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FROM DOUBT TO ASSURANCE

FROM TRAUMA TO HEALING

FROM FEAR TO COURAGE

IOAN MURGU

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PREFACE

GAINING A FRIEND, SHARING THE STRUGGLES

During the summer of 1999, I took my first trip to Arad, Romania, to fulfill a missional calling to minister to the gypsies in the area of Arad. While I was there, I met a young man named Murgu Ionel. I was drawn to his enthusiasm, and I loved how he had the willingness to serve the Lord. The more I got to know Ionel, the more I realized just how much he loved God and His church. It didn't take long for our team to fall in love with this young man and his family.

Throughout the years, it has been one of my greatest joys to return to Arad, Romania. Ionel and his brother Mitru, who were only teenagers, became vitally important to the success of our trips. These brothers would spend hours translating for us as we served these incredible people.

Though we would only spend about two weeks out of the year together, Ionel became a very close and personal friend to me. No amount of time or distance could keep us from remaining in a close relationship with one another, especially with the introduction of the Internet.

For as long as I have known Ionel, I have continually watched him grow into a man who is committed to his Christian faith. This is expressed through his passionate love for God, for people, and for Gospel ministry.

In 2004, Ionel came to intern at the First Baptist Church in Woodward, Oklahoma, where I served as Youth & Missions Pastor. My wife, Golda, and I were honored to have Ionel live with us for these two years. During this time, I watched Ionel devour ministry knowledge as we served together. I often wondered how difficult it would be for Ionel to return to Arad. Most of his family, especially his friends, thought he might never return home. But he did.

I was so proud of Ionel as he worked diligently to serve his Savior there among his people in Checheci, an area of Arad. Specifically, Ionel and his brother began a children's ministry at his home church, Biserica Crestina Baptista, which was very successful.

In his book, Ionel shares some of the struggles he has faced and the toll they have taken on his life spiritually and mentally. It was so difficult for me to be on the other side of the world, feeling somewhat helpless.

But through my close relationship, I know that when things were hard, Ionel made the brave decision to share with his Christian community what was going on so he could receive the help he needed. I thank God that I have been able to watch Ionel remain steadfast through the struggles, and I can testify of the many victories he has experienced!

This book is a testament to the grace and power of the One True Living God as well as a testament to the perseverance and commitment to Christ of a young man who grew up in a gypsy culture that bears extra weight that is not experienced in many other cultures throughout the world.

I am forever proud of Murgu Ionel for submitting his will to God and His Word. I know that you will be encouraged as you journey through Ionel's experiences and life lessons that he boldly shares in *A Story of Salvation, Trauma, and Restoration!*

A friend of Murgu Ionel,

Mike Duncan

Former Youth Pastor at FBC Woodward, OK

INTRODUCTION

Are you fascinated by how God can save and change lives? God can do that! There are great testimonies of how God can change lives. And even after our lives have been changed, we are still in the changing process.

Let me ask you another question: Have you ever doubted your salvation as a Christian? I know this is a touchy subject for some, but the truth is there are many Christians who come to doubt their salvation at some point. I came to doubt my salvation 17 years ago and it was a very hard time. There was fear and insecurity; there were nights I could not sleep and days I could not eat. It was hard. But after I drew near to God, He started to work in my life bringing truth, closeness, healing, assurance, and restoration.

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And I wrote this book because I want to help. Well, let me share with you my story and I hope you will find it interesting and helpful.

In 2005, I had an awesome opportunity to go to the US and work as a youth intern at First Baptist Church in Woodward, Oklahoma. I wanted to get there after I met some American Christians who came to Romania, specifically to my gypsy community in Arad under the lead of Pastor Mike Duncan. Upon discussions, I wanted to go to the US and learn more about ministry. I started to pray for this and to the surprise of many, I got my VISA as God was with me having a plan, and I was very happy.

So, I got to the US, and the staff and the church had a welcome party for me. The people were very nice, and I had a great time. Soon I found out that the food was delicious, I liked the Chinese food, the Mexican food, but especially the food cooked by Miss Lily Neil, and Golda Duncan – well, except when she said Johnny, now here, there is only one course; so, you'd better eat it up. In Romania we have the soup, and then the main course.

Time went by with very good first-time experiences for me like going to a football game to see Boomers going to a rodeo which was very interesting or going tubing, which was pretty scary. I had a lot of fun and a great time but later I went through a shocking experience. Sometimes, God wants to teach us something and allow things in our lives, and it is not all about having fun.

In 2006, the church had an evangelistic event and invited an evangelist who was going to preach three nights in a row about the assurance of salvation and hell. Among other things, the preacher said for

you to know you are saved, you must remember the moment when you received Jesus. If you do not know you had such a moment when you received Jesus; you are not saved.

Well, I was only a teenager when I knew I received Jesus, and I couldn't remember the moment. I had something in my mind, but I was not sure. In my case, salvation was a process and not a moment. So, coming back, because I was not sure about the moment, and because he was preaching on hell, I got very scared, and because of the preacher's aggression, fear grew each night. I started to doubt my salvation, could not sleep in the night, my mind was always struggling and I remember I started to have a delirium, and my mind got pretty messed up as I just went through a trauma.

I shared this story of mine because I know that there are many other Christians, especially teenagers, and maybe you also, who are struggling with doubting their salvation, and I want to help. When I got through this, there were at least five others that I knew that were going through the same thing. I was reading the book **Saved Without a Doubt**, by John Macarthur, and he says in his book:

*"It is a heartache for me as a pastor to know there are
so many Christians who lack assurance of their
salvation."*

It is either that Christians don't know they can have assurance of salvation, or that they, like me, have doubted their salvation and lost

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assurance. I know it is a sensitive subject but please be patient. I'm trying to help. If you are struggling with doubting your salvation, or you know someone, and you believed in Jesus and received Him, take heart. There is hope.

I want you to come with me on this journey and read this story because I want this book to be useful for you and other Christian teenagers. I know there are books on Assurance of salvation, but I am writing as one who has gone through this, and through drawing near to God, through God's work in my life and the truths of the Scripture, I have obtained assurance of salvation, and enjoy life and ministry.

But first, I want to share with you how God saved me and worked in my life, and also how he saved my father in a mighty way and brought peace to my family.

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived. Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. (Psalm 106:9-13)

The Bible says that although God did great and wonderful works for the people of Israel, not long after, they forgot God and forgot His works, which he did in Egypt and then at the Red Sea. Maybe we wonder how this is possible. How is it possible for Israel to forget so quickly the great and miraculous works that God has done for them? The truth is that we as humans forget pretty easily the good things we have. The reality is that

the same thing happens to us today; we forget what God has done in our lives! We forget to trust the Almighty God.

But God does not want us to forget His works and benefits. Psalm 103 says: *“Bless the Lord oh my soul and do not forget any of the goodness of God.”* God wants us to keep His works in our minds and our lives! When we remember the works God has done in our lives, we do three things:

1. We honor God by keeping Him in our lives
2. We become even more concerned about life with God and our trust in Him.
3. We are a testimony to other believers.

So, God has worked in my life, and He has saved me. God does not consider nationality, race, or social status. He loves us all, and wants to work in the life of any man and woman; especially in the life of the one who lets himself/herself molded by him! And he does this though we do not deserve it. God also granted me the grace of salvation, and then He also gave me the great opportunity to go to College and prepare for ministry. Then, he allowed me to go to the US, and later, somehow, he also granted me the grace to suffer for him. It is God who does all these things! He is the One who by His grace raises people, regardless of nationality or race! speaking of my nationality, especially the people in my gypsy community in Arad, Romania, I can say that they have a talent for singing. the talent or the gift most spread among the gypsies is that of singing. The gypsies have a natural talent for singing.

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The Bible says: "Brothers, think of what you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

So, because of my origin and because of God's work, I can't boast before God, but I can boast in him.

That's because praise and thanksgiving are our response to God for his work in our lives! This is the pattern found in the Bible! God works and we are called to proclaim his praise! The second verse of Ps. 106 says: "*Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare His praise?*" The psalmist also says: "*Lord God, many are your wonders and plans for me: no one can resemble you. I would like to tell them, but their number is too big to tell!*"

IOAN MURGU

So, my purpose in writing this book is twofold; to tell how God saved me, and to tell how he brought assurance of salvation and restoration after going through a trauma.

