

From
Sadness
to Joy

by Dotty Duke

The wife of astronaut Charlie Duke tells how God transformed her life and her marriage.

“You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance; you have taken away my sorrow and surrounded me with joy. So I will not be silent; I will sing praise to you. Lord, you are my God; I will give you thanks forever.”

Psalm 30:11-12 (TEV)

Cover photo: Earthrise from the moon,
taken by crew of Apollo 16.

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Introduction

by Charlie Duke

“In 1975, three years after my Apollo 16 moon-flight, Dotty’s and my marriage — like so many other astronauts — was headed toward the rocks of divorce. The first divorce had hit the office in 1971, a blow to the all-American image. After that a number of marriages had ended, almost like opening up the floodgates.

Outwardly our marriage looked good — we appeared to be the ideal couple. We always held hands, and when we went somewhere we fit in socially, not letting our problems surface in public. But Dotty was always complaining, “We just aren’t close any more; there’s no depth to our relationship.”

Things got so bad that Dotty was depressed much of the time. Some mornings she didn’t want to get out of bed because life looked so bleak. I was no help and so I pulled away only making matters worse. As her depression progressed, she even entertained thoughts of suicide.

But then a miracle happened. Some people came to our church to testify about God and His love. That weekend Dotty gave her life to the Lord and I watched a new life emerge as Jesus began to make her whole. Depression left, suicide thoughts departed and the peace, love and joy of Jesus came forth as a new flower budding.

What God did for her, He is able to do for you. Let Dotty's story inspire you and fill you with hope. God is able to change your life too.



Dotty and Charlie's wedding picture, June 1, 1963, Atlanta, Georgia.

From Sadness to Joy

“I’m so unhappy . . . I don’t want to live any longer . . . I want to die!” I kept repeating these words over and over in my mind, as I sat forlornly at the breakfast table still covered with dirty dishes left by Charlie and our two young sons. “Life is too painful and it doesn’t look like it’s going to get any better,” I reasoned.

Taking my life seemed like the only way to get rid of all this pain and loneliness. The thought of suicide flashed through my mind once again. Thoughts of suicide had pressed heavily on my mind more than once this past year. I sincerely believed my family would be better off having me dead than so depressed, and maybe that would make Charlie finally understand how unhappy and desperate I was.

Suicide! Why would a girl who seems to have everything — famous astronaut husband, fancy trips, two healthy boys, big house, two cars — ever think of suicide? But here I was so depressed that ending my life seemed the only answer. Life was too painful. I had difficulty getting out of bed in the morning and attending to all the things I had to do. It was not easy putting on a smile and pretending that everything was okay.

I didn't tell many people how depressed I had become — only Charlie and my father. I knew that people wouldn't understand and would think I wasn't being appreciative enough of what I had. I didn't want to feel guilty for my depression, too. My dad's response was deep concern; Charlie's was typical of the way he had been acting toward me for years — “Maybe if I ignore her, she'll stop complaining and the problems will go away and everything will be all right.” I knew he didn't know how to deal with it, but I was hurt that he didn't even seem interested in helping. One of my pleas had been for us to go to a marriage counselor, because I believed the problems in our marriage were really the major cause for this hopelessness I was feeling.

Our marital problems had been going on for a very long time, ever since we were married twelve years ago. . . .

I was so happy when we first began courting in Boston. During those months we dated, Charlie was a lieutenant in the Air Force studying for a Master's degree at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and I was working in the registrar's office at Harvard Business School. This young Air Force pilot literally swept me off my feet. Charlie was so understanding and compassionate . . . and romantic. He wanted to be with me all the time, and even nights when he would have to study he would call, and we would talk about our day and how much we missed each other.

Maybe it was because he was five years older, but I felt in him a strong arm that I could lean on, someone to protect me and take care of me. He told me over and over again how much he loved me and how special I

was. I had never felt so loved and it was wonderful. I knew I had found the Prince Charming I had been searching for. All my life, my dream had been the fairy tale “Cinderella.” The dream of one day finding my Prince Charming, who would sweep me off my feet and, professing undying love, would fulfill all my needs. We would have a perfect marriage and, as in the fairy tale, live happily ever after.

When Charlie asked me to marry him, knowing how much I needed this special love, I said, “Charlie, I’m going to put you first in my life. Will you put me first in your life?” His answer reassured me that I was truly the most important thing in his life. And so Cinderella and Prince Charming got married.

