



SIGNS OF
GOD ALONG
THE WAY

— + —

WALKING

REAL-LIFE STORIES FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *END OF THE SPEAR*

HIS TRAIL

— + —

STEVE SAINT
AND GINNY SAINT



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Walking His Trail: Signs of God along the Way

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The author has used a mixture of orthographies in spelling Waodani names and words in order to most accurately reflect Waodani pronunciations for English-speaking readers.

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Ginny and I dedicate this little book to our parents
who started us walking His trail with their human
and fallible but believable example.

Steve



CONTENTS

8. **PLAN A. B. OR C** P.081
7. **TIMBUKTU—
TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH** P.073
6. **BUSINESS AS UN-USUAL** P.063
5. **JUST IN TIME** P.053
4. **OUR CASTLE ON GRINNELL** P.037
GINNY'S STORY
3. **SILK PURSES** P.029
2. **OUT OF THE SKY** P.017
1. **MIRACLE WIFE** P.001
- INTRODUCTION: SAND CASTLES** P.XI
- AUTHOR'S NOTE** P.IX

9. **WIDOWS' STORIES** P.091

10. **BLESSED CATASTROPHE** P.115
GINNY'S STORY

11. **END OF THE SPEAR** P.135

12. **I WONDERED IF I WOULD EVER SEE
THAT LITTLE PLANE AGAIN** P.147

13. **SAND CASTLE
UNDER CONSTRUCTION** P.163

14. **N-NUMBER** P.179

15. **THOSE SAME HANDS** P.189

16. **A UNITED NATIONS HIT** P.199

17. **HE PADDED MY PAIN** P.211
GINNY'S STORY

EPILOGUE: **PILES OF STONE** P.223

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS P.231

NOTES P.233

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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“Stevie-boy, your daddy is never going to get to come home and live with us again.” Mom had called me into her bedroom to give me this terrible, mind-numbing information. My dad, Nate Saint, and four friends, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, and Roger Youderian, had just been brutally speared to death by warriors from a Stone Age tribe they were trying to befriend and protect. I was only a little boy. My dad was my hero. And this news was devastating. But there were chapters to come in my life that were as wonderful as that early chapter was excruciating.

I now know all the members of the attack party that killed dad and his friends. I have lived with them. They have loved me and cared for me and my wife and children and grandchildren. The very same people who killed my family have become family to me.

God intervenes in people's lives all the time. But we seldom document these special, faith-building events. I think we should write them down so we will remember them and can pass them on. Why don't I go first?

INTRODUCTION: SAND CASTLES

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“It takes faith to believe that the world as we see it today is the product of evolution, but there *is* some evidence on which to base that faith. For instance, X-rays of a seal’s flippers show that each flipper has five longitudinal bones, very much like the bones in an ape or human hand. Now doesn’t that make you wonder if they couldn’t have ascended from the same ancestral origin? Why else would the bones in a seal’s flipper resemble those in a primate’s hand?”

+

The twenty or so teenagers in the room sat perfectly still. A dead silence permeated the room. Then on inspiration, someone blurted out, “Yes, but the similarity could just as likely show that both people and seals are created by the same Creator who used similar designs for both.”

That was exactly the answer I was looking for. Unfortunately, it was my wife, Ginny, who came up with it. I wasn’t sure that the teenagers had yet grasped the point I had been trying to make, which was that reasonable and educated people sit on both sides of the table when it comes to the question of God’s existence and His role in the universe.

+

So I continued. “There is evidence that can be used to support the theory of evolution. There is also evidence that indicates that this world is the handiwork of an intelligent Creator. Both sides in this debate prefer to believe that the other side consists only of people who are incapable of intelligent thought.”

Most of the young people in the group that Wednesday

night were from evangelical Christian backgrounds. They were a little surprised and uncomfortable when I mentioned that there is some evidence to support evolution. They were totally unprepared, however, for what happened next.

+ Pablo, our recently arrived exchange student from Spain, blurted out with obvious conviction in his voice and an intense expression on his face: “But there is no evidence for God.”

It was clear that just as the majority of the group had been taught to think of evolution as an untenable theory, Pablo had been taught that there was no tangible evidence to suggest the existence of God.