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

MY SALVATION

Hello, my friend! My name is Ioan Murgu, my family and friends call me Ionel (which is Johnny) I come from a Romanian, orthodox family, and I would like to tell you the story of my life; I want to tell you how God has worked in my life. I want to testify how God took me out of the darkness and brought me to His wonderful light (both me and my family); also, how he took me from a life with no future and gave me a new direction, the opportunity for education and ministry.

My childhood was quite difficult! My father was an alcoholic and a smoker; and we, the family, had a very hard time because of him. My

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older brother and I already understood what was going on in our family, and my mother and I suffered quite a lot because of my dad. Dad used to come home drunk, and whenever he came home drunk (which happened very often), he was set on having bad actions. He would come home, yelling at my mother, and us, the children. He would play the music very loudly. We couldn't sleep (he woke us from sleep). There were days when my brothers and I couldn't go to school the next day.

He also used to break things in the house; from time to time he would hit my mother. We were going to suffer a lot! The people in the community knew my dad as a bad guy when he was drunk (which was very often)! When people saw my dad coming down on one side of the road, they decided to move on the other side. My dad was also quite a fighter! Almost every time his friends had a problem with someone, my dad solved the problem by beating up those guys.

I can remember one experience from my childhood. One day my dad was drunk at home, and my mom was standing on the other side of the bed with my sister in her arms. And in the middle, it was me on the bed. Dad told my mom to give him the baby, but my mom refused it. My dad only wanted to get close to Mom so he could hit her. I realized this and so I told my father that I could take the baby from my mother and give the baby to him. But when my dad heard this, he pushed me away.

My dad was a very bad person. The only person who could stand before him was my grandmother. Whenever my dad was drunk, my mom would send my older brother to get my grandmother. She would confront him. Sometimes, my dad calmed down; other times we all had to go to

Grandma's place in the middle of the night. There were times when my grandma told my father: "*When these two grow up, they will get you back*" (my grandma was talking about me and my older brother).

Thank God, my brother and I didn't have to do anything about it, because God did something. He did something unbelievable! Both he (My dad) and our family were going to change dramatically.

In 1993 my parents and I were invited to church by my siblings. My siblings had to perform a Christmas play. While the play was performed, my dad was very touched, as he realized that while he lived a miserable life, his children were going to church praying for him. So, then and there, my dad started crying for the first time after many years.

Praise God! My dad was soon going to become a Christian. He was baptized in 1994, after several oppositions. First, he had a dream from God in which he saw fire coming down from heaven. Then, it was an epidemic illness; we all had some infectious stains on the whole body. But my dad postponed his conversion. And then, eventually, when my older brother was missing for two days, my dad finally capitulated. My older brother was missing and my dad started to look for him. Because he didn't find him, he called the police, and then he prayed to God saying that if God brought his son back, he would submit to God.

As for myself, I kept on going to church, and in 1996 I became a Christian too. In my father's case conversion was something very difficult, and in my case, conversion was something very easy. That is, God spoke to me, the Holy Spirit convicted me, and I responded.

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I remember I was home alone, and as I was watching the Jesus film—I liked it and God touched my life. I felt God was speaking to me and searching me, and then, while in the US I didn't remember if I rewound the VHS tape or not to pray the sinner's prayer. But I remember my desires started to change, and the truth is if you are a Christian, you don't need to remember when exactly it all started. It's like if you are on a plane, you don't need to know when you got on, to be sure you are on the plane. Then, it was also another moment in my life; a public evangelistic moment this time, when I accepted God. I think it's very good to keep in mind that for some people, a conversion is an event; a clear moment of before and after. This was the case of Apostle Paul who had a dramatic change in his life. Saul met God, but, God met Saul on the way to Damascus, and there, God began to change his life. But for others, conversion is a process; it is not a clear moment of before and after.

There are maybe more moments that have led to conversion, to baptism, and it's possible that you don't remember exactly how it happened, and you don't have to. This was my case. So, it is good to keep this truth in our minds.

CHAPTER 2

FLMO - Knowing God

In the previous chapter, I mentioned a significant moment of my salvation: an evangelization event. This event, held outdoors and attended by some Americans, is still vivid in my memory. Although the details of the service are hazy—I can't recall if I raised my hand—I distinctly remember telling my father, a Christian, that I wanted to sing a song at church the following week. The song I had in mind was "All my energy I put at your disposal." I was brimming with enthusiasm and ardor for praising God! In retrospect, I am pretty sure I did rewind the tape, pray, and raise my hand.

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After the event, I went home. Before entering the house, I overheard my father talking to a man about another person who had recently become a Christian and was now preaching the Word. They were discussing how well this man knew the Word of God. Once inside, my father and I spent some time together. Excited about reading the Bible, I heeded my father's advice to start reading from Psalms. Thus, I began my journey of reading the Bible and later reciting verses within the church program.

After a while, I applied to the "Fountain of Life" Mission Organization (FLMO), led by Park Cheon Kyu and Andreican Mircea, who were pastors at the church I attended. FLMO was where I laid the foundation of my faith and began to grow spiritually. I started learning about God and reading about great people of God, such as John Wesley, George Whitecliff, Hudson Taylor, and others. My dream was to become a missionary one day.

I was just a recently converted teenager (not yet baptized) with a desire to know God. My father was attending FLMO courses, and I wanted to join these courses as well. At 14 years old, I could hardly be admitted. But after a while, Brother Cheon allowed me to attend the classes. I was going to be the youngest student. I am grateful to Brother Cheon for this opportunity. Here, I began to know God and establish a solid foundation in my Christian life. The courses were excellent! I attended twice a week (Friday and Saturday), taking theology (and mission) courses, as well as Romanian and English courses. We had teachers like Iuga Viorel, Gongola Mihai, Iovin Neli, and others. I thank God for the grace He has given me to know these people.

I also had some amusing experiences at FLMO. During an English exam, it was me, my dad, and a good friend of mine (my dad didn't know any English at all). All three of us were seated next to each other - Dad was in the middle, and my friend and I were on the sides. We were both helping my dad. Time was running out, and I had no time to write my paper. Upon correction, I learned that my father got a higher grade than both of us.

On another occasion, I went on a mission to Maramureș along with other students and pastors. We left Arad by train. When we arrived in Cluj, we were told they were going to change the locomotive and that this would take about half an hour. So, some of us decided to get off the train to buy some snacks. When we returned (after about 10 minutes), we learned that the train had left.

There were three of us, and one had a jacket that belonged to another colleague. Incidentally, my colleague who had the jacket on searched his pockets and found some money; a pretty substantial amount! Because we had to get to Maramureș that evening, and because the Pastor who was with us decided to use that money, we took a taxi. After negotiation, the taxi took us to Maramureș. Thus, we had a taxi ride from Cluj to Maramureș, which is about 100 miles.

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*Fountain of Life Mission Organization founded by Pastor Park Cheon
Kyu*

CHAPTER 3

A NEW DIRECTION IN LIFE

In the time following my surrender to God and while I was attending FLMO courses, I registered for vocational school; I wanted to become a tinsmith. The truth was, I was following my friends and not considering my future, although from first grade to seventh grade I had achieved very good grades.

I went to a school with a very low level of education and a fairly high level of vagrancy. Not much was learned; it was a school where, instead of having the bell student ring the bell (announcing the break), he

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had to break firewood to heat the school in the wintertime. Many students were already old (it had been years since they finished the 8th grade), and they did not come to school to learn, but only came to have a preoccupation and eventually get a job certificate. They were also organized in gangs.

The school had a doorman who would not let you out of school within the break time; it was like a prison. I remember a circumstance when a colleague of mine did something he was not supposed to, and the doorman came to him, showed him the bat, and asked him which end he would choose. It was a bit of a joke, but the gesture did not sound good at all. But again, I signed up, being badly influenced by my friends.

When I became a Christian, I realized that God wanted to give me a new direction in life. I realized that God had something for me; he had a plan for my life, and so I started to want more from myself. I say this because at the trades school, in the first year we learned to work with the metal sheet, and we made plates for flowerpots. God was going to take me from making flower pots to something much higher; more precisely, to prepare me for his work!

