

# GOD'S ALLSTAR BASEBALL TEAM

**Art Zehr**



*Messianic & Christian Publisher*

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## Endorsements

*Pastor Art Zehr has written an intriguing autobiography and a very insightful as well as enjoyable comparison of the baseball diamond of performance and God's diamond of grace. He writes straight from the heart with an endearing openness that will capture the heart of many a reader. It surely has captured mine!*

*Pastor Zehr emphasizes that interpersonal relations are of the greatest importance and that a personal relationship with Jesus is all-important. His evangelistic message is very clear: we are saved by Grace. He makes it also clear that we can only succeed in this life or the life to come by the selfless love of God. The ultimate message in this book is that without selfless love we cannot have a transformed, victorious, and abundant life.*

*The author presents us with a valuable, courageous and heartwarming account of one man's search for meaning and purpose in life. It is valuable because it reminds us all that every person is significant in the eyes of God and ought to be significant in our eyes as well. It is courageous because Pastor Zehr dares to be transparent in a world that seems to prefer vagueness over clarity. It is heartwarming because it reminds us that most of us, most of the time, can be overcomers in this life.*

*I love this book and cannot wait to give a copy of it to my dear grandson, Zachary Brandt, one of America's finest young baseball players. He too will love this book and so will his friends. And speaking of America, Pastor Zehr has done a good job by giving us a book that delivers the kind of soothing medicine that our country greatly needs.*

*Dr. Frans M. J. Brandt, EdD, LPC, LMFT  
Author, Counselor and Psychotherapist*

*Here is a man not afraid to share the ups and downs of his life, ministry, and relationship with the Lord. After reading his book, not only do I know baseball a little better, I know Art, a minister under the umbrella of Mt. Zion, who has dedicated His life to demonstrating the principles of God's Kingdom on earth.*

*Joseph G. Milosec, Minister and author,  
Mt. Zion, Clarkson, MI*

*Pastor Art possesses both an informal and a unique method for presenting deep spiritual concepts and precepts in a very interesting and creative manner. This book is easy to read but it is not an easy read. Like a provocative sermon, it may challenge you for days or weeks.*

*I consider Pastor Art, with deepest respect, to sometimes be a spiritual savant. He has many times during personal conversations revealed profound spiritual insights totally unaware. This is especially true when he prays for people and their situations. I have personally greatly benefited from his prayerful interventions.*

*His ministry has always been based on restoration: first to God, then to the kingdom. He always has had a special understanding and a double portion of compassion for the emotionally helpless, broken hearted and marginalized. His compassion also extends to pastors and churches who are hurting—Godly people who need a safe place to vent, reflect and pray. These are the tenants that AZ Ministries is founded upon.*

*This book shares his struggles and revelations from forty years of ministry. I believe you will thoroughly enjoy it.*

*Let me add that I have been a close personal friend of Pastor Art for over fifteen years. In our numerous conversations he has always been very respectful of the different denominations and their traditions—especially the Catholics. His view that denominational worship has its place, but that the Kingdom Church is far greater in Jesus' heart, has greatly influenced me and my theology. I can now say I am a practicing Kingdom/Catholic—in that order. Thank you, Pastor Art.*

*Gary Hayward  
Teacher/Seeker, Flushing, MI*

*Why do I think my dad knows baseball?*

*Fact #1: He plays fantasy baseball and one year he came in 3rd in the nation out of thousands of participants. The winner makes projections of how major league players will play for the following year with the major media involved.*

*(continued)*

*Fact #2: He was my coach growing up and 100% of the players that he had coached on my teams ALWAYS stated that he was the best coach, the most fair, and most fun to play for. They stated we won a lot because of his talent in coaching and he was also able to balance winning with being fair in getting everyone with varying levels of skill and talent to play in the games.*

*Fact #3: I witnessed him talking to two other people at a major league game with the opponents' jerseys on. Initially, they were giving the body language they did not want to speak to him for obvious reasons. By the end of the game they were turned around, not watching the game anymore, asking him specific questions about the game of baseball. He clearly had compelled them to change their minds that relevant, accurate, and truthful knowledge can come from any source; even one that initially appears to be the opposition.*

