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INTRODUCTION

Greetings, friends. Today we are going on a journey. Where it will lead is hard to tell, because I am simply going to sit down and tell you a bit of my life's story. I don't really have a clear outline. I suppose that is because my life has not been structured as a clear outline. It was simply lived. I wonder if it is acceptable to tell a story, or if we must force life into clear outlines. I am not sure. Why don't we try it and find out?

I am not going to tell my whole life's story in this book. Instead I want to tell you about one of the central lessons I have learned as I have lived 23 years as a Christian, that of living the "replaced life," or allowing Christ to live His life through me, rather than living myself. I lived as a Christian for twelve years before I discovered this truth. During that time, it was "I" living. Don't be confused and think I was a non-Christian simply doing religious works. No, I had given my life to Jesus at age 15. I had asked Him to be my Lord and Savior, and cleanse me with His shed blood. I was trying as hard as I could to live the Christian life and be pleasing to Him.

For instance, the Bible told me to love my enemies, so

I tried as hard as I could (with Christ's help) to do so. I never could quite seem to do it well enough, try and pray as hard as I knew how. It made no difference which biblical command I was trying to obey, I faced the same struggle and the same partial successes and partial failures. It didn't seem that Christianity was **all that supernatural**. I tried as hard as I could and asked God to help me and together we got as far as we got, and that was about it. I couldn't say that I loved my enemies, but I certainly tried.

Then revelation began to pour into my heart. I discovered that "I" no longer lived. I had been crucified and Christ lived! It seemed so hard to accept because when I looked in the mirror, the image I saw certainly looked like me! It took most of a year for the revelation to saturate my heart that I was only a vessel that held Another; that I was a container of the life of Christ; that I was a branch grafted into a Vine. You see, I had grown up thinking that "I" lived, but that was an illusion. Actually, satan, the spirit of this world, had dominion over me. However, since I was not insightful enough to see that, I had grown up believing the illusion that "I" was in control. Now that I was a Christian, I still thought that "I" lived but now Christ was coming alongside me, assisting me in the life I was living.

But again, this was an illusion, because Christ was not only coming alongside to assist me, He was actually going to **be my Life**. "I" was not going to live anymore. I was going to be lost in Him. So many mumble jumble words! It sounded like nice religious jargon. However, it had very little meaning to my life. I looked in the mirror. I saw who was there. It was I, Mark W. Virkler. It was not Jesus. Therefore, all these nice religious platitudes were

simply that: religious platitudes. They were not revelation knowledge burning within my heart, transforming my life. They were not experiences. They were trite sayings that did not appear particularly relevant to my walk as a twentieth century Christian.

Then God burned them home. He shone His light upon these confusing, almost meaningless words, and transformed my way of living within. I became supernaturally empowered to live far beyond my own abilities by living out of the life flow within me. I no longer had any limits but began experiencing the limitless power and ability of Almighty God pouring forth through my heart. I became **naturally supernatural!** Christianity took on awesome new prospects. It became much more real than it had ever been before. When I reread the New Testament, it was a new Book. I was seeing it with open eyes for the first time, and I could not believe what I was reading.

This book tells the story of how this revelation broke into my life. It is the story of one who thought he lived, and how God showed him that he had been crucified with Christ, and now Christ lived. It is a story that goes beyond religious platitudes and words, and finds reality in the Person of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the story of living the replaced life. It is the story of how to begin living naturally in the supernatural. It is testimony to the fact that we as the Church of Jesus Christ are **fused to Glory**.

May you, too, be transformed as you read.

How to Use This Book

This book includes thought and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. I recommend that whenever pos-

sible, you study this book with a group that meets together weekly to cover a chapter or two. These groups could be Sunday School classes, home cell groups, women's or men's groups, Bible school classes, Sunday or Wednesday evening services. It could even be a series a pastor preaches through on Sunday mornings. Assign the chapters to be read during the week and come together prepared to discuss the application of the truths of the chapters to your lives. The questions should promote a lively discussion when you gather. You will want to develop a companion notebook to keep with you while you study. Here you will write your journaled answers to the questions, any questions you have, and your assigned personal journaling.

I recommend that the group leader introduce the evening by reviewing the key points indicated at the end of the assigned chapter. He may want to emphasize a point that was especially significant to him. He could then open it up for others to share concepts that were revelation for them. From there you could discuss the questions as a group.

I pray that the group may intensify and quicken your learning experience, as your heart witnesses others walking the same path of deepened spiritual encounter. Blessings as you travel!