After the meeting, Pablo was waiting to talk. It soon became apparent that although this highly intelligent young man had been led to believe that God’s existence was simply the fabrication of human imagination, he was not totally opposed to the concept of God. He simply saw no confirming evidence.

+ As we debated the existence of God, I searched for a mutually agreeable starting point. I had once heard a story about a man who claimed he was dead. His family and friends tried to convince him that he was not dead, but he remained convinced he was. Finally a psychologist was called in to help. He questioned the deluded “dead” man until the two of them found a characteristic of dead people they both agreed upon. They agreed that dead people don’t bleed. As soon as they had established this point, the psychologist produced a needle and pricked the patient. As a spot of blood began to grow on the man’s arm, the psychologist asked, “Now what do you think about being dead?” The man answered, “Well, what do you know—dead people *do* bleed.”

I was looking for a point of mutual agreement from which

INTRODUCTION: SAND CASTLES

to start a sincere conversation with Pablo. As we were debating, a picture came to mind of a recent trip we had taken with Pablo to Daytona Beach. While we were there, we had seen some very elaborate sand castles.

“Pablo, let’s suppose you are stranded like Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island. Desperate for company, you search the small island repeatedly, looking for another human. Finally, after exhaustively searching the entire island, you resign yourself to the fact that you are totally and completely alone. Then one morning you walk down to the ocean, and there on the beach you find a finely detailed and elaborate sand castle. Now what would you believe? Would you prefer to believe that some rogue wave from the last receding tide created the castle, or would you decide that in spite of your belief to the contrary, there must be other intelligent life on the island?”

Pablo looked as though he felt trapped, but he didn’t hesitate long. “I would have to believe that someone else was on the island,” he responded. “Waves don’t make sand castles; people do.” Then with an intense expression that hinted at defiance but spoke clearly of a deep-seated yearning I have often felt myself, he demanded, “But where are *life’s* sand castles? Where are the signs of God along the way?”

Pablo’s demand is a fair one. God is only significant to us if He intervenes in our lives!

I set out to establish intellectual evidence of God’s existence for Pablo. But Pablo did not respond to intellectual arguments. He wanted to hear that I had actually experienced God. He wanted me to show him the signs of God’s personal intervention in my life and the lives of people I knew.

WALKING HIS TRAIL

+ Over the course of the next few weeks, I had the opportunity to tell Pablo of some of the sand castles God has built along my life's shoreline. Before he left, Ginny and I took Pablo and our kids over to New Smyrna Beach for a few days. On our first night there, we all went for a walk along the nearly deserted beach. As we returned to our condominium, the sun was just a rosy glow in the western sky. We nearly walked over it before we saw it—but there on the beach was an intricately detailed sand structure: moat, tower, castle, and bridge. I glanced at Pablo just as he looked over at me.

Thanks to Pablo's challenge, I decided to document some of the signs of God's intervention in my life as I have been walking His trail. The tides of time have already erased many of them from my mind, but on the following pages you'll see that some remain strong and clear. I'm sharing them in the hope that they will encourage and stimulate you to recognize and document your own sand castles for those who come after you.

+ Your story is the greatest legacy you will leave to your friends. It's the longest-lasting inheritance you will leave to your heirs. So watch for signs of God's intervention in your life, and record those stories for your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren as you walk God's trail.

Ginny and I hope that our story will motivate you to notice God's signs in your own life, and pass them on.

OUT OF THE SKY

MIRACLE WIFE ▲

SAND CASTLES

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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The old bus was in bedlam as thirty-two young men and women tried to shout everyone else. On one side of the road was a vertical wall of rock. On the other side, a sheer drop-off. Excitement and adventure were in the air as we careened around hair-pin turns. The road was little more than a notch cut out of the mountainside as we wound our way out of the Andes Mountains to the jungles below.

+

But mingled with the excitement was also a little fear. Visions of snakes and monster spiders played just beneath the surface as each person sought reassurance from the others. I was the tour leader for this musical group and the only one with any jungle experience. It was up to me to either ease everyone's fears or fuel the fires of apprehension.

"What kinds of animals will we see?" someone yelled from the back. "Are there any camels?"

This was too good to pass up. "Sure," I yelled back.

