

LIFE SAVORS



JAMES STUART BELL
JEANETTE GARDNER LITTLETON

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Life Savors

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Dedication

To Wyatt James Ritchie,
first grandson of a new generation
on life's journey with Jesus

—James Stuart Bell

To the Advisory Board of the Heart of America Christian Writers Network (www.HACWN.org): Sally Danley, Sally Jadlow, Ardy Kolb, Mark Littleton, Patricia Mitchell, Karen Morerod, Phyllis Farringer, and Teresa Vining. These people give constantly to help writers like the ones in this book bless others.

—Jeanette Gardner Littleton

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INTRODUCTION

Life is full of moments to savor—

Restful relaxation with favorite friends . . .

Sights, sounds, and scents of a sweet spring day . . .

The tender touch of someone we truly love.

Such moments bring us hope and peace as we enjoy them with unhurried appreciation. When we take delight in the people and pleasures lacing our days together, we learn to live more fully.

The Christian walk is a savor-full life.

In fact, although the Bible is a user's guide to life, it's not just full of directives and diatribes. Instead, it also includes hundreds of little pictures of people savoring life—from the Old Testament stories of feasts and families and individuals who discovered God's strength, power, and joy as they served him and one another . . . to the portions of Scripture that point out the magnificence of our Father's creation . . . to the snapshots of Jesus laughing, living with, and loving people just like us.

Through these ways and more, the Bible gives us bite-sized pieces of pleasure.

And that's the inspiration for *Life Savors*.

Through this book, we hope that you'll learn to savor

life a little more as forty new friends recount the colorful moments, the challenges, and the watershed events that have added flavor to their lives.

As you read these pages, taste and see that the Lord is good. He's been good in others' lives, and he will bring moments to savor into your life, too.



THE FRIEND AT THE CAFÉ

“You are one *tart!*” I exclaimed, grabbing my friend by the shoulder.

We’d planned to meet at our favorite café at 8 A.M. that morning, but she’d called me, canceling. However, around 1:30 P.M., I felt “impressed” to visit the café.

So there I was, later the same day, sauntering into our mutual stomping ground just because I had an “impression.” The place was pretty empty after the lunch rush. And that’s when I saw my friend, with her back to me. Her blonde wavy hair rested on the blue T-shirt I’d given her. She was eating her usual meal.

Well, I never! I thought. *She canceled because she wasn’t coming to town today, but there she is! I’m really going to give her a hard time.*

That’s when I marched over, grabbed her shoulder, and said, “You are one *tart!*”

The face turned to me; it had changed drastically. Confusion washed over it—but nothing compared to the confusion on mine.

“Oh! I’m so sorry,” I twittered nervously, as I looked into a stranger’s face. What else was I supposed to do in such a situation? Not only had I accosted the poor woman, I had called her a *tart*.

“I . . . I thought you were a friend who stood me up for breakfast this morning,” I stuttered. I had to admit it wasn’t the first time I’d done something so embarrassing in public. At times I’ve even conversed with perfect strangers, thinking I knew them. You’d think I’d learn to quit while I’m behind, but no, I keep going! I’ve even tried to convince them they really were who I thought they were.

Now this woman’s blue eyes sparkled, and she laughed. Relief flooded over me. I apologized again and went to the next booth to recover all the equilibrium I’d lost.

Between giggles of embarrassment, I heard an inner voice whisper, *Eileen, you need to go and talk to this woman.*

No, I argued. How can I do that after making a complete idiot of myself?

The voice persisted and resisted my excuses. By the time I’d devoured the last of my potatoes, it had become one deafening, almighty shout.

“All right, God! All right!” I heard myself say aloud (another of my embarrassing quirks).

Just then the assailed woman stood to leave. I jumped up and offered my hand.

“I’m so sorry. My name is Eileen, and I feel impressed to talk to you.”

She grabbed my hand and squeezed it. “My name is Shelly. This is so very strange.”