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THE WRETCHED MAN SYNDROME

I lay in bed, tossing and turning, not able to fall asleep. What if I died tonight? Would I go to heaven? No, I knew I wouldn't. I had attended my conservative Baptist church long enough to know that only those who had accepted Jesus into their hearts would make it to heaven. And I hadn't done that. No, I still wanted to go "my way." To give it all up for "His way" seemed just too much to ask. So I had resisted, year after year, knowing that if I died, I would be headed straight to hell.

The Night God Chased Me Down

But tonight was my night. God must have singled me out and said to His angels, "Go get that boy. I have need of him." Toss and turn as much as I would, I could not drop off to sleep. One thought ran constantly through my mind: "What if the house burns down tonight? I would go

straight to hell.” I could not shake it. I am sure it is because the angel kept whispering it into my ear.

So, finally, after a couple of hours of relentless angelic pressure, I gave in, got up and went downstairs. My parents were at a church meeting, so I sat in a living room chair to make my announcement when they returned: I was giving my heart to Christ.

I was fifteen years of age when I was baptized and joined our conservative Baptist church. My repentance was thorough. My commitment was firm. Jesus was Lord of my life. I was heaven bound. Yippee! I felt the release within my spirit. I felt peace sweep over my soul. I knew I was born anew. I was a child of God.

Seeking Spiritual Growth and Sanctification

I had an immediate desire to saturate myself in the Word of God, which I did. A year later, I decided to commit my life full-time to the ministry. By age eighteen, I was enrolled at Roberts Wesleyan College near Rochester, New York, where I spent four years being trained for the pastoral ministry. I wanted to give God my all. I worked as a youth pastor for three of those years, and shortly after graduation was pastoring my own church.

Life was really starting to cook. I was preaching every Sunday, discovering from the Word of God new truths revealing how to please and serve God more effectively. Week after week I would share these with my congregation, teaching them how they could live more effectively for God. We studied holiness and righteousness, witnessing and prayer, and the need to love our enemies. I taught about giving and tithing and alms and becoming financially free.

We organized witnessing teams and went door to door. We organized early morning prayer times and set aside days for fasting. I taught about becoming pure in heart, developing self worth, the principle of meekness, and developing God's priorities. We learned about putting off sins of the tongue, becoming like Jesus, pulling down strongholds. I taught a series on Christian living in the home, and how to establish proper eating habits. I taught about the believer and the Law, how to heal depression, the beatitudes, overcoming lust and adultery. The list went on and on.

The Load Became Heavy

Then something strange happened. One of my deacons sat down with me one day in my study and said, "Mark, I don't want to hear any more sermons. I can't even do all the things I know to do now, and if I hear any more, I will just feel even more guilt about all the additional ways I am failing God." I understood his problem. I was feeling it, too. It seemed that no matter how much I did for God, it was never enough. But what could I do? I was a preacher; I needed to preach. I couldn't stop preaching just because my frail flesh could not keep all the commands of God I was discovering in the Word.

No, I must preach. But something had to change. The load had become heavy. There were so many things to do if I was going to be a good Christian, it was impossible to remember them all. And when I would discover one which I had forgotten to do, I would instantly feel guilt and condemnation. Jesus had said His yoke was easy and His burden was light, but it certainly didn't feel very easy or light to me! I remembered that when I was first saved I

had felt pretty light. However, as soon as I began to study what God expected of me, things became heavy in a hurry. Obviously, Jesus didn't understand that when you live in flesh as frail as mine, life is not as easy and light as it appeared to Him. Or was I messing up Christianity some way, making what was supposed to be easy and light very hard and difficult? I wondered.

The Wretched Man Syndrome

Not only was Christianity becoming heavy and burdensome for me because there were so many things to remember to do, I also found that when I tried to do many of the things God wanted me to do, my flesh screamed in protest: "Make me!" I said, "You *will* do this..." and immediately we entered a knock-down, drag-out battle.

Take loving my enemies, for instance. Someone would attack me in some way (not understanding, of course, my greatness, love, devotion and purity!), coming against me with gossip and slander. My flesh would rise up and say, "All right, Mr. Perfect, you think you are so hot, let me tell you a thing or two!" Then the battle would begin. Reminding myself that the law of God said I was to love my enemies, I would put a smile on my face, set my will and say, "You will love this wretch, even if it kills you." Well, it usually killed me. My flesh would fight and storm and scream and howl and have a royal fit. But since God graced me with a strong will, it would finally prevail and, on the outside at least, I would say loving, kind words. Not that my insides felt all that loving. They were mostly dead, because I told them, "You will die to that anger you feel." As a result, eventually I was very, very dead on the inside,

while on the outside I was smiling, saying loving words, and doing loving deeds. This didn't seem to be quite the way Christianity was supposed to work! As I recalled, I was supposed to feel love, joy, peace, and patience on the inside rather than simply anger and deadness.