Because transferring from trade school to High school was not possible, I chose to stay at home for one year and prepare for the High school admission. I studied, God was helping me, and I was admitted. I was admitted at the Pentecostal High School in Arad. I remember that my father was very proud of me. Dad was bragging that he had “a high school boy”.

For a better understanding, I must mention the fact that, where I grew up (in Checheci), there was no education at all, as it is not now as well. That is, at that time, one went to school no further than to a jobs school; today, students are already starting to drop out of school in the 5th grade. Very few are those who finish the 8th grade. That's because, in that community, people are Roma people and are practically uneducated.

As I said, the children go to school up to the fifth grade, and the fewest to the eighth grade. And in general, the reason parents send their children to school is to receive an allowance. Of course, there is a need; but parents are more interested in an allowance than in the future of their children. Poverty and lack of education characterize these people. Although the Checheci community is located territorially in the heart of Arad, there is still a lot of poverty and lack of education there. A few years ago, you could see children here naked on the streets.

As for me, I grew up a bit outside the gypsy community. I was a gypsy and my parents lived in the gypsy community, but then, they decided to move. (I was like Moses in Egypt). I lived in another community, called Confectii. Thus, I could see life from a different angle and also received a good education from my mother. But, of course, I went to the community almost every day, because I had my grandmother and my friends there. There I was playing with my friends and we used to go steal apples and other fruits.

I have mentioned that my grandmother lived in the gypsy community, and so did my friends. In addition to other activities I had in

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the community, such as playing soccer at school, in the summertime, we used to go steal fruits from one of my great-grandparent's neighbors.

I remember going to my great-grandparents, going to the backyard, and from there my friends and I went straight into the neighbors' garden. The neighbor had a beautiful orchard of apples, pears, and other fruits. When we got out, and the neighbor saw us, she would cry out:

Cretie, your grandkids were in my garden again!

She called my grandmother. And in the wintertime, we used to play ice hockey. It was a pond in the community, and when it got frozen, we would use some sticks to play ice hockey.

Another habit that we had in the summertime along with almost all the people in the Checheci community was to stay up late at the fire pit. All the time when the night was falling and my family was still in the community, my great-grandfather was preparing to light the fire, and we children (myself, my brothers, and cousins) were going to gather some charms. Once the fire lit, my great-grandfather told us about his life, in particular, he told us different episodes of his time during World War II. I thank God because my great-grandfather came to receive the Lord, after a lifetime of singing in the choir of the Baptist church.

Thus, although I did not live in the community, and although I did not know the Romani language or the ethnic traditions, I was considered a "Roma / Gypsy", like everyone else in the community. I had a nice childhood with my friends, both in the community and at the

apartments where I lived. Here I used to play soccer, with my other friends, and other games like hide and seek and thick milk.

CHAPTER 4

THEOHARI - GOD'S PLAN

I thank God for the many opportunities he has given me! He gave me the opportunity to attend FLMO, then to go to High School, and then to College. Afterwards, God gave me the opportunity to go to the USA, and then to Germany! God is good!

I loved high school! I started learning pretty well; in fact, I got close to the brilliant girls in my class. By the way, both in high school and College, I had more female colleagues than male colleagues. When I was

in High School, there were six boys in my class; when I was in college, I was the only boy (for the English courses).

Everything was fine and nice until I was in the tenth grade, and I was starting to have math problems. I could learn any subject, but I knew almost nothing about math. So, because of shame, I quit attending math classes regularly.

The end of the semester was approaching and ... yes, I was approaching math classes too. Mrs. Theohari - the Math teacher - looked at me and said,

"Murgule, I solemnly promise you that as long as I am in this school, you will not pass the class. The problem is as follows: either you or me!"

I got scared; I talked to my parents and I stayed home for the next 2 weeks (although my parents scolded me).

After those two weeks, I received a phone call from a colleague:
"Murgule, guess what? The math teacher is gone. She left".
Then I understood what is said in Isaiah 43: 4:

"Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you and people in exchange for your life."

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I know it sounds funny, but it's also very serious. The idea was that, on one hand, the reason I didn't go to math classes anymore was a shame (or maybe I wouldn't even have a legitimate excuse). But more so, the idea was that the teacher opposed God's plan (the teacher was not a Christian). That is why God had to work this way. God's plan for me was to go on, and prepare for his work! Therefore, God did not allow me to stop. God loves us so much and he is ready to do anything for us, his children! God gave everything when He gave the Lord Jesus for us. And in Romans 8:32 he says this:

*“He who spared not even his Son, but gave him up for
us all, how he will not give us all, together with him,
all things”*

God be glorified for this!

CHAPTER 5

HARD TIMES

God was going to bless my life a lot. I kept on going to school, prepared for the math exam, and passed it. Then, I found a verse in the Bible (in fact, God revealed it to me):

*"For I know the thoughts that I have concerning you,
saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of
affliction, that I may give you a future and a hope!"
(Jeremiah 29:11).*

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Later, I heard about the “Emmanuel” University of Oradea. Being at “Love” Baptist Church in Arad, Pastor Paul Negruț (the president of the National Baptist Association at that time) was invited to preach. The pastor was talking, among other things, about “Emmanuel” University and about the students there. He told the story of how, once, he heard someone talking in the study room late at night. The pastor thought there were more students and they were talking to each other. So, the pastor said: *“I will go, I will open the door and I will catch them”*. Pastor Negruț approached the door, opened it, and was surprised when he found, in fact, a student who was bent on his knees praying.

While attending FLMO courses (I was taking these courses in parallel with the high school hours), I heard about the “Emanuel” University. And so, I began to feel God’s calling to prepare for the ministry. Later, I had the exam, and what a great joy it was when I saw my name on the list of those admitted. Both my joy and the joy of my parents was immense!

So, I was in college, and my major was Theology and Philology (English language and literature), but I had no money for tuition and other expenses. But God was in control. Some American people (the Oklahoma mission team) came to our church to do ministry, and I started translating for them. The mission team came from First Baptist Church in Woodward, and other churches in Oklahoma, to work in the gypsy community, having with them a general practitioner, a dentist, a barber, pastors, and other people. They had heard of our community, being very poor, and came to do medical examinations, give free medicine, do dental

work, give reading glasses, and do haircuts. It is a wonderful ministry that is very beneficial for the people in the community as they don't have the money to buy medicine and have all the other benefits. Also, this ministry has a spiritual side; we have Children's ministry and also church services. It started in the year 2000 and is still going on today.

As I said, I was translating for these people, and one of the pastors heard that I was a freshman in College and asked, "*Johnny, do you have money for tuition?*" "*I didn't*", I replied. And the pastor offered to help me with the tuition and school expenses for the first year. Thus, I have known God as the Caretaker!

God, indeed, cares! I remember one day I was going to pay the tuition. I took the money with me, I went to classes, and I did not get to pay the tuition that day. So, I went home. I got on the tram and, because it was very crowded, I didn't feel like the person next to me stole my wallet (there were also the cafeteria tickets). When I got to the campus, I found out that my wallet had been stolen with everything in it. I remember I called my parents and told them what happened. Then I talked to my roommates, who encouraged me. I also let the cafeteria staff know about my tickets. They understood and there was no problem for them. Moreover, the ladies at the cafeteria heard about what had happened to me and decided to help me with some money. It was God's love for me!

After a week, a missionary came to my church. I was speaking about what happened to me, and in the end, the missionary decided to help me with the money for the tuition.

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I have said that my father was a bad man and that we were suffering because of him. After my dad repented, his life began to change dramatically. Now he loved his family, and he was trying to lead his family to God. So, when I was in college, my father offered to take me every Monday morning on his bike and take me to the railway station. He would take me on his bike every Monday morning (as the distance was not much, and I came home very often) So, I used to get on the bike, and my dad was pedaling, and we were happy to be together.



Dr Frank Evans from Stillwater seeing a patient in Romania

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CHAPTER 6

HARD TIMES

I was beginning to minister at church. I was already leading the prayer time with my dad. I can say that my life during College was between preparation for ministry and the actual ministry. During the week I was at school, and on the weekends, I came home to serve at church. I didn't have much time to hang out with the boys; nor did I have a girlfriend to go out with.

Later, I began to lead the Bible study at church, and soon after that, I also had short messages for the church. Pastor Andreican (the pastor of

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Faith church at that time) was glad that I was in Seminary; and because he liked to make disciples, he wanted to introduce me more and more into the ministry.