“Amazonian camels, with webbed feet for swimming in jungle rivers and green spots for camouflage.” The bus roared with laughter, and soon everyone began to ride the joke. Every question of “What’s that?” was met with a chorus of “It’s a camel!”

+

Our destination was Puyo, a little one-street frontier town on the edge of the jungle. Once there, we had just enough time to unpack the equipment and walk to the auditorium before the group was scheduled to perform a musical concert.

As we made our way down the dirt “main street,” someone tried the gag one more time: “Hey, look, a camel!” Without thinking, I glanced over at the pasture where he was pointing. Evening shadows were playing tricks on us, and an old horse on the far end of the pasture *did* look almost like a camel.

Just as I was about to make a joke about being duped by an old nag standing in front of a giant anthill, the animal stood up. I had never seen a camel outside of a zoo, but I knew one when I saw it, and I was sure enough seeing one now.

+

“No camels, huh? What do you call that?” Everyone was kidding *me* now! I didn’t know how that desert buggy ended up in the Amazon rain forest, but I knew I was going to take a lot of ribbing on this one—especially, I hoped, from Virginia, one of the older girls in the group whose beautiful eyes, dimples, and contagious enthusiasm had caught my attention.

When the concert was over, that crazy camel was lying down right in the middle of the plaza. I had never seen a camel up close, though I didn’t admit it, so I was as eager as anyone for a closer look.

“Can we ride him?” Virginia asked. She was so pretty she made my knees weak.

“Sure,” I replied. “Why not?” Without a second’s hesitation,

this Scandinavian siren was shinnying up the camel's back, formal dress and all.

I didn't know much about dromedarian character, but I knew those weren't happy sounds coming from the camel. I could just picture him biting one of those cute little feet hanging enticingly down his back, and I knew I would be responsible!

I can't remember how I got her down, but I do remember how erratically my heart beat when I did. Any girl this beautiful and adventuresome was sure to have a line of young men waiting back home in Minnesota. But even so, I began to wonder if maybe my resignation to bachelorhood at twenty-two had been a little premature.

I had resigned myself to being single when I graduated from Wheaton College and headed home to Ecuador. I had just broken my engagement with a young schoolteacher from Wisconsin. Our relationship had been somewhat stormy. She was a nice girl from a wonderful Christian home, so I figured the storm was mostly my doing. Who would ever want to marry an adventuresome but contemplative "jungle boy"? Girls wanted security and stability. Nice girls wanted to live in a small town within driving distance of a good hospital for delivering babies and a nice dinner theater for contemplating their children.

I loved mountain climbing and felt as comfortable living in the jungles as I did in suburbia. I was tricultural, bilingual, well traveled, and restless. I desperately wanted to get married, but I didn't think I'd make much of a husband unless I could design the bride. My order was pretty unrealistic, even for God. I wanted a girl who shared my desire to live life by "the Book." She would love to sit at home and read on a rainy day, but she wouldn't care where the rain was falling. She would make our home a castle whether it had four bedrooms under barrel tile

or one room under thatch. She would feel comfortable mingling at a political rally or dishing out gruel in a disaster-relief kitchen. And she would look stunningly beautiful at either. It also wouldn't hurt if she liked to fly, scuba dive, mountain climb, and travel, all while raising a big family.

+ I was idealistic, but I was also realistic enough to know my chances of finding such a wife were about as good as finding a camel in the Amazon. The clincher was that I wanted to know that Miss Impossibly Wonderful would mean it if she said, "For better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." And I wanted to mean it too! With the national divorce rate reaching the 50 percent mark, I knew I was asking for another miracle there. *And oh, by the way, God, would You mind bringing her to Ecuador? I'll be working in an orphanage as a volunteer and starting a construction and land development business while I try to figure out what You want me to do with my life*, I had prayed.

+ After a brief trek into the jungles, we headed back up the winding road to the mountains, where I planned to leave the tour and return to my responsibilities at my construction business and at the orphanage where I volunteered. I knew I had to figure out some way to get to know Virginia before we were separated forever. I was desperate to figure out some excuse to get her away from the group so we could talk. That would have been difficult enough, but every time I was around her, I was unusually shy and unsure of myself.