What had happened? What about “happily ever after.” Where had Prince Charming gone? My dream bubble had burst. It was no more. The only thing remaining was a wishful memory.

Our honeymoon hadn’t been great but was okay. It wasn’t quite the “romantic, deserted island with fantastic red glowing sunsets” experience I had dreamed of, but then we had a whole lifetime to look forward to. However immediately after the honeymoon, when we returned to Boston, I realized things were not okay.

I was not first in his life: his job was first.

Charlie had changed. He didn’t spend time with me as before. He didn’t talk about how much he missed me when he was at school. He didn’t linger over our candlelit dinners for two, instead he’d hurriedly eat and rush back to his room to study. Whenever he did take a free

moment from studies, he'd often pick up a newspaper or turn on the TV. "I need to relax," he would say, effectively closing me out of his presence. Consequently I felt rejected.

I knew he had to make good grades at MIT in order to graduate. I knew how important the degree was for his career. But I couldn't understand why I had slipped from first place to second or even third place. I was confused and hurt. I began to think, "Well, as soon as he graduates from MIT, things will be different. He's just worried about school." With that thought, I looked forward to school ending and going wherever the Air Force would send us next. When the orders came through that Charlie was accepted at test pilot school, Edwards Air Force Base sounded fine. "Yes, anything will be better than MIT." He was excited and I loved to travel, so California would be a new place to explore and live happily ever after.

Well, Edwards turned out to be not quite so fine. It was like leaving the frying pan and jumping in the fire. Charlie was in school studying just as hard, plus now I had to compete with something new — AIRPLANES! He loved flying. The topic of conversation was always flying. The guys were continually sharing one tale after another, and the wives either sat and listened or went to another room.

Also Edwards Air Force Base was in the middle of nowhere — desert, cactus, windstorms, hot and not much to do. I found a job substitute teaching the second grade and joined the Officers' Wives' Club and a ceramics class, but mostly I was lonely. Charlie stayed busy at school and at nights studying. I became pregnant and experi-

enced the usual nausea and tiredness, which seemed to compound my loneliness. Christmas came. It was the first Christmas spent away from my parents, and I missed them. We'd always have a big Christmas dinner with Daddy's relatives and then in the evening, another dinner with Mother's family. Christmas with only the two of us just wasn't the same.

Life wasn't working out like I thought it would.

Charlie was ecstatic at Edwards, but I was biding my time hoping the next move would take us to a better place. Maybe then Charlie would start paying more attention to me and loving me the way I wanted to be loved.

Our first son was born and I was delighted. Blond and blue-eyed with an infectious smile; we named him Charles III. Being a mother kept my days busy — washing diapers, making formula, late night feedings. Charlie was a great dad. I should have been overjoyed at his pleasure and devotion toward this new smiling life in our home, but I couldn't help wishing he would show as much enthusiasm over me. For a while Charles seemed the most important thing in Charlie's life, but then the excitement of school and jets pre-empted this latest interest.

Upon graduation from test pilot school, Charlie was asked to remain on staff as an instructor. This disappointed me. I didn't know where I wanted to go but felt any place would be better than Edwards. Every opportunity I could, I persuaded Charlie to drive us off for the weekend and explore California. I looked forward to the change in scenery and being alone with Charlie

and Charles. Surprisingly, after eighteen months I began to appreciate somewhat the open spaces, the spring wildflowers, the clear skies of spectacular sunsets and brilliant stars.

It was then that Charlie saw a notice in the **Los Angeles Times** announcing NASA was seeking more astronauts and asked me, “Dotty, what do you think about my being an astronaut?” An astronaut!?! I had never thought about it. I was proud of Charlie — He had done well in test pilot school and was an excellent pilot. What greater achievement than to become an astronaut?

In my mind I weighed what I knew about the space program. The negative was that he would be gone from home a great deal, traveling about two-thirds of the year. The positive was we’d be living in a real town, Houston, Texas — with trees and lakes and all the things I’d missed. And Houston was at least one thousand miles closer to my parents. But most of all, I hoped a new place would improve Charlie’s and my relationship. Our marriage had grown further apart at Edwards, and I was ready for a change. I thought, “Surely I can get him to love me the way I want to be loved and we can live happily ever after.”

Life as an astronaut’s wife.