I began to grow more! I began to know God, to love him, and to serve him. I was glad to be able to serve God. I liked to prepare, and it wasn't hard for me. However, with the ministry, the difficulties also appeared. And a friend of mine would say: *Welcome to ministry!* Well, some people in the church opposed my family. My father served as a member of the committee, and my younger brother was leading music. As for me, they said they respected me and they had some respect indeed.

But the greatest hardship in the ministry was to come when the same people, under the leadership of another pastor, directly opposed me. As a fact, "Faith" Baptist Church was a church where there were quite many conflicts, from generation to generation. (the church is close to being about a hundred years old) This is what I have heard from the elders and this is mainly due to the lack of education and, implicitly, the lack of spiritual growth. Otherwise, we gypsies are fine people; most of us have the gift of singing, and we also have the nature to feel with other people (we are very sentimental).

My father-in-law, who was a bear-carrier gypsy (they would go with the bear from place to place to perform shows), said that if we know how to work with the Roma people and make the most of this emotional capacity of the gypsies, we will have a very sweet fellowship in the church. The gypsy is ready to provide you with everything if needed; and

if he invites you to lunch or supper, he puts everything he has on the table! This is how we are.

So, going back, I was facing direct opposition and was asked to give up on my church ministry along with my family. That's because some people in the church were beginning to find fault with me and my family. It was very hard for me; maybe I had some of the blame.

But what strengthened me at that time was the Word of God. God spoke to me through a verse from Revelation, which says,

"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10).

Thus, I gave up on the ministry at church, but I remained faithful to God in walking with Him.

Then, about the same time, I also encountered financial difficulties concerning college. The pastor who had helped me couldn't do that anymore. And I could not work, because I had a double major (Theology-Philology), and had classes from morning to evening. I was always caught between attending theology classes in the morning and attending English classes in the afternoon.

But God worked in that situation too! God used my parents in the second year of college. My parents sacrificed so much so that I could continue my studies. And I thank my parents for their support! But it was not only them who sacrificed; I had to sacrifice as well. There were months when I would no longer be able to eat at the cafeteria, but I would

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always eat in my room. I ate some bread and butter, or bread and some chicken/pork liver paste. Often, I ate lunch together with my roommate, and we baked potatoes in the microwave.

I remember one evening I was getting ready to eat and I didn't even get to sit on the chair; it was just when I ended up praying, and I heard someone knocking on the door. I opened it; it was a colleague of mine who had a cafeteria ticket, which he wanted to donate. I was so glad! I took the ticket and ran to the cafeteria. It was God's work! It was His love and His caring for me! Thank you, Lord!

CHAPTER 7

SHOWERS OF BLESSING

God was faithful and did not leave me regarding my studies. In my 3rd and 4th year of College, God blessed me again with financial support. Hebrews 13: 5 says, *I will not leave you, nor will I forsake you*. I mentioned some American people. Well, God used them again in my life! (I want to thank those people. I thank Pastor Mike Wall from the Henderson Hills, I thank Pastor Mike Duncan, I thank FBC in Woodward OK, and I thank Mrs. Jane Easterwood). While I was translating for these people during their mission in our gypsy community, I talked to Mike Duncan about my situation. I remember we prayed, and then he presented my need in his church, and then we waited.

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Not long after, Mike wrote to me saying there was an older lady at church who felt the call of God to help me. Brother Mike had told this lady about me concerning my situation, but also about my desire to continue my studies. Later on, I was surprised when I checked my bank account to find out that this older lady sent me three thousand dollars. There was money for tuition and other expenses as well. I remember I began to praise God by humming a song that says; *"I know there is someone whom I thank, I know there is someone; it is the Heavenly Father."*

As for the exams, the Lord granted me success in all of them; I was doing my part to learn, and then I trusted the Lord for every exam. My favorite verses in this regard were those in Proverbs 3: 5-6:

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on
your own understanding; in all your ways
acknowledge him, and He will make your paths
straight"*

Generally, I attended all of the courses. Some of my colleagues missed some courses. I started college being quite serious about it; and on the other hand, I found myself having to go to classes so I could learn. Someone said that he, as a gypsy during school, had to learn twice as much as the others to get in line with them. My colleagues were smarter than I was, and I had to make a greater effort to be in line with them. It was both my effort and my trust in God. There were exams for which I

was preparing until late at night because I could not learn on time for all the exams.

But I remember a circumstance when I was with my colleagues attending an English seminar. The teacher had me read and translate a text. Well, the night before, I was reading a little English book in the school library. So, I was at the seminar and I had to translate the text into English; I came to a comparison between two products, and had to translate with "*the best*", or "*the better*." And because I read the night before about this issue, I used "*the better*", while my colleagues said "*the best*." The Professor confirmed my answer; then I remember one of my colleagues turned to me and said: "*Wow, Johnny!*"

The only exam I failed was English Phonetics. I remember it was evening and I was very discouraged. It was my first exam that I failed. I chose to walk and not take the tram, just to clear up my thoughts.

But overall, studying went very well! I could not prepare very well for all subjects, but I chose to prepare best for the Theology exams. I did prepare myself for the English Language and Literature, but not at a high level. I remember that I had an exam where I had to read about ten books. And, because I couldn't read them all, I only read three. But guess what? What I read was what I received as topics for the exam! That's because I chose to honor God (and when I had to learn, I didn't neglect church). My motto was to honor God, knowing that in return, He would honor me.

Another beautiful experience I had during College was the train trips (Arad-Oradea, Oradea-Arad) and the testimonies of different people on the train, in the compartment. Because we had a Missionary course, we

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were urged to do personal evangelism, and then we had to make a report. Thus, train travel was my point of evangelism. First, I asked the man where he was traveling, and then I went on into the conversation, and at some point, I told him about the Lord Jesus.

I graduated from College, and after a year, I had the opportunity to go to the United States. I had talked with the team leader for whom I was translating (Mike Duncan) about my desire to go to America for a while. Mike agreed, returned home, and asked his church if I could work as a youth intern. He was a Youth Pastor, and I was to be his apprentice.

So, after a few months, the church gave me its acceptance. They wrote the papers and sent them to me. I went to the US Embassy and, to the astonishment of some people, I was granted the visa. Some people have applied for the visa before me, and they did not get it. But I trusted God, and He was at work! The verse I had in mind was that of Deuteronomy 18:14: *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* It is a question, to which the answer is obvious: *"No!"* I knew if it was in God's plan, He would work so I could get the visa.

When I arrived in the United States, the family I was going to stay with welcomed me very well. After a few days, we arrived at FBC. I was the only Romanian among the people, nevertheless, I did not feel alone. I already knew some of them, and Mike introduced me to the youth and then to the church.

Not long after, Pastor Mike gave me the opportunity to lead the Bible study with the youth. Every Sunday morning, before the service, the church had a Bible study organized in groups. So, I prepared for

Sunday morning; it was a lesson about serving others, and the idea that stuck in my mind was that sometimes, we don't feel like doing this or that. But although we are sometimes reluctant to serve, God wants us to get out of our comfort zone and get to serve. The Lord was with me; He helped me to present the lesson and I could also speak good English. It went well, and the church staff congratulated me. Then Pastor Mike gave me the opportunity to practice, and we took turns leading the Bible study.

I learned a lot in working with the youth; I learned how to work with the youth, how they are organized within the youth meetings, and also concerning the Bible study that was organized by school grades. Then I learned about people's lives in general. Yes, life in the US is indeed better but it is not like in the movies. There were actually poor people who came to church to get some food through the Loaves and Fishes church ministry.

As for the people, they are very kind, open and friendly. I have met people when going shopping, they ask you how you are doing. And when you are driving on one side of the road, the driver that comes from the other side waves at you. Or when you get to an intersection, the other driver across will say you go. As for horns, you don't hear them too much.

The food is very good! And I'm not talking about fast food (McDonald's, KFC, etc). I am talking about cooked food. Both Golda, Mike's wife (who by the way, taught me how to drive, and with her help, I got my driver's license in the US), and especially Mrs. Lily Neill made some very good dishes. Mrs. Lily made some good biscuits and gravy, as

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well as other great dishes. The food was good at the restaurants too! For example, I liked the chimichangas at the Mexican restaurant.