*Why do I think my dad thinks outside the box?*

*The Bible wrote about the letter of the law in the Old Testament and the spirit of the law in the New Testament. Jesus was the perfect balance of both. As my dad has matured through life in his unique way, he has been able to achieve this understanding and been able to apply this critical balance in many outside-the-box ways, including in this baseball analogy. I am proud of his efforts, and years ago I gave him the award for MOST IMPROVED DAD. Isn't that what we are all striving for, to become the most improved we can through GOD?*

*Read about one man's journey in baseball, God, and life, and I guarantee it will compel you to think through how you can also improve.*

*Kelson Zehr, MA, LPC, LSW, CRC, CCM, CAADC, CEAP  
Licensed Professional Counselor*

*My Dad has written a unique book that describes his personal journey through life and with God, together with a new and modern theme that relates to everyone: the baseball diamond of life. This book does not require any special knowledge or even love for the sport of baseball. Rather, it showcases the theme of the beloved sport to explore important life topics and your relationship with God.*

*Well known and colorful Biblical figures form God's "baseball team" and directly relate to modern character issues as we struggle to achieve grace in our walk of life. You will smile as you recall the many foibles and miraculous strengths that endear us to these historical Biblical stories and characters, and you will find yourself connecting in new ways that personally affect your life. The autobiographical background is heartfelt. The personal walk of the author, as he is at times rejecting and then welcoming the hand of God, explores how we should embrace our past mistakes and triumphs on the field of life.*

*Read this book and you will be reminded of the simple connection with God that must be the foundation for your faith. The tone is enthusiastic and supports what many of us have forgotten or never learned: That our walk with God is to be a walk of joy; not a task or duty, and not solely conditioned by church communities, but rather, by the strength and commitment that comes first from a direct relationship with God. Many facets of our life (especially sports and other hobbies) are topics that are never connected to God as we tend to compartmentalize our lives. This book renews the meaningful interconnection of applying your faith to all topics of life (including the fun stuff!) and the strength of character that only comes from human "errors" and circling back to what we knew in the first place but have perhaps misplaced: The joy of a relationship with God is easy and is in fact a choice.*

*Starla D. Zehr, Attorney-at-Law*

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Our prayer at Olive Press is that we may help make the Word of Adonai fully known, that it spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere. We hope our books help open people's eyes so they will turn from darkness to Light and from the power of the adversary to God and to trust in ישוע Yeshua (Jesus). (From II Thess. 3:1; Col. 1:25; Acts 26:18,15 NRSV and CJB, the *Complete Jewish Bible*)  
May this book in particular help draw men to answer God's call to them.

In honor to God, pronouns referring to the Trinity are capitalized, satan's names are not. But not all Bible versions do this and legally must be printed as they are.

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*This book is dedicated to my  
family, friends, and mentors, and  
those whom I have mentored.*

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank everyone who has encouraged me in obeying God by heading to my “Nineveh”—writing this book! These people include my good friend, Gary Hayward and his wife and sons, my wonderful friend and mentor Dr. Frans M. J. Brandt. It includes my kids Starla and Kelson (on the front cover at bat), my pastor Loren Covarrubias and his wife Bonnie and all my friends at Mt. Zion Church. It also includes my dad who is pictured on the front cover at 90 years old. He’s the one who introduced me to baseball and he will be the first to receive a copy of this book.

I would also like to thank my editor/publisher, Cheryl Zehr. I was sold (and my board was too when I told them later) when she said, “I try not to change the author’s voice. I depend on God’s inspiration and direction. I make sure the author agrees on everything, and we leave all in God’s timing.” She was clearly not motivated by money. I felt comfortable telling her about my weakest points in life for this book. I saw the spirit of Olive Press writings. It was not a religious spirit, but the Holy Spirit.

Finally and most sincerely, I thank the Holy Spirit for His revelation. To God be the glory!

## Foreword

This book is written to share the Good News of Jesus Christ (the diamond of Life) and to encourage and support others in their faith walk in following the Holy Spirit, and to equip saints with an understanding of their ministry and release them into fruitful function.

The Holy Spirit is calling the church to prepare and make ready. If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged, but if we hide sin in our hearts and cling to what is wrong, judgment will come to us.