Upon moving to Houston, Charlie was immediately thrown into the hectic pace required of an astronaut. He loved every minute of it and would come home with tremendous excitement of all he had seen and done. I was very happy for him. In comparison Charles’ and my life was the usual — diapers, washing, shopping, cooking. Because Charlie was rarely home, my duties

were compounded, and I felt sorry for myself.

Emotionally I was really stretched when a year after moving to Houston, I was responsible for building our new house and having our second child. Charlie was gone constantly and I knew very few people. Our new son, Tom, and two-year-old Charles received minimum attention as I rushed from duty to duty, physically and emotionally drained. Time sped on; I held on as well as I could.

Happiness continued to be elusive — not because Charlie was an astronaut and traveled a great deal, but because I didn't feel the love from him that I wanted. Whether he was gone or at home, I felt alone. His career was the most important thing in his life, and I knew it. I had put him first in my life when we married, and I continued to look to him for my fulfillment. If he was nice to me, I was happy; if he ignored me, I was sad. He didn't love me the way I wanted to be loved. When we had gotten married and the scripture was read, "They shall become one," I thought it meant I was half and he was half and together we would make one. Since we weren't together in so many ways, I felt incomplete.

Charlie seemed to be fine without me, but I felt something was missing from my life.

Of course there were the exciting times — the parties, the celebrity status, the thrills of launch and being a part of history. The wives got together once a month for coffee at the AWC (Astronaut Wives' Club) meetings. We had a lot in common and yet possibly because of the competition in the astronaut office and our desire to be individuals, we weren't as close as we could have been.

Most of my close friends were wives of NASA engineers and contractors, not astronauts.

There were of course rumors of husbands running around on their wives, but we didn't talk about that. It was understood that divorce would ruin an astronaut's chance to fly, so indiscretions were kept discreet. Every wife had to deal with the knowledge that her husband was a hero and considered prize game by good-looking women wherever he went.

Competing with the space program was impossible, so when Charlie immersed himself in his job, I tried to get involved, too. We could share that. I liked being a part of our country's heroic adventures in space — it was the patriotic thing to do. Fixing our marriage would have to wait. In 1969 Charlie was selected for the backup crew of **Apollo 13** and following that flight began training for the prime crew of **Apollo 16**. I put my efforts on hold as much as I could — like a war bride, waiting until the war is over to have her husband home again.

My responsibility as wife of a flight crew member was to make sure that my husband was taken care of in such a way that he could do the best job possible. I tried not to bother him with mundane burdens at home. Most wives cut the grass, took out the garbage, and kept the house and kids in order. That was our contribution to the U.S. effort in space.

When time came for Charlie's flight, I was really excited for him. He had worked so hard and now was going to see the fulfillment of that dedication and desire. Although I naturally had some fears, they were rationalized away by the success of previous missions. Why

shouldn't his be successful, too? I had seen Charlie flying now for ten years in many different types of aircraft. I had grown accustomed to the space missions — almost everyone living in our area worked for their success. Their confidence and Charlie's confidence became my confidence that everything would go all right. And I knew everyone in the astronaut office would give their right arm to be going, so I was proud that he had been chosen to make the flight.

My job was to see everything went well with the details of entertaining friends and relatives who came to the launch, taking care of the boys, and running a semi-organized house for the duration of the mission. There were the press interviews, overseeing my wonderful family, who would join me in Houston, welcoming a constant stream of friends and neighbors, plus intently following the space adventures of **Apollo 16**.

The boys and I traveled to Cape Kennedy for the moon launch.

We held our breath as we watched Charlie's spacecraft lift off from the pad, then returned to Houston for the remainder of the mission. There was a tense moment in lunar orbit when the space flight was almost aborted due to engine problems in the command module. Even then my greatest concern was not their personal safety, but the possibility they might not get to land on the moon. Charles and Tom stayed close to me and close to home. They were somewhat overwhelmed by all the commotion. Having their cousins visit was exciting, but all these other people and Daddy in space was difficult for them to handle.

It was a big day when Daddy came home, and we could all give him hugs and kisses. I'd never seen Charlie so filled with joy and enthusiasm. He related adventure after adventure of their space escapades and exclaimed he was ready to go again. I was ready for something else. "Now," I thought, "our family life will get back to normal and without the demands of preparing for a space mission, we can focus on each other."