During the week, I worked at the church and in the office. Because of the opportunity of being in the church staff, I was involved generally in all of the pastors' activities: visits, meetings, camps, conferences, etc. But I also liked to help the church secretary, fold the bulletins. I helped with maintenance, shoveling the snow around the church, and I drove the church bus to bring the church kids from school to church for the children's program.

I mainly helped the youth pastor because I was his assistant. I was preparing Bible study and meetings with the youth; I was arranging the youth room before and after the meeting. I helped with games for the youth, and projecting images on the screen.

On Saturdays, I was free. I spent the day with the host family; every three months I moved to a new family (who were members of the church). And on Sunday I went to church. In the morning I went to the youth Bible study, and then we all met in the church sanctuary for service. And in the evening, we had church again.

I was also going to meet the lady who helped me when I was in college. Her name was Jane Easterwood. Mrs. Jane is gone now; she is with the Lord. Mrs. Jane was a simple person but had a dedicated heart to the Lord. She lived alone in a rented apartment; her husband had died some years ago. She was very happy to see me!

I visited her and talked to her; we ate together and played cards (it was an American game). There was a time when Mrs. Jane would come

to the church every week to fold the Sunday bulletins. I helped her with that every Thursday. When we were done, sometimes, we would go have lunch together. To me, Mrs. Jane was like a grandmother. When the staff granted me the opportunity to have the welcome for the church, she was very proud of me.

After a year, I returned to my country along with the Oklahoma mission team. I explained earlier that every year a mission team from the US came to Arad (Cheheci) and offered medical examinations and medicines for free, as well as other services like haircuts, Children's ministry, and church services. Because God worked through these people, and because I served in their church, I returned to my country (only for ten days) with these people.

I got to see the people at the church from which I left; I was glad to meet the young people, and also the children of the church. I attended a baptism service for some of the teenagers, and I served the Lord with the people from the US. It was a joy to be able to bring some T-shirts to the children who liked them very much. God had worked so I could send some funds to the church. It was God who worked in my life and gave me different opportunities.

I enjoyed being with my family; they were waiting for me eagerly and we had a great time together! At the same time, I ministered with the team from the US for the benefit of the people in the community. The people here in Arad are very poor and uneducated and it was a great help for them to get free examinations and treatment. The ministry with the children went very well because many children came; but at the same

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time, so many children made it difficult! But the greatest need of the people here was for them to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

After ten days, I returned to America. Here I have had many new and beautiful experiences! One day I left with the church staff for fishing; we were six men. We reached the lake, got in a boat, and went offshore. In the first hour, we didn't catch anything! We were changing the place, but we didn't catch anything. Then somewhere we saw a lot of seagulls. Then we realized that there had to be fish! We pulled the boat in that place, and it was great to catch so many fish, one after the other. In total, we caught one hundred and fifty-three fish. (it was the same number as the number of fishes caught by Peter and other disciples).

In another circumstance, the tornado alarm went off. I was staying with a family church (every 3 months, a new family in the church would offer to host me). In the state of Oklahoma, there are quite frequent tornadoes. I went out, looked at the sky and I could see the funnel. We were all scared, and we realized we needed shelter. The host family did not have a basement to take shelter in; but someone in the church had told me before, that if there was a danger of this kind ever, I should run to him quickly. So, I got in the car and headed that way. On the way to the destination, I could see as I was getting closer to the possible tornado; I was scared. Thank God, I reached the destination, and we all sheltered in the basement. Thankfully, the whirlwind did not make contact with the earth, and the clouds dispersed.



I got to be on the local newspaper



Deacons of First Baptist Church in Woodward, Ok

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*Fishing at Lake Eufaula with Mike Duncan, Tony Barros, Brett Allen
and Les Castor*



Oklahoma Storm Clouds



Children's Ministry in Romania

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PART II

CHAPTER 8

DOUBTING MY SALVATION AND INSECURITY

In 2006, I was going through a trauma that affected my whole life. It was my 2nd year of stay in the US, and the church (First Baptist Church, Woodward, Oklahoma) decided to hold an evangelistic event. The staff invited an evangelist to speak at church for three nights in a row. This man talked about hell and assurance of salvation. He tried to describe hell night after night, instilling a fear of hell; then he talked

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about the assurance of salvation and presented some means by which you could verify your salvation.

What shocked and upset me was that the preacher was saying that I must remember exactly when I received the Lord Jesus in my life. If I could not identify that moment, the preacher believed that I was not saved. In my case, however, salvation was not a moment, but a process. Therefore, I could not identify a clear moment. As a fact, now I know that the preacher was wrong. Also, I was wrong considering too much of what he said instead of considering my relationship with God.

I was only 14 when I received the Lord. However later, I remembered the 2 moments in my life when I was convicted by the Lord (I wrote about them in the introduction of this book). I didn't know much about salvation as a process then, but the idea was that the fear of hell and the inability to find that moment of salvation in my life affected me very much. I was very frightened; I could not sleep for several nights and I became ill.

I would like to emphasize here the importance of the truth of the Word— there is indeed hell, but the foundation of preaching is not hell. The foundation of the preaching is the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Paul said,

"We preach Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:5).

What has the power to change people's lives is the sacrifice of Jesus and His love. In John 3.16 we observe the same central idea, namely: the love of God which was the basis of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER 9

MY ILLNESS

The fear that I experienced, coupled with several sleepless nights worrying about my salvation, led to a mental illness. I realized that something was wrong with me. I was starting to get delirious, but I was not yet aware of the severity of my illness. Only later, as I gradually healed, would I understand how sick I was.

The moment I realized my illness was before the divorce that I was going to go through. I will go into more detail in the next chapter. For now, I just want to talk about the awareness of my illness.

I went to see a doctor, and he told me that I was sick and prescribed medication. However, I was told it was just a deeper depression. I took

the drugs, recovered a little, and because I found out that my nervous system was extremely weak, I started taking a vitamin B complex. What happened next was that, once the first pill was swallowed, a desperate need arose in me to take one more and one more, until I took 50 pills in one day. The nervous system was so weak (because of the continuous stress I lived in, often wondering if I was saved or not), that the body desperately needed a filling.

I began to stabilize; I was better, but I didn't even know then that the disease was going to be something more. My diagnosis was found only when I arrived in Germany and went to the doctor. Doctor Matthias Hensler, who is a psychotherapist in Herdecke, found that I had been suffering from dissociation after many sessions. This means that because of my trauma in the US, my mind could not cope with the trauma and thus, it dissociated.

Therefore, Dr. Hensler has been trying to bring all the parts together. This works, but there is still work to be done. So, my condition is both spiritually and mentally. It started spiritually, and then mentally. Therefore, both sides needed to be addressed.

At first, it was only the spiritual side that was addressed (and I thank those who prayed for me), I took medication to have my body rested. Then I drew near to God, which was not easy. After this, I have been delivered; drawn nearer to God, and also serve God. And now, recently, psychotherapy was needed.

CHAPTER 10

FEAR MOVED ME AWAY FROM GOD

Coming back to what happened to me, after about six months, I returned to Romania. I found a good job; in fact, God offered it to me. I signed up for the exam to be a teacher, and God helped me get a pretty good grade. Thus, I received a substitute teacher position at the school in Vinga, Arad.

Here, I had some beautiful experiences! I had talked with some of my colleagues to use my car traveling from Arad to Vinga, and from Vinga back to Arad. So, the four of us decided to give money for gas each month. There were days when I was low on gas, and yet I chose to go to

school. On returning to Arad, God worked, and my colleagues gave me gasoline money exactly when it was needed.

However, the fear I had in the US (and the illness) would always follow me. Moreover, fear began to move me away from God. Later, when I met a girl, I was trying to find shelter in my relationship with that girl; she had become an idol to me. The girl was Christian, but the relationship didn't start so well.

I married that girl and not long after, we left as missionaries to the southern part of Romania, Oltenia. We moved there. I worked with adults in the church, and my wife worked with the children of the church.

At first, it was ok. I was able to get ready for the job; which was to prepare messages, and also to visit people in the community. I visited people from the church, and also some people from the community. It was funny how people in the community began to know me by using a different slang than them. But gradually my situation worsened. Both the illness and the evil spirits I was influenced by were going to slow me down more and more. I was immersed in a world of thoughts; I had a world of my own. And because we could not cope with the work anymore, we had to return to Arad.