When we fail, if we turn to the Lord, He is merciful. One appointed Sunday evening in 1987 I had an overwhelming spiritual experience. God let me know that my failure had not spoiled His divine plan. My spark that was almost out was re-ignited by the Holy Spirit into a fire that cannot be quenched. Now I live “saved by grace, justified by faith, sanctified by mercy, surrounded by love, endowed with power from on high, encouraged by the community of saints, and kept safely in the palm of God’s hand!” [Dr. Frans M. J. Brandt, *The Renewed Mind*, p. 21, copyright 1982,1984,1999, WinePress Publishing, P.O. Box 428, Enumclaw, WA 98022.]

JESUS certainly did not die for us so we could be joyless and miserable. He actually said in John 10:10 that He came so we could have life and enjoy it. Imagine that! Jesus wants us to enjoy life! I pray this book will be a HOME RUN for you and that you become inspired by GOD with the joy of the LORD in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. Let’s spread the GOOD NEWS THAT SERVING JESUS IS A JOYFUL THING!

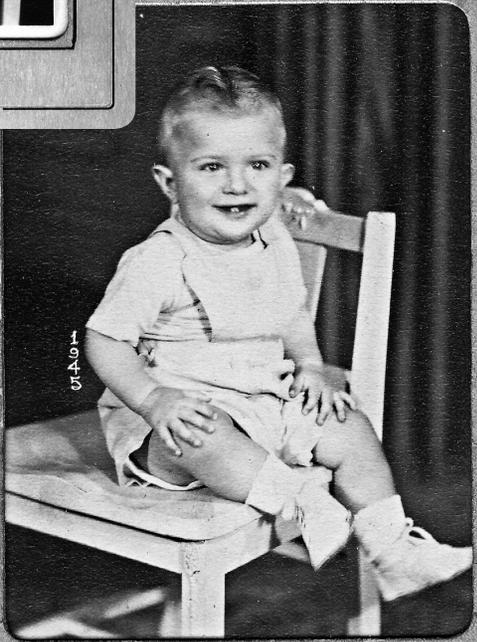
I know this baseball analogy  
is not the answer for everything.  
Only Jesus  
the Truth, the Way, and the Life  
is the complete answer for everything.

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Me at eight months, not able to sit up yet due to being born premature.



Me a hefty 26 lbs. at age one.

## Chapter 1

## Chosen

“God, WHAT is the bottom line here?”

“WHERE, Savior, can I find Your Spirit and attitude in this?”

“Lord, teach me HOW to perceive, understand, and apply Your Heart in my part of Your eternal purposes.”

“WHEN?” Now!

Get on your mark, get set, GO!!!!

The race of life started for me at 4:21 pm on July 28, 1944 in Lowville, New York. I was the first son of three to Floyd and Laura Zehr. I came early (over a month), and weighed in at 4 pounds 13 ounces!

The first question my dad asked was, “Will he make it?” You see, my mother had trouble getting pregnant. One of her sisters was also not able to conceive, so my mother assumed this was true for her. Then she did get pregnant but had a miscarriage. So the whole time she was carrying me, they wondered if they would lose me. Then I came early and tiny. So now you see why my father asked if I would make it. He has asked that question many times since, and as I write this book in his 92<sup>nd</sup> year, he probably is still asking that question!

What a celebration party they gave me! What attention and affirmation! Everybody was praying in faith and hope, believing I would make it. Would my lungs be okay? Would I be able to talk?

Mom exclaimed to me years later, “Your dad told you to ‘Grow up!’ and you did! You went from four pounds to 26 pounds in just one year!”

[Our heavenly father also says to us, “Grow up! Mature in the faith!” Will we listen to Him? We will address how to become mature sons later. For now let’s get back to the story.]

When the trouble was over—the storm past—when there were no more worries about my health and after a couple brothers came along, I found out the party was also over! There was little attention—little affirmation, and I was allowed to talk only a little.

I ran everywhere looking for someone to talk to. Some would give me a few minutes and then come up with different excuses to try to stop me most times. Everybody seemed too busy to meet my main need: a listening ear to fill my loneliness. I began to think, “Maybe I am not that important.” I didn’t know who I was or if I belonged, or if I would make it.