For a few months we went through the ritual of parades and speaking engagements all over the United States. It was a time to receive the acclaim and recognition of a job well done and to promote future NASA programs. We had a wonderful time, but one thing Charlie said in his speeches hurt. "The best thing that ever happened to me," he exclaimed, "was my flight to the moon. It's the greatest experience of my life." I wanted marrying me to be the best thing that ever happened to him. I would work on that. Things would be different now.

But they weren't different. Charlie worked as hard as ever as backup on **Apollo 17** and following that committed himself to working on the space shuttle. He did have more time at home, but he spent that time coaching the boys, playing golf, or fishing. I'd tag along.

One day Charlie told me, "I am pulled by your demands, by the boys, by work, and pulled by what I want to do. You'll have to take your turn. The boys come before you because they are so young. You are an adult and should understand." I, who had wanted to be first in his life, was instead just an irritating part. The more I had tried to get his affection, the more he had pulled away. I had tried the sexy approach, I had tried the cry-

ing approach, I had tried the angry and nagging approach — even the sensible adult communication had gotten me nowhere. It seemed like all he wanted from me was to cook his meals, take care of the children, and stay out of his way until called upon. My life was to revolve around his needs, but my needs weren't being met.

I had worked ten years to get Charlie to love me the way I had wanted to be loved and hadn't succeeded. When I saw that I wasn't getting the love that I needed and that my life was falling apart, I thought, "I'll divorce him and find someone else. Yes, if Charlie's not my Prince Charming, I'll find the person who is." But as I considered all the upheavals of divorce, the awful possibility hit me, "What if there's no one else out there? What if there isn't anyone who will love me the way I want to be loved?" The thought was crushing. In resignation I reasoned, "Well, maybe this dream of having a perfect marriage is not going to be the answer for me and my life. I'll try to find fulfillment in something else."

Women's Lib was proclaiming that the answer to life for women was finding fulfillment in a career. It seemed to work for Charlie, maybe it would work for me. I got a wonderful job — at a travel agency in downtown Houston. Loving travel, the job was perfect. I liked everything about it, even the detail work of writing airline tickets. My boss and the others in the office were a delight to work with. One winter I accompanied a tour to England and for my greatest adventure I traveled to Africa on my own, using bonuses I had been awarded as a travel agent. "What could be better?" But it didn't bring me the love and fulfillment I was searching for . . . I was still lonely.

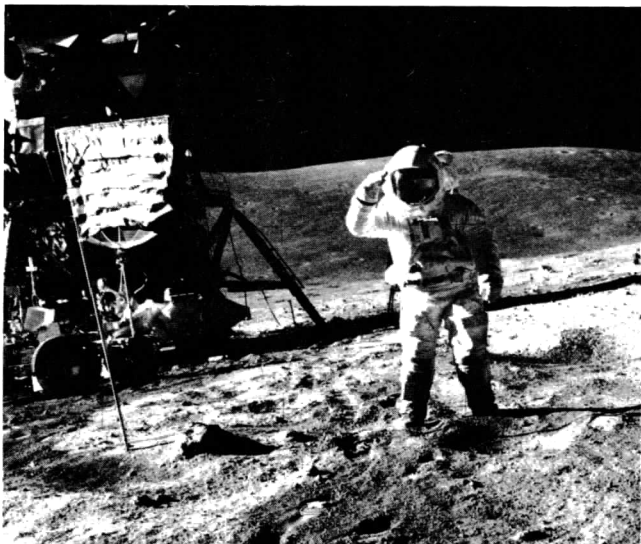
"What is the answer to life?" I asked myself.



Family portrait taken a month before Apollo 16's moonflight; Charles, 7 (left), and Tom, 5 (right).



Family anxiously watching the first moments of lift-off.



Charlie saluting US flag on the moon.



Dotty and Charlie today.

“Maybe it’s experiencing everything — climb every mountain and see what is on the other side.” I tried lots of things. I experimented with marijuana, but since I wasn’t a smoker, inhaling the drug wasn’t pleasant to me. I threw myself into the party circle. “Charlie likes to flirt with the girls, I’ll flirt with the boys.” Inwardly I was hoping he would be jealous, but instead he seemed proud that other men found me attractive and encouraged me on. I was lonelier than ever. Experiencing everything didn’t seem to be the answer.

“Maybe it’s serving the poor,” I thought. In college I had wanted to work in the Peace Corps and help in some third-world country. I decided to volunteer at the local Headstart Center and spent many enjoyable hours playing with and teaching disadvantaged kids. I tutored reading to boys at a home for run-aways and delinquents. At Thanksgiving and Christmas I organized a church outreach program of supplying baskets of toys and food to the needy and assisting a local Mexican family — finding them employment and assistant in their other personal needs. Knowing I was helping make other people’s lives better gave me great satisfaction, but it didn’t fill the emptiness in my own life.