What an understatement. I invited her to sit.

“Look,” I spluttered, “I’m embarrassed about the ‘tart’ bit. I take it you’ve never been called that before?”

Her laughter bubbled. “No, I haven’t, but I think it’s hilarious. You’ve cheered me up no end.”

“It’s like this, you see,” I started. “I have five sisters, and

in Ireland, where I'm from, my sisters and I use the word *tart* to denote a sort of cheeky, fun person."

"Oh! I see."

"Whenever my sisters and I meet each other or talk on the phone, we say, 'Hello, tart.' Since I am the oldest, my sisters often respond, 'Hello, bigger tart.' I do the same thing with my close friends."

Shelly continued laughing. "I think this is just too funny."

"Yes, but I want you to know I don't usually go around doing this kind of thing."

I had the decency to correct myself. "Well, actually, yes I do. Stupid things like this are part of my regular routine."

"Join the club."

I was embarrassed to tell her about the compelling voice I'd heard, instructing me to speak with her. *What if she doesn't even believe in God?* I reasoned. *She might think I am a complete idiot.*

God won. I obeyed his prompting and took the risk.

"I sensed God telling me to talk to you," I blurted, "but I felt like a moron after accosting you like that."

She started to cry.

"Oh no! I haven't done it again, have I?"

"Eileen," she said, touching my hand, "God's taking such good care of me."

She then told me she had come to our town to make arrangements to live nearer her sons.

"You wouldn't believe the last five years of my life." Tears welled again as she paused.

"Shelly, I'm here. I'm listening. God is with us . . . we couldn't have planned this ourselves. Tell me."

“I lost my fifteen-year-old son to an alcohol-related suicide.” She gasped for breath.

“I’m so very sorry, Shelly,” I whispered, taking her hand in mine.

“His name was Blake. He’d never touched alcohol, but this time he and three school friends went out and shared a large bottle of whiskey.”

We let the silence embrace us and reach into our souls.

“His friend Toby went into a coma—alcohol poisoning,” she continued. “They took him to the hospital and placed him on life support. When Blake came home, my husband told him to go to his room and wait. My husband went to Toby’s house to watch the younger children so Toby’s parents could stay at the hospital. They didn’t expect Toby to pull through.”

A long, poignant pause followed.

“I came home from work and found Blake dead. He had taken the gun from a locked cabinet and shot himself in the head.”

Our hands tightened.

“He’d never been depressed, was a great kid, had never gotten into trouble. There just weren’t any signs. None. It was just the stupid alcohol.”

“How’d you survive something like that, Shelly?” I asked.

“With great difficulty. God was with me. I was so mad at him for a *long* time, but he got me through it. I wouldn’t have survived if I hadn’t felt him near me every step of the way.”

The waitress filled our cups without comment as if sensing the conversation and depth of the exchange.

“I still get angry with God at times, but I’m working on getting over it.”

She sipped her coffee, and I watched her move once more to that silent soul place where memories cease to need words.

“My husband was Blake’s stepfather. They loved each other and did everything together. He blamed himself for not being there to protect Blake. He couldn’t forgive himself, you see. He kept repeating, ‘If I’d been here, he wouldn’t have died.’ He became helpless.”

“That’s desperate, Shelly.” I was too moved to say anything stupid.

“It got worse, Eileen. He decided life wasn’t worth living without Blake. He had severe physical challenges, so he took to bed and started dying right in front of me. Part of me felt abandoned. I needed him to be there for me, and he wasn’t. I was his caregiver until he died.”

Her pain was palpable.

“I lost two of the men in my life because of alcohol. Neither of them drank. Until that night.”

“I’m so sorry, Shelly. I can’t imagine such pain.”

“To make matters worse, his family abandoned me. I haven’t seen them since the funeral.”

She cried softly; I squeezed her hand.