I did find one person that gave me the time of day. It was my neighbor, Nevin. My dad and mom said we could never have had better neighbors than Nevin Lehman and his wife, Donna. He had been my dad’s boss while also being the neighborhood barber out of his home part-time. By the time I was eight years old, he was a barber full-time in the barber shop at his house, and he was also my bus driver. He had a small barn behind his barber shop. His barn had only one door. Nevi always had time for me. I appreciated his attention and affirmation. We were always bantering and kidding. Being a runner, I was always telling him, “You can’t catch me!” He would chase me, but I always got away.

One day in his barn, he told me, “If you say that one more time, I will catch you and throw you into the pigpen.” I didn’t listen to him because I was sure I could outrun him. But I didn’t realize that he had locked the barn door. So he caught me and lifted me up to pretend to throw me into the pigpen. I wrestled him as he was lifting me in the air. This threw him off balance which caused him to lose his hold on me and into the pigpen I went! What a mess! Mom would not like this!!



**GOOD NEIGHBORS** - Art and Carlton Zehr, sons of Floyd Zehr of Croghan, visit with their neighbor, Nevin Lehman (right) and his dog. Floyd says the Zehrs and the Lehmans were good friends and good neighbors. The snapshot was taken about the spring of 1950.

Mom was my hero. I thought the world of her, and I always wanted to please her. Bringing pigpen filth into the house would definitely not help with that! I didn’t want to have to explain it to her. I wanted to be perfect in her eyes.

I KNEW I had crossed the line. Which part of Nevin’s “no” had I not understood? I knew I was in the wrong spirit and attitude. I had perceived, understood, and applied my thoughts and feelings wrongly. God was using Nevin for His eternal purposes. Would I get my part right? No, not yet. I was not ready to change.

I didn’t blame Nevin. I blamed myself. I couldn’t lie to Mom, but I prayed she would never know. I came in by the back door of the house and made sure I washed out my clothes myself so she wouldn’t find out. Nevi (his nickname that I used in casual moments) and I had made a pact that my mom would never hear of it. I actually never did come totally clean with her about it. I wanted affirmation so badly that I couldn’t take the

risk of letting this poor performance be known. I overly wanted to please Mom who represented the “church” to me.

I was in the race of life, the diamond of performance. I tried so hard to be perfect and to not fail! This didn’t bring me much joy!

*M*y mother, coming from a large family, learned to be a hard worker. She was number six of thirteen children—a baker’s dozen! Her parents were very caring, nurturing people who took care of others besides their own thirteen kids. When the children were older and leaving home, my grandmother took care of the elderly in her home. They sold the farm and bought a big house where she cared for up to six people at a time.

To show you a little of what a wonderful person my mom was, here is a prayer she embroidered on one of her special dish towels.

### **A Kitchen Prayer**

Bless my little kitchen, Lord  
I love its very look  
And guide me as I do my best  
Especially when I cook.

May the food I prepare  
Be seasoned from above  
With thy blessing and thy grace  
But most of all thy love.

So bless my little kitchen, Lord  
And those who share my bread  
Bless its homey atmosphere  
And all those I have fed.

My mother had a tremendous work ethic. She worked outside the home doing professional cleaning for a lot of professionals, people well-respected in the community. They would ask for her specifically and she picked which ones she would work for. Later

on, people asked her to teach them how to drive. (This was before driver’s ed, of course.) All total, she gave driving lessons to a lot of people in the community so they could get their license.

So you see, Mom was very particular about things. And coming from a large family, she didn’t miss a thing. That’s why I couldn’t get away with much. And do you think I never tried? No wonder I had to go to people like Nevi, because “you couldn’t get away with nothing” around Mom!

*T*here were some special times to look forward to in my life. My father, nicknamed Samsie, was a good ball player and a great, successful manager. As a family we spent a lot of time at the ball field. At games, there was a lot of party celebration, along with affirmation, joyfulness, and praise. The cars even honked their horns at the great hits and field plays. And people would go wild when we won, which happened often! If someone struck out or made a bad play, the crowd would encourage or support them anyway! As a young child I always wondered why there was more celebration, affirmation, encouragement, and support on the ball field than in the church.