“Maybe the answer to life is church.” So I taught Sunday school, was on our church’s lay council called the vestry, organized family picnics and retreats, and was involved with every aspect of church life. I read in **Life** magazine of a movement called the underground church — a group professing to have found a reality outside the traditional, organized church. I called one of the movement’s preachers in Houston to come speak, but his words were empty, and I felt no warmth or love in him. “Is the answer not even church? What is the

answer to life?"

Someone suggested I read a book on astrology, which I did, but it seemed too mechanical and nonpersonal and didn't appeal to me. Our church offered a course on positive thinking, and I attended a series of their meetings studying the book **I'm OK, You're OK**. That led me to other self-help books, but instead of helping me, they made me feel more and more inadequate.

Positive thinking and self-awareness weren't the answer. I knew I couldn't depend on myself to get out of this pit I was in. I wasn't the answer . . . I wasn't the truth . . . I wasn't eternal. How could I depend on myself? I needed something to depend on that was constant and faithful and had meaning. Something that was bigger than me. "Is there no answer to life?" I asked myself. "Is life just a big joke? Do we just live for seventy or eighty years and die and that's it? Is there no purpose to life?"

"Why live anymore?"

After trying to find fulfillment in so many different directions and coming to the conclusion that there was no answer, I asked myself, "Why live anymore?" Life is just one painful, lonely, empty day after day. It always has been, it always will be. Why keep on living in such pain?" The popular Broadway play title, "Stop the World, I Want to Get Off," became my plea. I even imagined the way I would put an end to my life.

It was now the fall of 1975. Charlie decided to leave the space program and begin a different career. He applied for and received a new beer distributorship in San Antonio and began to make plans for our move. While

Charlie was getting excited about this new career in the beer business, I was in turmoil over what was going to happen to me. I wanted to break free and start a new life, but there didn't seem to be any new life out there worth living. "Divorce? Suicide? Or more of the same? What should it be?"

For the past few months our church had been planning a **Faith Alive!**, a spiritual renewal weekend. I remember the night that our vestry had voted to sponsor this **Faith Alive!** As a vestry member I had argued, "Instead of spiritual renewal we need to do more social work in the community." I didn't even know what spiritual renewal meant, but it certainly didn't sound practical and real-world oriented. The time came for the weekend and being a faithful church leader, I committed myself to go. Charlie said he would, too. In fact we even offered to host one of the many couples who were traveling to our church in La Porte, as part of the **Faith Alive!** team.

The weekend program consisted of several dinners and luncheons. There was singing, and then we listened as our guests — about thirty laypersons — gave short personal stories of their faith. I had never heard a personal testimony before. It wasn't anything like the sermons I had heard preached in church. Fascinated, I listened to these people talk about the reality of God in their lives, of prayers being answered, lives being changed. Some were spectacular changes, some fairly simple, but all giving credit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I had never heard anything like this before.

"Was it true? Was God real? Was Jesus the Son of God?"

Even though I was a faithful member of my church, I had long ago decided that Jesus was not necessary in a relationship with God. Even though I said the Apostles' Creed, I didn't believe Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. Why, in college I had studied all the major religions and they all seemed the same to me. I called myself a Christian because I was born in a Christian country and was a member of a Christian church. I could have easily been a Moslem or Hindu. To me, Jesus was a good teacher and wonderful example of the way we were supposed to live, like Mohammed and Buddha. They all taught that we should love and help each other. The Golden Rule . . . wasn't that all that was important?

But these people were telling me that their relationship with God was through Jesus. They actually believed the Scripture that read, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). They believed that Jesus died for their sins and that trusting in Him they might have eternal life. I wasn't even sure there was eternal life. Actually, I wasn't even sure that God existed. There was a popular book at that time which stated, "God is dead." It said that God is only a figment of our imagination because we need a crutch, something to depend on. Since we are so far advanced and don't need Him anymore, He is dead . . . the illusion of God has died. Well, I had wondered if that was true — if God indeed is a figment of our imagination.