All this time, I still didn't know I was sick. I just knew what happened to me in America and I knew something was wrong with me. (But I did not know that I was ill both mentally and spiritually). Disagreements began to emerge between my wife and me; I could not manage my marriage, on one hand, due to the disease, and on the other hand due to sin—fear has separated me from God, and I should have tried

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to trust God no matter how hard it was; it was hard because fear led me astray from God for several years, and I was also ill.

My mother, who was a Christian but still believed in spells, thought my wife had cast some spells on me (the relationship was not exactly good between my mother and my wife). My wife was not quite open to relating to my parents, and she was fairly dominant (she had grown up in an orphanage). As a fact here, I always put all the blame on me; I could not see her faults. So, going back, the mother resorted to a so-called “priest” who was doing enchantments, thus worsening the situation.

The marriage relationship began to deteriorate. I was no longer able to fulfill my responsibilities as a husband. I was not able to work and provide for the family. It’s hard to say what I should have done. Maybe I should have chosen to believe I was saved. Theoretically, I had to do what I did when I moved to my parents, after divorce: drawing near to God. I know the Metanoia Church was praying a lot for us during that time. Some brothers and sisters told us personally that they were praying for us.

I do not mean that the prayers did not help. Yes, prayers were part of the healing. But the medical treatment was needed also; I needed to sleep and rest. I needed that crazy day when I took 50 pills of vitamin B. But I wondered: could not God cure my illness? Yes, he could! However according to my diagnosis found in Germany (dissociation / multiple personalities), healing had to take place in different stages; different parts of me were trapped in the past, especially when I was in America. The

biggest part of healing was not (and is not) medicines, but psychotherapy and Counseling.

Thus, because of the disease, and because of the sin of idolatry towards my wife, I could not manage my marriage. The relationship with my wife was getting worse, so she soon chose to break up with me. She went to Germany with a cousin, and, because I was left with her sister in the apartment, I moved in with my parents.

What happened once I moved was the fact that drawing near to God, I came out of the sin of idolatry and also became aware of my illness. I am not saying I was not responsible for my marriage decay. I don't know why I had to get out of that frame, so I could get out of the sin of idolatry. This is a biblical principle. Thus, I began to become aware that my mental illness started in the United States.

I spoke with Pastor Cristian Barbosu about my illness, and then I went to the doctor and he prescribed medicines. The doctor couldn't find an exact diagnosis for me. I started taking medicines and slowly I started to feel better.

One day, I was reading the Bible; I was reading about Jesus' sermon on the mountain. I read verse 7 which says

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will have mercy."

In the evening when I lay down, and while I was dealing with my illness, I heard a voice in my conscience saying: *"I feel sorry for you!"*. God spoke to me and reminded me of what I read. By the way, the Holy Spirit reminds us only of what we have read. We must first read the Bible,

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and then the Holy Spirit will speak to us. So, God, who knew my illness, better than I knew, told me he had mercy on me.

Also, my being, my brain had been cleared out of most of my memories. Most of the memories were erased from my mind! That was because of the fear I lived in for many years; my brain was no longer functioning as it should have. Parts of my brain were numb. What I want to reveal is that I was practically lifeless. God brought me to life somewhere from 2 percent, which I had left. Now, I know I am not a doctor, but I know how low I was with my condition.

As someone said,

*“I don't have to look for a miracle; I am the miracle
myself!”*

CHAPTER 11

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

As I said, I began to draw near to God, to read more intensely from the Bible, to confess my sin of idolatry, and to repent of it. I began to fight for my marriage; I told my wife about my illness (I understood that I was wrong that I didn't tell her from the beginning that something was wrong with me; I knew it was hard on her), and I continued to visit her trying to rebuild the relationship with her.

My wife wanted a divorce and In one circumstance, she called her older brother who threatened to beat me. I believe she already had someone else in her life. She filed the papers for divorce and, in my absence, the divorce was pronounced. I continued to draw near to God

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and, little by little, I began to win battles over the devil. And 4 years later I got married again.

I regularly attended church and the death of a pastor very close to me (Andreican Mircea) drew me even nearer to God. God talked to me while at the funeral service; he spoke to me about my condition. Then I dedicated myself to the Lord, and I became even more involved in the ministry and wished that one day I would become a pastor.

Sometime later, "Faith" Baptist Church chose me as an assistant to Pastor Bîrniș Stefan (who was to be my father-in-law), but I also wanted another church, somewhere out in the country. I felt that I had a great freedom, to serve God and to grow as a leader in the church; which I did not have during my marriage, as I was better and my wife was pretty dominant.

Together with other people, I came to establish a children's center at Faith church in Arad. We had about 25-30 children who regularly came to the children's meetings. We met twice a week with them, and we tried (me, my brother Mitru, Madalina, and her mother, Mihaela) to deal with them both spiritually (with songs and Bible lessons), as well as educationally (we were doing homework), and socially (we bought school supplies, backpacks, shoes, and clothes). Plus, for each meeting, we offered them a snack or some fruit).

A couple of times, when I saw other Christians and even some of my Seminary colleagues, doing well in life and ministry, I got emotional and asked why. Why my life and ministry couldn't have been nice and smooth? My wife who was beside me said: "*Johnny, God has something*

more for you!" Other times, I asked God why he had allowed me to experience living in the US. And the answer I received was that God is Sovereign! I heard God speak to me several times saying that he had a plan; he wanted to use me. (Now the only thing I am sorry about is that I have not cooperated with God as I should have.)

Also, the Bible says that *"all things work together for the good of those who love God; for the good of those who are called according to God's plan."* I humbly and boldly want to say that I know that God allowed this painful experience in my life for the benefit of others. I know I was not the only one who has experienced such a situation in America; in fact, there were several others, who were experiencing such moments (though perhaps to a lesser degree, because they got help). And I know there was one person who said he truly got saved then. If he had not been saved till then, then this is great. But I believe that God wants to help those who have lived or who are living my kind of experience.

The truth of the Bible is not that fear of Hell is the foundation of preaching! The foundation of the preaching is the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus! Only the sacrifice of Jesus and His love can change people's lives.

There are young people who, if they received Jesus at an early age, come to doubt the experience of salvation. They come later to ask *"Did I believe?"* When in fact, not the measure of faith, not the identification of the moment, not even the reality of struggling with a sin, verifies or validates our salvation.

What confirms our salvation is the fact that we have believed and received the Lord Jesus in our lives. It all starts here – to believe in Jesus

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and receive Him. Then, this will be demonstrated through a new life (regeneration).

In 1 John, which is a great book that tells us how we know that we belong to Christ, there are a few proofs that we have been saved, but before that, the approach John has is outstanding and very important. He doesn't say to the people he wrote: *"Read the epistle and see if you are saved"* but he says *"Because you have been saved, read and have assurance"*. I am not saying that there are no people who have false assurance. Pastor John MacArthur says in his book *Saved without a Doubt*, that there are such people.

However, my friend, if you are doubting your salvation, the first thing you need to do is to believe you are saved. It's that simple, but at the same time not easy. Not easy, because I know where you are standing. But before looking for proof of your salvation wrecking your mind, you need to BELIEVE YOU ARE SAVED. It's hard because, like me, you might have fears. But you have to choose to believe. Once you choose to believe, pretty soon you will start feeling that you are saved. You will see the Lord work in your life, and you will hear Him speak to you. The battle is not over, but you are drawing near to God.

Now going back to the book of John, the purpose of writing this book was to reassure Christians in their faith and to counter false teaching. And the proofs presented here for being a child of God are:

1. You have believed in Jesus, which is the Holy Spirit convicted you, you believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for your

sins, and you accept Him. 1 John 3:23 says *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ*. Also, John 1:12 says: *He came to that which was His own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*.

2. You have a desire for God. 1 John 2:3-4 says: “*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands*”. The man who says I know him but does not do what he commands is a liar. So, that means that you want to go to church, read your bible, and obey his commands.

3. You love your brethren. 1 John 2:10-11 says: “*Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble but whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness*”.

