Everything will end.”

The young man spots a boyhood friend, now somewhat estranged, walking home in the rain. He offers a ride that the friend grudgingly accepts. Looking for brief sympathy, he tells of the night's plans and suggests the possible solution to his former friend. As the car begins to slow at a stop sign, the passenger hastily bolts from the car, thinking perhaps that he might perish also.

The young man becomes hurt and then angry at the sudden departure. His anger drives out all thoughts of the evil plan and he heads for home. Suddenly, a shiny, new Cadillac cuts across several lanes and heads directly for the little sports car. The young man cuts the wheel, accelerating out of the path of the oncoming car and then struggles to gain control as he swerves on the slick roadway. The driver of the other car seems to wake up and heads back to his own side of the road.

Finally reaching home, he collapses in bed and hopes the next day will bring better things.

The coming of the New Year brought new hope. A new job was obtained one with more promise of a future than the last. Most of his time was being spent in classes for the new job or at several local “crash pads.” These were rooms set aside, mostly at local churches, for the “hippie” generation. Here one could drop in and drink coffee or pop and “rap” about the draft or drugs or other social issues of the day.

Although church sponsored, the Gospel of Christ was seldom heard there as a solution to the world's problems. When voiced, it was usually slapped down by

those that were “with it.” The most common theme was that god-consciousness was more important than some all-knowing, all-seeing God of the Bible.

Here he encountered Mike, a fellow from his past. Although Mike was a few years older, they had “partied” together prior to Mike joining the Air Force. It seemed strange that Mike had returned home so soon. He had only been in the Air Force for a about two years.

The first thing that the young man noticed was the change in Mike’s eyes. It was as if a light was shining from behind them.

Over the next few weeks, Mike began to share how his life had changed since he was home last. Raised in the same church and faced with the same crisis of faith, he had gone down a different path.

In High School, Mike became involved in a local coven of witches and became, he thought, a White Witch or warlock. When he had left for the service, his eyes looked “dead” like deep, still pools. Now they danced with laughter. A smile was always on his face.

He told of how he had reached a point of despair while serving in the Philippines. The rest is another’s story. Suffice it to say that he came to know Jesus and was set free from the bondage of witchcraft and sin. The evidence of this was apparent in his life and testimony. His large, worn Bible was always at hand, open and ready to aid in giving an answer of the hope that was within him.

Slowly coals thought dead for years began to glow when fanned by the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit. As weeks passed, the fire grew hotter.

Out of school and at work at his new job, a morning came in March when the office was empty and there was nothing to do. Not a soul had crossed the door of the small storefront office and all the paperwork for the day was already finished. Picking up a Bible he had brought with him, he tried to read but the barrier of old was still there. It just didn’t make any sense. Suddenly the phone rang. It was Mike, calling to see how he was doing. As the conversation continued, Mike shared something he had never heard before.

God, it seems, was not interested in only “saving” people, He was calling people into His service. In exchange for this service, He was offering a totally new life. In fact, He was willing to live through those whom He had called.

The relationship was not one of a distant relative who occasionally called or wrote a short note to see how you were doing. This was an ongoing, everyday, personal relationship. Mike suggested that the young man prays and asks God to prove Himself strong. Further suggesting that after he prayed, the man should begin to read the Scripture and ask God to open His Word up to him.

Mike led him to 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth;*

*comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (KJV)*

He went on to explain that, apart from being born of the Spirit of God, no one can really understand the Word of God. The only way to receive this Spirit was admit that he had sinned and could not escape the penalty unless he accepted the work that Jesus did on the cross in his behalf.

Suddenly the call ended. The young man buried his face in his arms on the counter, torn in two directions. He had believed in this Jesus once before only to be told by his church and his pastor that his faith had been naive. Still the fire burned inside and would not go out.

He fell to his knees and cried out to the Father. "I don't know if this is real or not, but if it is, I want to be your servant, please take me and use me if You're real."

He followed with a sinner's prayer asking for forgiveness through the blood shed by Jesus on the cross in his behalf. Then he asked God to open up His Word to him.

With a trembling excitement, he opened the Bible and started to read. The bell on the door jingled as it squeaked open. As he looked up, customers had lined up three-deep. Confusion roared through his mind. Where could they have all come from at once?

The first customer pounded for attention, demanding that he was in a hurry and needed to taken care of at once. The young man, excused himself and ran to the bathroom, and shut the door. A quick prayer was sent up, "Father, I want to read Your Word and hear Your voice, help me!"

Running back out, he apologized and asked the man in line what he could do for him. Suddenly the man began feeling his pockets, realized that he was missing something and shouted, "I'll be right back," and ran out the door.

The second person in line asked for a copy of a form and then quickly disappeared. Third only wanted to ask a question and then left in turn. As suddenly as the office had filled it emptied.

He gave a prayer of thanks and again opened the Bible. This time it was like conversing with an old friend. He could almost hear a voice, calmly reading and explaining the words that he been so obscure only hours before. As he looked around, the world even looked different. The light brighter, the air clearer, the young man felt full inside, filled with a new life and one that was changed more than ever would have guessed.