It was a class B miracle that Virginia, a full-time nurse, had been able to join her old singing group for the tour. It was probably a class C divine intervention that *I* had been chosen as tour leader for their jungle trip. Now I needed—and received—a class A miracle.

We stopped in the city of Ambato to spend the night before continuing on to the capital city of Quito. I knew this would be my last chance to talk to Virginia, but I just couldn't figure out how to approach her. I was not only low on courage, but I also sorely lacked a good strategy. My desperate mind pulsed between trying to remember some boy-meets-beautiful-girl-and-wittily-impresses-her phrase, and begging God to intervene. +

I got my miracle so fast that I later kicked myself for not asking for something more substantial than just the opportunity to talk. I heard my name, and there was Virginia—or “Ginny,” as her friends called her—asking if I had a few minutes to talk to her after dinner.

It is a good thing my heart almost stopped and my knees and tongue froze momentarily. It would have been embarrassing and might even have scared Ginny if I had fallen to my knees to lavish God with praises for such an immediate answer to my prayer. Instead, my temporary paralysis gave an air of appropriate contemplation before answering that yes, I'd be glad to take a few minutes (not to exceed a week or so) if she wanted to talk. +

It has never taken so long or given me less pleasure to eat a filet mignon. Hope is a wonderful inspiration, but when it causes a rush of adrenaline it dulls the sense of taste and makes chitchatting and sitting still difficult.

Finally it was just Virginia Lynn Olson and Stephen Saint in the hotel rose garden sharing tidbits of our pasts and discussing the challenges of life. Ginny was impressed, she said, that a young man would graduate from college to work in an orphanage and build houses for missionaries rather than taking a corporate job and buying an expensive car, especially since

everyone else our age seemed to be doing just that. She was not flirting or being aggressive; she was simply looking for hope that there were still young men around who wanted God to have first priority in life, men who wanted the significance of their lives to be measured in more than the accumulation of toys or social status.

+ I told Ginny how forlorn I had felt returning to Ecuador, where I would be almost totally out of social circulation. I didn't feel that I was as great a specimen of principle, virtue, and spirituality as she seemed to perceive. But I did want God to be first in my life, and I did want my life to have eternal significance. I was also desperately lonely, and I wanted to get to know this lovely, beautiful, and sensitive young woman before she flew out of my life forever. As we talked, I realized that Ginny was naturally quite shy and unsure of herself around strangers. It really had been a miracle that she had found the courage to approach me. I figured that it was now up to me to initiate further contact.

+ I couldn't finagle an invitation to accompany the tour on their next outing to the coast of Ecuador because there wasn't room on the bus. I also couldn't leave my construction crews without supervision, so I resorted to writing. I wrote Ginny a letter, thirteen pages if I remember, telling her how wonderful it was to talk to her in Ambato. The knowledge that our time was running out made me bold, so I told her how alive I had felt just being around her for three days and how I missed her even though I didn't know her. I even hinted that maybe God had made our paths cross and that I would like the opportunity to take her out when her group returned from the coast.

What I didn't tell Ginny was the reason I was beginning to

see more than coincidence in our meeting. The night before I had joined them for their tour of the jungles, the “Bright Expectations” had performed a Sunday evening program in our English Fellowship Church in Quito.

At that concert, Mrs. Kelly, the woman who had organized the tour and asked me to accompany them to the jungles, sat down beside me. She began to tease me about what wonderful wives Scandinavian women made. Mrs. Kelly and her husband were missionaries of the Swedish Covenant Church, and it was obvious that the group had a large contingent with Scandinavian descent. +

I would have just ignored Mrs. Kelly’s remarks if it hadn’t been for two things. The first was that Mrs. Kelly was usually reserved and quiet. It seemed terribly out of character for her to even sit by me, much less tease me. Second, she continued the teasing even after the program began. I knew our whispering was beginning to bother those around us, and I knew nobody would believe that it was Mrs. Kelly initiating it, so when she insisted that I choose one of the girls to marry, I did it just to put an end to the conversation. A girl with a sweet, soft voice was singing a solo right at that moment. I couldn’t see who it was, but I told Mrs. Kelly I would marry the soloist. +

The next morning when I showed up to join the group, Mrs. Kelly was waiting for me. She grabbed my arm and marched me up to one of the buses that was already loaded. “That’s your girl,” she said, pointing right at Virginia, “so you ride her bus.” I thought she had just picked out the prettiest girl in the group and was teasing me again.