But these people were telling me that God is alive . . . that they know He is real . . . that they talk to Him, hear His voice, and He answers their prayers. I wasn't sure if God had ever answered my prayers. Yes, I had prayed in church the morning of Charlie's spaceflight

and had asked God to take care of him. But I had believed that the expertise of NASA, the excellent hardware built by the contractors, and Charlie, John, and Ken's training were what made it a successful flight.

The people at **Faith Alive!** were convinced God had answered their prayers. They said Jesus loved me just the way I was; I didn't have to do anything to deserve it. That He loved me so much He had died for me on the cross. All I had to do was receive it by believing and turning my life over to Him. "Could I chance it? Could I turn my life over to Someone I wasn't sure existed? Did He really love ME that much?"

They said Jesus would give meaning and purpose to my life. "Was it true? Was this the answer I had been looking for?" It seemed so risky, to take that step of faith. "Wasn't it good enough to just continue in church the way I had been? What if it wasn't true? Everything else had failed me. Would this fail me, too? Would I open the door to the closet where I had kept God and find it empty? Was it better to know He didn't exist than to continue on pretending?"

I looked at these people who had given their time to come be with us for the weekend. They had so much joy, so much love, and so much conviction in their testimonies. "Why not give it a chance? What really did I have to lose, except a last hope in an already hopeless situation."

That night, alone and kneeling by my bed, I prayed.

My prayer was, "God, I don't know if You are real;

Jesus, I don't know if You are the Son of God. But I have made a mess of my life, and if You are real, You can have my life. If You are not real, I want to die." With that prayer, I turned over the control of my life. I was now going to look to God for all the answers; I was going to depend on Him for my fulfillment. I had committed myself to finding out if God and Jesus were real.

I didn't tell anyone, not even Charlie, of my decision. The next day the only change I noticed was that now I was going to look to only one place for the answers — not to Charlie, not to work, not to self-help books, but to God. One of the team members had given me a Campus Crusade tract which explained that you were not to depend on your feelings in this new relationship with God, but you were to make the decision on fact and the feelings would follow. I hoped so, because I didn't feel any different.

I daily began to ask God to guide and assist me. I reasoned, "If God is real and He loves me, He can and will help me in every part of my life." When my first prayer was answered, I thought, "Oh, that's just a coincidence, that isn't God." Then another prayer was answered and another. "Surely, these are only coincidences." But after two months of answered prayers, I couldn't put it off as chance anymore. I KNEW God had heard me and had lovingly intervened in my life. I felt totally loved for the first time in my life.

About this same time, I had a recurring dream. In the dream I was on a train with other people. I didn't know where the train was going or who was the engineer, but I had a great peace knowing I was in the right place. After having the dream repeated several nights,

I decided to ask God if He had given me the dream, and if He had, what did it mean? Immediately the following thoughts came to my mind, "Yes, I did send you the dream. You are on a train and Jesus the engineer. No, you don't know in life where He is taking you, but you can have peace because He loves you. He loved you so much that He died for you on the cross, and He will love you always. You can trust Him and depend on Him. And the other people on the train are people who have accepted Jesus as Lord, too." I was startled!

"Was that God speaking to me?"

It all made sense. Yes, I believe God is speaking to me. He is real! He loves me and I can trust Him! Not long afterward, God spoke to me again — again in a quiet voice in thoughts which were confirmed by my heart. This time He said, "Dotty, you are born again. All your past sins are forgiven. You are beginning a **brand new life**. You don't have to look back anymore. Your past is washed away, and you are starting a new life. Now, if you want your marriage to be 'born again,' you must forgive Charlie."

FORGIVE CHARLIE! I was convicted and defensive at the same time. I knew, and Charlie knew, that I remembered well all the times he had hurt me — forgetting my birthday, criticizing me in front of my friends, putting me down, flirting with other girls — the list went on and on and was firmly established in my memory. And every now and then I would remind Charlie of them. Forgive him! Let him off! Why, he hadn't even apologized. He hadn't asked to be forgiven. He didn't even think he was wrong.

“No, God,” I answered stubbornly. “He doesn’t deserve it. I want to let him suffer for a while. I don’t want to forgive him.” This time God spoke with powerful, yet loving authority, “Dotty, I thought you had made me your Lord. Being your Lord means you do what I want you to do, not what you want to do.” I was reminded of the Scripture, “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). At that moment my understanding of lordship became clear — to do what God wanted me to do, not what I wanted to do.