Sometimes the realities of life are tough. We develop all kinds of ways to escape, to not have to think about our situation. I escaped my unmet need for attention and affirmation by developing and honing a fantasy of becoming a great ball player. I practiced pitching against the garage for hours, throwing much harder when Nevi’s wife Donna was playing the piano. I would also run and run and run. I was still the skinny kid that most wondered if I would make it. I even wondered myself. I gave myself no grace. I was on the wrong diamond of Life.

The bantering fun with Nevi continued as I grew older. I loved to run. Our high school had no track, but because of Nevi’s good nature I found an outlet for running. The school was about

a mile from my house. Most mornings when the snow wasn't too deep, I would race Nevi's bus to school, all in fun. My house was his last stop, but there were two stop signs, two railroad track crossings, and one stoplight at the main road between our house and the school. When Nevi stopped the bus at the neighbor's house, I would yell out the challenge, "I'll beat you to school!" He would laugh as he revved up his engine to take me on. With the bus full of students cheering me on, I would dart off running beside the bus.

As I turned at the tracks for a short cut straight to school, I would hear the yells out the bus windows, "Go, Art. Go!" I usually won the race to the delight of the kids and to the fun teasing of Nevi.

Nevi was like an Enoch to me. He was a Godly man, respected in the community as a man of integrity and character, and he had time for me! He wanted me to be part of the team.

*M*y father was a very busy, successful man. He was the foreman of a large paper mill, JP Lewis Company in Beaver Falls, NY. He worked there from 1951 to 1983. The last five years he was the scaler, measuring all the pulp. JP Lewis said, "Floyd, you go out there and give honest measurements. Don't beat nobody, so they keep coming in here." It worked. People soon learned that Floyd gave an honest scale and soon they were swamped with business. Customers even brought him ice cream in thanks.

In 2004, Dad wrote the following article for the church newsletter about his first "job" as a young boy.

## My First Job

By Floyd Zehr

In the last part of May 1932 during the Great Depression on a Friday night, my Uncle and Aunt Emmanuel Lehman and Christina Lehman came over to Beaver Falls on the Second Road to visit my parents, Christian and Martha Zehr.

In those days, most all farm work was done with horses. I just loved to drive horses and my uncle Emmanuel Lehman knew that. That was the reason he came over. He asked my parents if I could go home with them and drive his second team of horses Saturday on the ridge Road toward Dadville. This was a milk station that took in milk in station cans. It was called Swamp Station.

At this time of year there was a surplus, more than they could process and that had to be hauled to Castorland to the big milk station there.

It was transported in high iron wheel wagons with a big seat up front. A big wagon would hold possibly 36 station cans, 3 cans wide and 12 cans deep.

My uncle had to haul between 60 and 70 cans on Saturday and needed a driver for his second team.

My parents agreed to let me go and help him out.

My uncle had two good pairs of horses, a young, frisky pair and an old, gentle pair. My uncle gave me a choice on Saturday morning of which pair I wanted to drive. I chose the old, gentle pair.

Saturday morning right after breakfast we started for Swamp Station. We loaded my uncle's wagon first, a full load of 36 station cans. The team I drove had the rest of the station cans, another 32 cans, and then we set out for Castorland, NY.

We arrived there approximately a few minutes before 9 a.m. and the men at the plant asked my uncle who his new driver was. My uncle replied, "That is my nephew, Floyd Zehr, from Beaver Falls, NY."

I didn't have to help unload the cans, the men did all the work. I sat in the big seat up front and watched. When empty I drove away and waited for my uncle as he picked up the paper work to show he delivered two loads.

It sure was a day of learning many new things, but the biggest surprise I got is when my Aunt Christian tucked me in Saturday night. She gave me a brand new, shiny dime.

I said, "I don't need any money. I just loved to drive horses."

"No," she said, "this is your wages for the good job you did today."

It was one of the best days I ever had visiting other people and driving a pair of good horses which would have followed the first team to Castorland without a driver.

As I said, Dad's nickname is Samsie. Some people only know him by that name. Here's how he tells the story today at the age of 93 of how he acquired that name.

"On my first day of school, Mom told me to go over to Harold Noftsier's house and walk with him. He was 3-4 years older than me. She told me, 'Go early so he doesn't have to wait for you.'