“How do you know she’s the one I chose last night? We couldn’t see her,” I challenged.

“Oh, that’s easy,” she replied. “All the soloists are listed in the

bulletin.” With that she ushered me to the bus, where thankfully, Virginia was unaware that her nuptial arrangements with a total stranger had just been finalized. Mrs. Kelly never teased me again—about anything.

+ Ginny received my thirteen-page epistle when the group got back from the coast. She says now that she was excited to get it but felt it would be too forward to write back. Her initiative in Ambato had apparently been a wide deviation from her normally shy character. Fortunately, or providentially, Mrs. Kelly insisted that Ginny reply. She also insisted that Ginny do so immediately so that Mrs. Kelly could hand deliver it to my house on her way home.

I followed up Ginny’s note with a telephone call and asked if I could take her to dinner and show her the lights of our beautiful city of Quito, nestled like a sparkling gem in a setting of snowcapped mountains.

+ Only after setting a time—and we had precious little time left—did I remember that I already had an inviolable engagement for the same evening: my stepbrother Joel’s groom’s dinner. I couldn’t let my brother down; I was his best man. But I also couldn’t pass up this only chance to be with Ginny. So, with several apologies and a suspiciously detailed assurance that I hadn’t planned to introduce her to my whole family on our first date, I did just that.

My embarrassment quickly faded once we arrived at the party. Everyone seemed to accept Ginny and really like her from the start. I did too, so we said our good-byes and made a hasty exit.

I had long wondered what real romantic love felt like. I had looked for definitions and descriptions, but they were always a bit vague or imprecise, like receiving directions from people

who have been to your destination many times. They can picture every turn and landmark, and they usually end with “you can’t miss it!” But what they really mean is that *they* can’t miss it. An older man had once told me that love comes in different packages for different people. “But,” he said, “when you really find it, you’ll know it.” I wasn’t so sure I would know. I wanted a checklist. I knew that it is possible to think you’re in love but not be. But it wasn’t until I met Ginny that I realized you can’t be in love and think you’re not.

+

I had it and I knew it. The world could have burned down around me and I would have been oblivious. You could have pulled my fingernails out and I would have merely overlooked it. What I couldn’t overlook was that Ginny was leaving and I couldn’t follow. I had sixty men working for me. I had commitments to fulfill that forced my body and mind to stay in Ecuador. But my heart flew back to Minnesota with Virginia Lynn Olson.

After a month or so of being apart, I knew I had to find a solution to the problem. It took about two seconds to figure out that the answer to my problem was living in the north-central part of the United States. It took somewhat longer to figure out how to keep sixty men busy for two weeks while I was away. I finally decided that this was the opportune time to build everyone in our little development a septic system or two if necessary. With that problem solved, I found out that I had another one. All flights out of Quito bound for Miami were sold out for the foreseeable future. Besides that, I had recently received Ecuadorean and U.S. dual citizenship, which meant that I needed military permission and a U.S. visa to leave the country. I got the military permission, but the U.S. Embassy refused to give me a U.S. visa because I held a U.S. passport.

+

+ Finally I bought a standby ticket, called Ginny by international telephone, and headed to the airport. The airport officials made a stink about my papers but eventually accepted them with the warning that the U.S. authorities would not accept my dual citizenship. But there was a bigger problem. The plane was sold out. In South America, who you know is very important. I happened to know someone who knew the man at the exit gate, and he let me board the plane to look for a seat. I found one and quickly settled in, trying to look inconspicuous. Just then, two women boarded the plane. I had taken the very last seat, which had unfortunately been sold to them. Fortunately it had been sold to both of them! They started fighting over that seat and put up such a ruckus that the pilot called security and had them both thrown off the plane. That left me as the happy occupier of that last seat.

+ Minnesota was never as beautiful as it was that summer of 1973. Crab apples were a little sweeter, butterflies a little more colorful, and the smell of newly mown hay just a bit more appealing than usual. Summer days are usually long in the North, but this summer they flew by. I had to return to Ecuador much sooner than I wanted to.