I couldn’t argue anymore, so my next question to God was, “But how can I forgive him? You want me to forgive him the same way You have forgiven me. That means wash the slate clean, forgive and forget. There’s no way I can do that.” I even reminded the Lord of what I had learned from books on psychology — that if you’ve been hurt, you’ll never get over it. You’ll carry the memories and wounds the rest of your life. All you can do is learn to cope, not forgive and forget. “I can’t forgive him the way You’ve forgiven me, Lord,” I said.

The Lord’s kind words assured me, “You just agree to forgive him and I’ll help you.” And help me He did. Every time I would be reminded of something Charlie had done in the past, the Lord would say, “You can’t think about that anymore. Remember you’ve forgiven him, so it’s been erased. It’s not there.” Instantly I would imagine a big blackboard like we had in school when I was a young child — erased and then washed clean with a wet rag, leaving not a hint of chalk. So in obedience to the Lord, I immediately would remove the thought from my mind.

For two months over and over again, each time I was tempted to remember the past hurts, the Lord encouraged me by repeating these words, and I would cast the thoughts out of my mind. A wonderful healing took place — as the Lord truly removed the resentment and unforgiveness in my heart, along with erasing the memories and hurts that had been there for over twelve years. I experienced a real freedom and understood Jesus' reference to the words of Isaiah, "He has sent me . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives" (Luke 4:18).

The Lord continued freeing me.

He also freed me from my loneliness. So often in my life I had felt lonely and unloved, not from my parents, but from friends and from Charlie. But now I knew God loved me and was with me and would never leave me. To know that the most important One in the whole world — in the whole universe — cared for me and loved me, reassured me when I felt unloved by Charlie. I sensed the Lord's presence and learned to recognize His voice, not an audible voice, but words lovingly put in my thoughts which my heart and the Bible assured me were from God.

I no longer wanted to commit suicide; I had given my life to the Lord, therefore my death was in His hands. He would determine my time to go, not me. And I no longer wanted to divorce Charlie. God showed me that He had given me Charlie to be my husband; if Charlie wanted to leave me, that was up to him, but I was not to divorce him.

When I was at **Faith Alive** I had been told by one of the people there that making Jesus Lord of my life

would help my marriage. This had encouraged my decision since I still dreamed of a Cinderella marriage. But soon after I had made my commitment to God I sensed the Lord speaking to me that turning my life over to Him was the right thing for **me** — that I needed God in order to make **my** life whole — and that I should turn my marriage and whether it would ever change over to God. What I had done was make an idol of wanting a perfect marriage and so it was necessary to let go of that in order to make Jesus and following Him truly foremost in my life.

I sensed something like a death within my heart when I let go and released my long held dream of a perfect marriage to the Lord. And with that death I felt new life and freedom. Freedom to become who God wanted me to be, not who I thought Charlie or anyone else wanted me to be. Freedom that trusting God and doing His will was to be the only focus of my being, trusting Him to take care of everything else. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). But dreams die hard, and for awhile I continued to hope that Charlie and our marriage would change.

About this time we moved to a small town outside San Antonio, and Charlie began work on his beer distributorship. I was really hopeful that our life would be better now and that Charlie would have more time for me and the children. But instead of things getting better, things got worse. He left before dawn every morning and returned late every evening.

Faith Alive! had not changed Charlie. He treated me the same way, plus now he was obsessed with mak-

ing a lot of money. He had gone to every church meeting that weekend, but his mind had been preoccupied with his new business venture. All he could think about was the excitement of putting this business together and all the money he would make. When I complained to the Lord, He spoke to my heart saying, “Dotty, I love you and I want what is best for you. The way Charlie is now is what is best for you.”

I was stunned! “What do you mean, Lord, that the way Charlie is now is what is best for me? I know what is best for me,” I argued. “In fact, I have a long mental list of characteristics that I believe a good husband should have and Charlie doesn’t have them. He’s the reason I get depressed and unhappy. He makes me that way.” The Lord just continued to repeat the same words over and over in my mind, “I love you, Dotty, and I want what is best for you. The way Charlie is now is what is best for you.” Finally I submitted and asked, “Well, then, Lord, what do you want me to do?”

“Love Charlie,” was the firm reply. “Don’t try to change him; don’t try to save him; I am the Savior. Just love him.” And with those words I knew the Lord meant for me to love Charlie the way Jesus loves me — unconditionally. I then saw that I had been loving Charlie conditionally — loving him so he would love me back. Maybe I was loving him 75 percent so I could receive 25 percent, but God was calling me to love him the full 100 percent whether he loved me back or not. My prayer began to be, “Lord, help me love Charlie.”