"I did that and he took me to school. But he didn't take me inside. Instead he had me stay outside and wrestle with the other boys. I was taking them down. Soon the others all started yelling, 'Take him, Samson! Take him!' I worked hard on the farm and I was able to wrestle all of them down, even the older boys. So, I got that nickname before I ever went into the school. At that time they were saying the whole name Samson. Later it got shortened to Samsie."

Dad was also known to the community as the baler man. He owned three baler machines. He fixed farmer's balers for them and custom baled hay for those who needed it done.

### HAPPY 85<sup>TH</sup> FLOYD TO A GOOD FRIEND

By Frank Hanno on 8/27/04

If your baler needs repair  
Don't throw your arms up in despair.  
No need to call those equipment dealers  
Those guys are all checkbook stealers.

Just call 346-1265  
Yes, folks, Floyd Zehr will soon arrive.  
When you see that red Jeep coming  
You can bet that baler will soon be humming.

He doesn't come to second guess  
Nor does he give you a lot of jest.  
When he gets working there is no doubt  
He knows those balers inside and out.

For many years he's been around  
But it doesn't seem to slow him down.  
He's probably forgotten more than most guys know  
About how to get those balers to go.

Let's hope the Lord gives him many more years  
That will eliminate our baler fears.  
Good baler men are hard to find  
And Floyd Zehr won't charge you blind.

One day Dad took me along to his uncle, Menno Moser's farm, which is now the Mennonite Heritage Farm. Menno was a successful dairy farmer who also had about thirty sheep. While Dad was working on Menno's baler, Menno took me along with

him to help with his evening chores. He asked me to call the sheep for him. I was about eight years old. I called and called, but got no response from the sheep. So Menno called and they came running to the barn to be fed and protected for the night. He checked each one individually and told me their names, their spirit and attitude and why some were better followers and others were leaders. He knew his sheep and I could tell they knew him. I had called and called for them but they wouldn't come for me. They didn't belong to me. They belonged to him. They loved him and he loved them. They had a relationship with him. They belonged to him. Menno was like David in the Bible. He sang and played for his sheep.

Menno was mentoring me to understand that God wanted me to be like his sheep—to hear and follow His voice; not to hear any other or follow any other voice. God wanted me to know that He would take care of me as Menno did his sheep. The Spirit of God planted seeds of Truth that day in my life. I didn't understand the principles that day about me being a sheep and trusting my Master. The only thing I understood that day was I wanted something to belong to me, that would listen to my voice while I fed it. I made this wish known to my dad. Soon afterward he bought me my first calf.



My first calf.

*My* second mentor Andrew Moser was a man of God that listened and followed God. He was a man that had “time” for you and was friendly. He was one of the first people in my life who didn't try to change me. He believed in me and thought I was special. He said, “I have never seen anybody with more energy than you.” He believed God gave me that energy. He thought that someday I would be a minister because I loved people and animals. I was outgoing and friendly and was good at remembering names. He said that people like to see that in a minister. He also said his son, Elmer, would become a minister, which came true. I liked being around Andrew. He gave me freedom and respect. He liked how I was wired.

Andrew had a farm as did most of the men in my neighborhood and in my church. There were a lot of cats on his farm and they really liked Andrew. I wanted them to like me too. As I got older, I helped Andrew with haymaking. He drove the tractor. I stacked the bales of hay on the wagon as the baler machine spit them out. As the baler lifted up the rows of piled hay from the ground, it always uncovered many a mouse that had been hiding under there. Whenever I saw a field mouse racing away, I would jump off the wagon and catch it. Being a fast runner, I was usually successful and usually got back on the wagon in time to catch the next bale of hay and stack it. I put the dead mice in a container where extra twine was kept. By the time we got back to the barn in the evening, I would have ten or more mice to offer to the cats. Those cats soon began to like me because I brought them food.

Most people didn't like how I was wired, but Andrew told me God created, called, and chose me that way for His Team! I started to believe that maybe God did have a plan and purpose for me. I longed for God's “Atta boy!”