“I had been very close to his daughters. They thought their father had left a lot of money and that I kept it for myself. He didn’t. He had run up debts, remortgaged the house, and didn’t have insurance.”

She let that sink in. “I had to start all over again. At fifty-two, I was back to square one. The hardest part,” she whispered, “was the way his family treated me.”

Silence enveloped us.

“Shelly, how *did* you survive all this?”

“God’s grace,” she whispered. “God’s grace.”

She wiped her eyes and looked at me. "Eileen, I had three choices. I could lie down and die. Dying seemed an easier option than living. Have you ever felt like that?"

I simply nodded.

"I could choose to blame God and abandon my faith. Or I could trust God and make a new beginning. That's what I did. I retrained in banking and finance. I started over. I'm making plans to move here."

"Wow! You're amazing. Here you were, having a peaceful meal, and I come in and call you a tart!"

Her laughter gurgled. "That's just what I needed. I believe God put you in my path. You're my kind of woman."

We talked more, then exchanged e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

"When you move here, we'll start a Tarts' Breakfast Club and you can meet my 'sister tart.'"

"Count me in. I feel better already."

She shifted gears. "I'm scared. Starting over at fifty-two is not easy."

"I know, Shelly, I know," I said. "I started over at fifty, too. I changed careers after twenty-five years. Then I married for the first time and moved here from London."

"You didn't marry until you were fifty? That's hard to believe."

I agreed.

"You know, Shelly, it's been an awesome and challenging journey. God has really turned my life upside down, and I've learned to trust him at a totally new level."

"What do you mean?" she queried.

"Well, not too long ago, I unexpectedly lost my job in a church. I was shocked when I realized I'd never really trusted

God to take care of me financially. I was always able to take care of things myself.”

“Same here,” she said. “That’s it—the scariest part for me is the financial one.”

“God looked after me in incredible ways. I’m still being surprised. I’m learning to open closed-off areas in my heart. I’ve learned about forgiving myself and others.”

“Yes, I feel I’ve had emotional bypass surgery,” she acknowledged. “I’ve closed parts of my heart too. I know I need to work on forgiveness and releasing resentment. I’m struggling to get there.”

“You’re doing great, Shelly. Look what you’ve accomplished. You’ve survived when others would be crushed.”

God, please tell me what else I need to say, I prayed silently. “Maybe you could ask God to help you get to the place where you would be willing and able to start the journey of forgiveness.”

“That sounds good. I can take baby steps to get there. God will see me through it.”

“He has. He will.”

The tables and chairs around us were stacked; the café was closing. Shelly and I hugged and promised to keep in touch.

God has a great sense of humor and can even use a bungler like me for his purposes. I’m slow on the uptake. But I learned, once again, to heed his voice, get over my own embarrassment, and reach out to a stranger who was simply a friend I had yet to meet.

—Eileen Roddy-Phillips

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JAMES STUART BELL

James Stuart Bell is the owner of Whitestone Communications, a literary development agency. He consults with numerous publishers, represents various authors, and provides writing and editing services. He has previously served as executive editor at Moody Press, director of religious publishing at Doubleday, and publisher at Bridge Publishing. He coauthored the best-selling *Complete Idiot's Guide to the Bible* and numerous other Christian guides in that section for the Penguin Group. He has also contributed numerous Christian volumes to the best-selling Cup of Comfort series by Adams Media.

JEANETTE GARDNER LITTLETON

Jeanette Gardner Littleton, the author of about a dozen books including *When Your Teen Goes Astray: Help and Hope from Parents Who've Been There*, has thirty years' experience in the writing and editing fields. She has been on the editorial staff of eight publications, including *Moody Magazine*, and has written several thousand articles. A freelance writer and editor, she is content editor/consultant for several Christian publications, is a series editor for Barbour, and edits for other book publishers. Jeanette and her husband, Mark, share a passion for encouraging and equipping Christian writers as co-directors of Heart of America Christian Writers Network.