4. You do not keep on sinning. The Bible says in 1 John 3:8-9: “*He who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work*”. No one who is born of God will continue to sin because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God. Not that you do not sin; but you don’t make a practice of sinning. We all have areas where temptation is strong, and we may struggle with a particular sin, but John is not talking about people whose victories are still incomplete; he is talking about people who make a practice of sinning.

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Three steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin; seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God's word; stay away from tempting situations; and seek the help of the body of Christ.

That is why, my dear reader, if you are facing problems with your salvation; if you doubt your salvation, take heart! If you have received Jesus by faith, and you believe in him, you are saved! If you have a desire for God, you are saved! What you need to do is to remain in Him, continue in Him. 1 John 2:24-25 says:

"See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and the Father. And this is what he promised us even eternal life".

Also, you need to move on and start growing. Read your Bible, especially 2 Peter 1, and add virtue upon virtue, go to church, get involved, and use the spiritual gift the Lord has given you.

I am not attacking anyone. I am just telling my story! The devil can use sermons like "You have to remember the time of your conversion." Or "that faith as a teenager was not authentic." Or "Look at your facts; you are still struggling with that sin." I understand that there are people who believe in universalism; people who believe they will all go to heaven; and it is they who must be preached salvation and assurance of salvation. And I know this is hard too, because you need to know your audience. But, it all comes down to having a Biblical message.

And I want to point out that the evangelist who preached such ideas was not of FBC Woodward, OK; he was only a guest. But I believe such messages could lead to great damage, and I know what I am talking about! Nights I could not sleep— fear, anxiety, stress, and illness. I believe that God allowed that experience into my life, precisely to help people who have faced, or are facing doubt about their salvation. I know I have a blameful part because I have strayed from God because of fear, and I did not draw near to God any sooner, but this is my story. This is where God pulled me out! But you, my dear reader, don't have to go through what I have gone through.

Also, James says in his epistle, the following words: *“My brethren, look on as a great joy in passing through many trials, as some who know that the test of your faith is patiently working. But patience must do its work, so that you may be complete, whole, and not lacking in anything.”*

James says to rejoice when we are in trouble. That is, we should rejoice, not in tribulation; but let us enjoy what causes the trouble. Trouble produces patience, and patience produces maturity. Here the word ‘perfect’ means mature (as in Colossians 1:28). Therefore, Peter goes on saying, *“Be whole and not lack in anything.”* God wants us to mature! And for that He uses trouble.

CHAPTER 12

DELIVERANCE

Shortly after I started to draw near to God, I realized that my life was under the influence of some spirits, and demons. Fear (that began in the 2nd part of my stay in the US) and straying from God (because of fear) had led me to unbelief and that allowed the presence of some demons that influenced my life. It's not about being possessed, because a child of God cannot be possessed but he can be influenced by spirits. I know it may sound strange to some people, but it is true!

I remember being home with my parents, and I was beginning to feel the presence of some demons; I was living in fear, and also my whole

body tingled. The idea was that, as I drew near to God, the work of the evil one was exposed. Also, as I healed, other stages of the disease came to light. As I mentioned, I suffer from a mental illness called dissociation - which means that the mind can no longer cope with a crisis or trauma, and thus, it dissociates. Thus, you can go on in life, but parts of you that have dissociated remain in the past. This means, that on the outside, you may look all right, but on the inside, you are damaged. Every time I dissociated, there were parts of me that became hidden. But when I began to heal, those parts came to light.

For several days, my father and I prayed that God would remove those spirits, and I felt God delivered me from those spirits, one by one. When I felt the presence of an evil spirit, I prayed and then I felt God's presence strongly, and then I felt how the demonic presence left and lost its power.

It was very difficult for me at that time; especially at night. I felt the presence of those spirits that influenced my life. I talked to my dad about it, and every night my dad was sleeping in my room. Whenever needed, Dad prayed for me. I thank my parents for their great help and support!

It's interesting how God worked in my father's life. If before repentance he was a curse; after repenting, he became a blessing! God freed me from those spirits, and if I write these lines, I write them to testify to the work of God and to glorify him for what he has done in my life.

CHAPTER 13

MARRIAGE, SERVICE AND TRANSFORMATION

A few months passed and God brought a Christian girl into my life. I felt like I had to start my life again. Four years had passed since the divorce. I prayed to God to lead me and I saw how on different occasions, He would confirm my relationship with this Christian girl. For example, we found out that we both wrote the same final school paper; I wrote my final paper, "*The Life of Joseph*" and she wrote - during some Bible courses - about the life of Joseph as well.

We got married and moved to Germany (my wife Felicia, had been living in Germany), and because there are many Romanians in the little town we moved to, God has urged us to open up a Romanian church. I

thank God for my wife; I thank her for her love, for her care and patience towards me.

So, now, we both - I and my wife Felicia - serve the Lord at the Romanian Baptist Church in Gevelsberg (there are a few hundred Romanian Gypsies here). We have been ministering here for about three years and there are between twenty and twenty-five adults. We've had several people that were baptized. We have a children's ministry, and we had several baby dedications. My brother Mitru is doing music— if you remember, gypsy people like music very much, which is good. The thing that is less good to minister to gypsies is that the Pastor does not get paid. But for me, it was anyway a good opportunity to serve the Lord and plant this Romanian church. And also, Germany was the place where God put me for a while to give me healing and restoration. I don't think I could have made it in Romania, especially in my gypsy community.

We gather together within the German Baptist church here. Felicia, my wife, has a close connection with the German church. Just before I arrived in Germany, Felicia and her Pastor came to Romania, to my gypsy community, with a semi-truck filled with Christmas presents. There were about 200 children at the church that day, who received gifts (shoe boxes). It was wonderful.

CHAPTER 14

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION AND RESTORATION

God has worked in my life and little by little, step by step, He has brought restoration spiritually, mentally, and physically and I praise God for that. Although I am much improved, I am still not fully restored. I am still in the process. But I have come a long way.

Recently, I've done some counseling with a Pastor here in Germany, and it has been very helpful. When I was at Metanoia church, I was being counseled by pastor Cristian Barbosu and his wife Anne, and it helped, but at the time, I was quite far away from the Lord then because of fear, and because I did not know what was wrong with me. There were

different stages of my spiritual condition. Coming back to when there was a lot of spiritual warfare in my life— whenever I felt that, the Pastor told me to tell Satan to leave in Jesus' name. Then, I began to put my past behind me and believe in the present that I am saved. Then, I asked the Lord to close those open doors that I opened while I had the fear in the US, and by which Satan had access.

I found out that actually, I did not have to try to talk to or solve the parts from the past when they came to light with my dissociation and the work of the devil. I learned I was supposed to ignore them and not listen to them, as they were lying to me. They were always dragging me into the past. Then, I gave them to the Lord, to heal them. Then I gave my past worries and fears to God.

As soon as I did that, I felt God working through my dissociation. I still struggle with illness in my life and I still receive counseling and psychotherapy sessions. I need to have both, as it is both illness and spiritual, and when a part of the past comes out, I admit that it is dissociation, but I give that part to the Lord and ask Him to heal me. I am amazed at God's work in my life.

The thing I am sorry about is that I did not cooperate with God any sooner, I did not dare to learn to communicate and express myself. I would often repress my feelings or myself because of fear and shame. Now, I am working on my communication, and it is getting better.

Also, I have realized that because I had thought I was not saved and because of fear, I had self-righteousness; there was a part of me that was always trying to do things and live the Christian life through my efforts.

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It was me trying to do this and do that. But I gave it to the Lord. You see, until recently, it was me trying to fix that part of the past, but I learned that I need to give them to the Lord and ask Him to heal them. Now, I believe I am saved through grace, by faith in Jesus; just as I believed when I was only a 14-year-old boy.

Also, a friend told me about a book called Healing for Damaged Emotions, by David A. Seamands. I had a lot of emotions that needed to be healed, and when I began to read, I realized I had to forgive that preacher who caused me the trauma. It was not easy as I still felt anger, but God helped me forgive him.