When I prayed for the Lord to help me love Charlie unconditionally and accept him the way he was, God immediately started revealing to me little things I could

do to show my love to Charlie. I would bake his favorite pie and then not complain when he wanted to play golf. As I did these acts of love through obedience to God, (not because I felt like showing love to Charlie), the Lord began to change my heart and fill me with His love for my husband.

A love that had truly been dead was becoming re-kindled.

It was later that I understood that “the way Charlie was then” was what was best for me. The Lord wanted to change me. He needed to teach me unconditional love and what better way to teach me than to put someone next to me who was difficult to love. I could easily love someone who loved me, but Jesus wanted me to learn that by His Holy Spirit working through me, it was possible to love someone unconditionally, whether or not they loved me in return. I praise the Lord for teaching me that truth.

“But Lord, I need love and Charlie is not loving me.” Whenever I complained to the Lord about my need for love and Charlie’s lack of love for me, the Lord would remind me, “Dotty, I have enough love for you with plenty left over. I have all the love you need. Look to me for love. Look to me for all your needs.” I then realized I had been looking for my happiness and fulfillment in Charlie and in our marriage. By putting Charlie first in my life, I had made him my “god” and had put a burden on him that was impossible for him to carry. No one is perfect, so of course he disappointed me. Only Jesus is perfect and He will never disappoint me. He is my constant friend and companion, faithful in His love and encouragement.

There were days when the Lord and I would have a wonderful time of peace and love together, but then when Charlie would come home from work, he would say something negative to me and all my peace and love would leave. I knew the Lord wanted me to have peace and not depression; I knew God wanted me to love Charlie, but how could I have peace and love when Charlie's actions and words continued to hurt. God answered me through a counselor who told me, "No one can make you depressed. Charlie can't force you to be depressed; he doesn't have a gun to your head, does he? You are choosing to be depressed."

I didn't want to hear those words and thought that's crazy; of course Charlie makes me depressed. But later I began to think and pray about what he had said. Jesus didn't want me to be depressed. Did I really have the freedom and power to choose peace and love instead of depression? Could I choose the way I react to others? God assured me I could and He began to show me how to be led by His Spirit and to not allow myself to be controlled by the way others treat me or by negative circumstances. He taught me how to pray for His protective shield of love and peace to surround me and fill me, so that whenever Charlie put me down I could respond in love and not in anger or depression. In order to do this it was necessary for me to let go of self pity and blaming others for my hurt and depression, but the gain was a heart free in the Spirit and full of love and peace.

Over the following months I tried to let God's love flow through me to Charlie. Sometimes I failed and had to turn to the Lord for forgiveness, but gradually I learned how to let go and let God have control. Two and one half years after I had accepted the Lord, Charlie

was invited to attend a Bible study. At this Bible study he was challenged by the claims of Jesus Christ and realized Jesus truly is the Son of God. He became born again when he received Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

Now our marriage is born again and dedicated to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is first in our lives and first in our marriage. Of course our marriage is not perfect, because we are still imperfect people, but we know to Whom to turn when we have problems. We join hands and pray together, seeking God's will for our lives.

The Lord has brought great joy and fulfillment to my life. I know I am complete in Him. Even if Charlie had never accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, I know my life is complete in Jesus. He is all I need.

I praise God for all He has done in my life. He has given me new life and a new marriage. He is the resurrection and life — creating out of ashes something wonderful and beautiful. Praise His Holy name. All my life I had been looking for my Prince Charming. I have found Someone better than a prince; I have found a king — His name is Jesus, King of kings.

“You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance; you have taken away my sorrow and surrounded me with joy. So I will not be silent; I will sing praise to you. Lord, you are my God; I will give you thanks forever.”

Psalm 30:11-12 (TEV)

I invite you to receive Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior.

Dear God:

Thank you for loving me so much that You sent your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins in order that I might be forgiven and have new life.

I ask Jesus to come into my heart now — to be my Lord and Savior. Forgive me of all my sins and through Your Holy Spirit help me to become the person that You want me to be.

Thank you that I am now born again and a child of God, and that I have eternal life through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

As a new child of God, I encourage you to tell someone, to read your Bible and pray, and to attend a Christian fellowship.

God bless you,

Dotty Duke