Andrew was like an Abel to me as he imparted truths. One example was telling me, “Art, you are fun to be with. You like to

laugh and get others to laugh.” Andrew has passed away and never realized what an impact he had on my life.

Laughter can be a witness in many ways. We have been misled if we have come to think of laughter and fun as being carnal or even questionable as was taught in some churches when I was young. This is one of Satan’s sharpest darts, and from the looks of some of our faces, we have been punctured too many times. Looking stern and severe is nothing new. The frowning sour sect got started in the first century. Its members were a scowling band of religious stuffed shirts called Pharisees. Jesus’ strongest words were directed at them. Their super serious, ritually rigid lifestyle angered our Lord!

Charles Spurgeon was the famous preacher of London. He could have easily allowed himself to become a sober, stoop-shouldered pastor who carried the weight of London around on his back. But he was a real character! He dearly loved life. His favorite sound was laughter and frequently he leaned back in the pulpit and roared with laughter over something that struck him funny. He infected people with cheer germs. Those who caught this disease found their load lighter and their Christianity brighter!

Andrew told me I was winsome. What is winsomeness? It is that appealing magnetic quality—that charisma—the ability to cause joy and genuine pleasure in the thick of it all. When a coach has it, the team shows it. Our owner, general manager, and manager have it. They want us to have fun playing ball.

Whether it is true or not that I am winsome, it is something I aspire to be. Why? Because winsomeness motivates. It releases the stranglehold grip of the daily grind. It takes the sting out of reality. Winsomeness simplifies. Things suddenly become less complicated, less severe, less bothersome. Winsomeness encourages without ignoring the wrong. It focuses on the benefits, the hope, the answers (Proverbs 17:22, I Thessalonians 5:5-16).

I was good at running and at pitching for baseball (and talking and laughing), but when it came to things like fixing machines or building things, I was no good. My dad was a genius at fixing machines. The local tractor company would even call him in when they had a tough case. My brothers are great handy-men like him. I have no such skills. Even today, my brothers still say, “If you need something done, hire someone else to do it, just to save your life.”

My good friend, John Young, a pastor, counselor, and electrician agrees whole heartedly with my brothers. He knows me well. In fact, he goes a step further and tells me he will come and do the work himself just to save my life. He has called me from across America, after he moved to other states, asking me, “Art, do you have someone who can help you?” He doesn’t think I’m dumb, he just thinks I’m stupid when it comes to electricity and such. He told me one time when I was younger that there are three different voltages of electricity: 110, 220, and 440. I asked him how one could tell the difference. He answered tongue in cheek, knowing I was ignorant and gullible, “You take off your shoes and socks and put your feet in water and your finger in a socket. If your fingers curl, it’s 110. If your hands curl, it’s 220. If everything curls, it’s 440.” I chose not to try his electricity test. I knew it was all in fun. Even though he was teasing, I could still feel his respect for me. Years later he had me do counseling with him for some people in his ministry.

## Chapter 2

## Called



My high school graduation picture. I was lean and mean then. I'm no longer lean, but ...

At fourteen, after hearing evangelist Myron Augsburger preach, I went forward and accepted Jesus as my Savior. I was later baptized and joined the Lowville-Croghan Conservative Mennonite Church. It was the bishop of that church, Richard Zehr, who went over the plan of salvation with me when I went forward.

At seventeen, I attended an evangelistic crusade meeting conducted by Myron Augsburger, so I heard him preach again. There I submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. At that point Christianity became a deeper personal commitment for me.

Two evenings later, I felt the Holy Spirit calling me to a unique ministry comprised of some of the same elements I had witnessed in Myron Augsburger's services. The next evening he asked me to share my testimony at that meeting.

### College and Volunteer Service

Chosen before the foundation of the earth, created, re-created, and now called, I went for two years of Bible study to Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Virginia from 1962-1964, where Myron Augsburger was college president. I greatly admired that man. He was one of my main first spiritual mentors and role models. I wanted to be like him. He was like an Abraham to me—a spiritual father. Under his leadership, I was taught by Christ's Spirit and formed by Christ's mind. *I will pray with the spirit but I will pray with the mind also. I will sing praise with the spirit but I will sing praise with the mind also* (1 Cor. 14:15).

again offered me grace—the life I always wanted—one that redeems emptiness and overflows with hope. He offered me both love and forgiveness.