I also listened to the series on damaged emotions by Dr. Charles Stanley. I had a lot of fear, anxiety, shame, and anger, and through scriptures, God started to heal me. Isaiah 41:10 says;

*“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed,
for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”.*

So, when you fear, give it to the Lord. The antidote for fear is God's presence. Philippians 4:6 which says;

*“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything
by prayer and petition with Thanksgiving present your
request to God.”*

IOAN MURGU

I had a lot of anxiety about whether I would go to heaven or not, and I gave it to the Lord. And the Scriptures told me I was saved. You see, it was always me trying to fight in my power, saying I was saved, and there was a time when I even had to say I was not saved, so that, admitting it was not in my power, God worked in my life even more. So, just like the song, I am who You say I am.

I am glad God brought assurance of salvation into my life. 1 John has helped me very much. Chapter 1: 1-2 says:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked at and our hands have touched this we proclaim concerning the word of life the life appeared we have seen it and testified to it and we proclaim it to you the eternal life which was with the father and has appeared to us”.

I was always obsessed with wanting heaven more than anything else. John links eternal life with Jesus which was with the Father and who has appeared to us. and in chapter 5 verses 11 and 12 John tells us *“This is the testimony God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son he who has the son has life he who does not have the son of God does not have life”*. It is that simple.

I learned that the more I love God and my brothers, the more evident my assurance and confidence is. Now I am closer to God and I feel him, I hear him talk to me when reading scripture, and I am more efficient to I

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serve him through my gift of preaching. God has done some amazing things in my life. I mean some parts were trapped in the life beyond, I was not leaving the reality but God has healed me.

First, he did that through awareness. I became aware of how I used to be, and then it was the Holy Spirit who taught me and changed me. So, if you believe in Jesus there are some traits about you. You will love God (and if you are fearful and you're not sure anymore about that, you still want to love him), love the brothers, the Bible; you have humility (when I obtained assurance of salvation, I had a feeling of humility again), and you have a desire to do what's right. As John McArthur said: *"It's not the perfection of life but the direction."*

I have also learned to love my wife and care for her, I have learned how to lead my family; my wife and I have spent time reading the Bible and praying together. We go to church together, and we are both growing. And I can fulfill some responsibilities— I try to work at something, to pastor my small church. I have helped my wife clean people's houses or mow lawns. And I have started to serve my wife, and also to care for her sick mother who is living with us.

We are also thinking of becoming missionaries for Romania, working with the children of Checheci. There is a small Baptist Church called Faith church where I grew up. Children are very poor in this community, and there are many needs. They need clothing, shoes, school bags, and school supplies, but most of all they need someone to tell them about Jesus and teach them. Also, youth ministry is so much needed in the community, and many youth use drugs and alcohol.

So, I am just thankful to the Lord for his mercy and love, and for his work in me. Also, I thank God for giving me this wonderful opportunity to write this book. I hope it was interesting and helpful for you. May God bless you and if you were doubting your salvation, I hope you drew near to God and obtained assurance.

Next, I wrote a few very important topics that are very practical for the Christian life. The topics are *Spiritual Warfare*, *The Spiritual and psychological of a mental illness*, and *Moving from fear to Courage*.

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PRACTICAL TOPICS

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power.

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

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¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. **Ephesians 6**

I know spiritual warfare is something we all go through. It's a battle. I just want to stress some ideas. In my case, spiritual warfare was very intense. On one hand, I gave in when I was in the US, and I thought I was not saved, and I lost territory. On the other hand, God has allowed this.

First of all, the Bible says we have an enemy, and we are in a battle. You have to admit your battle. It's your battle, and no one will fight for you. Don't ignore the battle nor argue. If you fight with your mind, you will lose. If you feel you are spiritually attacked, don't argue with Satan. Don't wreck your mind, but go in prayer and give that thought to God. The battle belongs to the Lord. So whatever Satan tells you, you put on the armor of God through prayer.

And sometimes, if you are being attacked especially at night, and you feel pressure in your mind, it's good to get out of that state. That means you have to get up and try to make a few steps. Don't stay in your boxing corner.

Also, another thing is that the Bible says, "*Submit to God and resist the devil.*" We are to submit to God, that is, draw near to God and give God control, and then resist the devil, and he will flee. So, you are in a battle but don't fight alone, take God with you. And He will give you victory.

Also, with time you will learn. In fact, the Holy Spirit will teach you how to have victories in your battle. Because we don't depend on a method; we depend on a relationship.

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

My Theology Professor, Paul Negrut, who was also a Psychiatrist, was once asked, *‘Preacher, if we have God with us, then why do we still need psychological help?’* My Professor replied; *‘If you are a Christian and trust God, why are you wearing eyeglasses?’*

Many Christians believe that if you are a Christian, you should not need psychological help if you are ill. I believe, both biblically and from my own experience, that if you have a mental illness, spiritual and psychological aspects go together. There are different diagnoses, like depression, psychosis, schizophrenia, or dissociation, which I had. But in

each case, I believe both the spiritual part and the psychological part need to be addressed.

In my case, the root of the problem was spiritual, and because of fear, there was an open door for evil spirits to come and influence my mind. That's why I needed deliverance. Many Scriptures can help you recover mentally and spiritually, and I already talked about verses that helped me with anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger. But I also needed medical treatment, especially pills to calm down and sleep. The most spiritual thing you can do when you can't sleep is to get to sleep. So, medicines that help you calm down, I think it's okay.

I am not getting into approaches like EMDR or other things, but even this helped me to find my safe place. Then the key to recovering from my illness was communication. Communication with a psychotherapist, communication with yourself, especially if you have parts that were trapped in the past and you have to communicate with yourself and see what other parts want and why is that thing important. Because the aim is to become a whole person.

Then you need communication with other people. I know, there is fear and shame, but with time you will learn to put yourself and your health above. And of course, communication has to be in your family and also with friends according to your nature.

Other helpful things are physical exercise, walking, fresh air, food, especially fermented food, which is good for the brain. And of course, sleep.

MOVING FROM FEAR TO COURAGE

Five things will move you from fear to courage. These things are based on the story of Gideon.

1. **The presence of God will give you courage** – The Angel of the Lord told Gideon, “*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.*” Now, Gideon was living in a time when there was great fear among the Israelites. Gideon was threshing the wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites who would come and take their crops. David says in Psalm 23, “*Though I shall go through the Valley of Death, You are with me.*”

2. Trust in God will give you courage – The Israelites were getting ready to fight the Midianites when the Lord told Gideon that they were too many. Lest they would say they had the victory, God said, “*Whoever is afraid, let him go home.*” Ten thousand went home. Then the Lord said there were still too many. After the second selection, the people that were to fight were only 300. Why? Because the people could have said that they had victory because of their number. But with 300 against 135 thousand, victory would be impossible. So, Gideon had to trust God.

3. Obedience to God will give you courage – Gideon was told by God to tear down the altar of Baal, who was the idol of the Israelites, and the altar of his father. Gideon did this, although it was a risk. Then during that night, the Lord said to Gideon,

“Get up, and go down against the camp because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp. So, he and Purah, his servant, went down to the outposts of the camp.”

God wants to give us courage when we are afraid, but we need to do something. We need to make a step, to get out of the house.

Past experiences will give you courage - Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. “*I had a dream,*” he was saying. “A

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round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.”

His friend responded, *“This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.”* When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, *“Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands.”* When we look back or when we look around, we will find strength and testimonies that will encourage us.

The relationship with God and walking with Him will give you courage – When we read the Word, the Holy Spirit will give us understanding and power to live close to a loving and all-powerful God. We will feel secure. The more we draw near to God and have a close relationship with Him, the more love and power we have.

4. Past Experiences Will Give You Courage - Gideon arrived just as a man was telling his friend about his dream. *“I had a dream,”* he said. *“A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.”* His friend responded, *“This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.”* When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshipped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, *“Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp*

into your hands.” When we look back or around, we will find strength and testimonies that will encourage us.

5. Your Relationship with God and Walking with Him Will Give You Courage - When we read the Word, the Holy Spirit gives us understanding and power to live close to a loving and all-powerful God, making us feel secure. The more we draw near to God and have a close relationship with Him, the more love and power we possess.

To God be the glory.

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My Parents & I

IOAN MURGU



In Woodward, OK, USA at the Rodeo Parade

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Super Summer is a leadership camp for Christian teens and is held at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, OK every summer.



Falls Creek is a summer camp for teenagers near Davis, OK.

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Me and my wife Felicia

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Romanian Baptist Church in Gevelsberg

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