By this time, Ginny and I had spent a total of thirteen days together: three on the tour observing each other and ten in Minnesota getting to know each other. Neither of us thought we knew the other one well, but we knew the fundamentals. We both wanted to follow God's plan for our lives. I wanted a loyal friend to accompany me on the strenuous and uncertain journey of life. Ginny wanted a man she could trust to lead the way. It was clear that Ginny trusted me. I knew her devotion and trust would be powerful motivation to keep me on course.

Besides all that, there was magic between us. We were in love and we dreaded being separated again.

Since there was no one who could finish my work in Ecuador, I talked to Ginny about quitting her job and coming to serve as a volunteer nurse in Hospital Vos Andes, a mission hospital in Quito. I knew it was highly likely that we might live overseas if we were to marry, and I also knew it was important that Ginny realize what it was like to actually live in a third world country. Leaving the security of her hometown, family, friends, work, and church would also give Ginny a chance to separate love from infatuation. +

Plenty of my college acquaintances had married before putting their love and commitment to the test. When the trials of life came, they found that they had insufficient love and commitment. I had watched them split up one after the other, and I had no interest in a false start. Nor did I wish to prove my tenacity by living in an unhappy and unhealthy relationship. I wanted the magic to last and last and to never wear out! So Ginny followed me to Ecuador.

Our testing started about the time Ginny cleared customs. She couldn't fend for herself in a foreign country with a strange culture and an unknown language, so my mom and stepdad invited Ginny to live with them. Mom and Dad loved her from the start, but I'm sure it was more than a little uncomfortable living under such close scrutiny while being so dependent on my parents. +

Ginny's new job in Ecuador offered another test. Everyone liked this *senorita* with a quick smile and cute dimples. But the patients thought she was just a little girl. It is quite proper for young Latin girls to remain silent when spoken to by an adult. This is seen as respectful shyness. Ginny played

the shy role very well, partly because she *was* shy and partly because she didn't speak Spanish. What she didn't understand was that when her patients finished talking, she was supposed to respectfully leave. Instead, she assumed that their silence was the signal that they were ready for their injections, which was usually what she had been sent to do.

+ “No, little girl,” the patients often said, “don't give me the shot; call the nurse.”

Adding to everything else, I was terribly busy. I generally worked ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. By the time I got cleaned up and drove from the construction site back to the city, I didn't have much time or energy left. But Ginny never faltered. She was sweet as sugar with my parents and hard-working and understanding at the hospital. I was still helping out at the orphanage on the weekends, and the children there loved Ginny. So did I!

+ I wanted to marry Ginny, and she made it clear that she would say yes when I asked. But could we make such a permanent commitment? I couldn't help but think of all my friends whose marriages had failed after only a short time. Who gets married thinking it won't work? Who walks down the aisle planning to take that special person to court in three or four or twenty years? I had seen how easily fortunes could change, as well as perspectives.

As much as I wanted to make a commitment to this beautiful girl, I was terribly unsure of myself. I needed to know that I could and would stick to my commitment. Ginny showed me so much love and had such a submissive spirit, I knew I couldn't marry her unless I was sure her trust was well placed. I couldn't bear the thought of ever letting her down. I finally made up my mind. I would not make a commitment unless I

was absolutely sure I could keep it. But I had no idea how to find that assurance. My spirit was in agony, and my mind was in turmoil.

Ginny said she understood, but I couldn't believe she did. Who but Ginny Lynn would continue to trust a man who said he loved her and wanted to marry her but couldn't until he was sure his commitment was greater than he was?

I needed help, which I sought from Mom and Dad. They were sympathetic and smart enough to point me to someone else. They suggested I talk with Dr. Wally Swanson and his wife, Charlotte. We had known them for years, and I knew they would offer honest advice. So I went.

After pouring out my heart to them and explaining in great detail the anguish of my uncertainty, I waited for their wonderful revelation. I really expected some secret revelation that had been withheld from me until this moment of initiation, the password that would grant me entrance to the world of stable and wise certainty. What I got instead seemed trite and unfeeling: "Ask the Lord to show you," they advised. "Only He knows what the future holds. If He blesses your commitment, you will know you can keep your word to love and cherish Virginia for as long as you live."