Coming Face to Face with Will Worship

Then my wife complicated the situation even more. Patti said to me one day, "Christianity only works for those who have a strong will. It doesn't work for weak-willed people." You see, Patti's will appeared weaker than mine, and she was much more prone to giving in to doubt or depression or other negative emotions, rather than holding them inside and smashing them to bits as I was able to do. Her statement cut me to the quick. I knew that Christianity must be able to work for all, for those who had weaker wills as well as for those who were stronger.

Becoming Confused

Now I was confused, which is great, because I've learned that confusion is the first step toward revelation. Wasn't my approach to Christianity right? Could it be fundamentally flawed? I sure hoped not, because I had spent ten years as a Christian building this way. However, the end product of my life at this point seemed to be very similar to Paul's cry of frustration in Romans chapter seven.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do...Now if I do what I will not [to do], it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the

law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:15, 20-24)

That is exactly what I had come to, that same **wretched man syndrome**. At war with myself. Constantly trying to be good. Always trying to do the right thing. Feeling either inner war or inner deadness coupled with a lack of love, joy and peace. I knew there had to be more to Christianity than this. Was this the abundant life God talked about – man constantly struggling and at war internally with himself? If it is, it is rather hard to export. I could picture myself saying to a non-Christian, “You can accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and become like me, full of inner war, guilt, tension, and condemnation.” He would, of course, say, “No thanks, I have enough problems of my own.” So I stopped witnessing because my experience was not worth passing on. And I said, “God, please teach me what I am doing wrong.”

The Dawning Revelation of What Actually Happened at Salvation

God began bringing the right books, teachers, and experiences into my life and during the following months taught me seven truths which have set me free from guilt, condemnation, war, inner turmoil, and the Law. They are the following:

Truth # 1 – God Is All and In All

Truth # 2 – I Am a Vessel

Truth # 3 – I No Longer Live

Truth # 4 – Christ Is My Life

Truth # 5 – I Am Dead to the Law

Truth # 6 – I Live by the Spirit (*rhema* and vision)

Truth # 7 – I Live by Faith that God is Immanuel

In the following seven chapters we will examine what God taught me about each of the above seven truths which released the divine power of Almighty God through the fusion of His Holy Spirit to my spirit.

Review of Key Points from Chapter One

- The salvation experience brings with it a sense of peace, joy and lightness.
- Often as one begins to study the Bible and see the commands of God for his life, a sense of heaviness returns as one finds it difficult to obey all the commands he is discovering.
- Often there is an inner war as one finds his flesh struggling against his spirit in an effort to be holy.
- This results in what Paul called the “wretched man syndrome.”
- Add other ideas that were key points for you. Use your separate journal.

Think and Discuss

- Recall your own salvation experience. Take a few minutes to share it with your group. If anyone in the group has never had a salvation experience, ask if they would like to meet Jesus as their Lord and Savior. If so, lead them into salvation.
- Have you experienced the inner war and struggle discussed in this chapter? If so, share a bit of your experience with your group.
- Have you ever fallen into will worship, that is, a dependency on the strength of your will to accomplish things? Discuss this with the group. If we are not to set our will to come against sin, how are we supposed to use our will?
- Do you experience condemnation, or have you reached the place of no condemnation spoken of in Romans 8:1? If you experience condemnation in your life, what causes it? How is it possible to overcome it? By living a perfect life? What are the chances of that?
- Have you found a way out of the wretched man syndrome that Paul speaks of at the end of Romans chapter seven, or are you ensnared in the problem? If you have found a way out, describe the way in as much detail as possible to your group.
- **Journaling** – Write down this question in a separate journal: “Lord, what do You want to say to me about the truths of this chapter?” If you are unfamiliar with journaling as the author teaches it, read his book *Communion with God* or *Dialogue with God* which teaches this process in depth. (*Communion*

with God has a more left-brain, logical, outline style, while *Dialogue with God* is more right-brain and story oriented). Journaling is simply the writing out of your prayers and God's answers, as David did in the Psalms. Record what God speaks to you by way of journaling in a special book. If it is not too personal, you may want to read some of it in your small group. That will be edifying and encouraging for all who hear, as well as confirm to you that it really is the Lord speaking to you, as the others in the group affirm the quality of your journaling. Make sure to begin every journal entry with a question written at the top of your blank sheet of paper. The simple act of writing the question often is the stimulus that precipitates your openness to receiving the response. See Appendix A for a brief overview of the four keys to hearing God's voice.