I could have given myself that advice without spending hours pouring out my heart before these people! As much as I respected and trusted them, I felt betrayed. Sure, we pray for God's blessing. Sure, we ask Him to show us His will. But He doesn't answer plainly. It's always a mystery. This was not some small matter to be treated casually. This was a pivotal moment in my life. For all I knew, all of history was at a crossroads. This was more important than life or death—this was gut-wrenching, heart-stopping, mind-numbing love.

I left the Swansons' house deflated. I had struck out. Worse yet, Ginny—sweet, trusting girl that she was—was waiting with great expectations for the outcome of our meeting. I was heading back empty handed.

Before I reached Mom and Dad's, I had a fleeting thought. Like a microscopic seed striving to root in untilled soil, it searched for a hold in my mind. Could it be that God *does* really answer prayers—not vaguely, but clearly and explicitly? Could He know the torment of my soul? Could it be that until now I had never needed His direction with sufficient urgency to merit a clear answer? What choice did I have, anyway?

“What did they tell you?” Ginny asked, eyes sparkling, when I showed up.

“They said we should ask God to show us if this is His will,” I replied.

“Are we going to do it, then? How will we know if God answers?”

“I don't know. I have to be honest with you, Ginny,” I confided. “I believe God exists, I believe He loves us, and I believe He gives guidance, but I don't have confidence that He will reveal His will to us like this. I won't be asking with the confidence James 1:6 says we must have. But I'm going to ask anyway. Let's ask together, and let's just hope He works a miracle for us and in us so we'll know our commitment will stand—not because we made it but because God blessed it and gave us the assurance it would last.”

So we prayed. Together and separately. Every time I began to agonize, I would pray. My mind felt like jelly. I have never been *less* sure of myself than I was during those awful days of faithless waiting. I couldn't imagine why Ginny didn't want to pack up and go home. But she understood that the basis of

my uncertainty was my determination to make a permanent, lifelong commitment to her.

I have heard people say they want to live together before marrying to be sure it will work. I always think that sort of a test is like tasting ice cream to evaluate whether working in an ice cream factory would be fun. But those days of agonizing—now *that* was a test—were miserable days. I didn't know how long I could last or what option I would have when I could no longer stand waiting for God to answer.

Then the answer came! No, it didn't really come; it was just suddenly there. Miraculously, wonderfully, unbelievably, God's answer—the assurance of His blessing and partnership—was there. I had envisioned handwriting on the wall or the appearance of a scroll with God's message on it. Instead He gave me a better, more appropriate answer. God's answer didn't tell me to ignore the uncertainty I felt in my own ability to make a life-long commitment to love and cherish and protect and esteem Ginny. Instead He simply changed my constitution. Where I had wavered like a cattail in a breeze, turning to a different conclusion with every puff of wind, now I was suddenly steady. Where I had been like jelly in my resolve, now I was very sure. Where I had believed that only discipline could keep me to my intended vows, now I had a quiet, confident peace that God Himself would underwrite my pledge.

To adequately describe the wonderful release and the pleasure of the stability that I so desperately needed and received is beyond the power of my pen. Only those who have felt the gut-tearing and miserable uncertainty I experienced can truly understand the ecstasy of what I fully believe was God's intervention. Like real love itself, when I had God's answer, I knew I had it.

The first test of my blessed and incredible assurance was to tell Ginny. She wanted me to be sure, but she had seen me in the jelly state—she would know if this miracle resolve was just self-delusion. I knew my telling her what had happened would test the validity of the assurance. Thankfully, when I told Ginny, it was clear that she, too, could see the dramatic, miraculous change in me.

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Whenever I tell this story, I can't help but think about how incredible it is that God intervened in a situation that was monumental to me but totally insignificant universally.

Ginny and I have been married thirty-three years now. It's not a coincidence that I am still sure. This is one of God's signs that the tides of time have not diminished in any way. Why God chose to answer my plea for help so wonderfully and explicitly I cannot tell. I have called out for help and direction often. I know He still guides me, but never again have I discovered a sand castle so intricately detailed and custom built on my beach. Mostly I see faint markings in the sand now and again, but I recognize the origin and know I have company on my island.

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