God was showing me what I was and what I was meant to be. Jesus is a window through which we see the very nature of God; and a mirror revealing our human possibility by picturing our fallenness and then the image of our divine destiny.

Metamorphosis means, “a dramatic change through struggle.” God’s method is of changing you from the inside out. God is after changing you and He isn’t going to wait very much longer. God is in the change business. And if you do not submit, you will find out that God has a way of making you want to change. For when the pain of remaining the same is greater than the pain of changing, you will have a dramatic change. “Something takes place inside the cocoon. There is a dramatic struggle and that ugly worm one day becomes a beautiful butterfly.”

Christianity is not a theory or a philosophy of life. Christianity is a living process. The minute you said, “yes” to Christ; the minute you said you “belong” to Him, it became a lifestyle. God calls us to be an organic church. What’s organic? It’s living and breathing.

I knew I was not living and breathing the abundant life. I had to change! I knew I couldn’t change myself! I had tried that too many times. I needed help! Where could I turn? The following answers from an answering machine were supposedly used at the New York Psychiatric Hotline. It’s hard hitting, but to the point.

### **Welcome to the Psychiatric Hotline!**

If you are obsessive/compulsive, press 1 repeatedly.

If you are co-dependent, ask someone to press 1.

If you are multiple personalities, press 3,4,5, and 6.

If you are a paranoid/delusional, we know who you are and what you want. Stay on the line until we trace the call.

If you are a schizophrenic, listen carefully and a little voice will tell you which number to press.

If you are a manic-depressive, it doesn’t matter which number you press, no one will answer anyway.

**O**ops! I found out that was not the right answer. Maybe I pushed the wrong button. Should I do it again? Was I too late? This reminds me of a story.

### **Oooops!**

Source Unknown

A priest was being honored at his retirement dinner after 25 years in the parish. A leading local politician and member of the congregation was chosen to make the presentation and give a little speech at the dinner. He was delayed so the priest decided to say his own few words while they waited.

“I got my first impression of the parish from the first confession I heard here. I thought I had been assigned to a terrible place. The very first person who entered my confessional told me he had stolen a television set and, when stopped by the police, had almost murdered the officer. He had stolen money from his parents, embezzled from his place of business, and taken illegal drugs. I was appalled. But as the days went on I knew that my people were not all like that and I had, indeed, come to a fine parish full of good and loving people.”

Just as the priest finished his talk, the politician arrived full of apologies at being late. He immediately began to make the presentation and give his talk. “I’ll never forget the first day our parish priest arrived, “ said the politician. “In fact, I had the honor of being the first one to go to him in confession.”

If I wasn't too late, maybe I could try God's answer in Jesus. But, I had relapsed so many times! Would He give me another chance? "God, where do I go, what do I do? Can you ever use me again?"

### Jesus Gives Second Chances

I battled guilt and shame, finding it difficult to forgive myself. I made the mistake of measuring Christ's forgiveness by the level of acceptance I felt from other believers. And because others kept their distance, I wandered in a wasteland of self-pity and rejection for many years.

The enemy nearly destroyed me with the lie that my sins were greater than Christ's work on the cross. Satan wanted me to believe I had forfeited my place within the Body of Christ and all hope for healing and reconciliation was lost.

But Jesus didn't give up on me. Just like He did for Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10), the adulteress woman (John 8:1-11), and many others, Jesus offered me another chance. He spoke to my heart that my sins were forgiven and it was time for me to turn my attention to building the Kingdom of God and offering hope to others who had failed.

Those who make life-altering mistakes can anticipate a season of shame, sorrow, and separation. But as 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 says, our goal within the Body of Christ is repentance, reconciliation, and restoration! The power to overcome sin will never be found in a person's own determination or wisdom. Freedom from the bondage of sin only comes through surrender to God.

Our only hope of overcoming habitual sin is to replace our love for sin with a consuming love for God. Until this love seizes the soul, we will never experience a driving passion for holiness.

Only when we look into Christ's lovely face will we find a love that will eclipse our love of sin and self.

So, herein lies the answer. It is to see Jesus; to fall in love with "the Lover of my soul." *My eyes are fixed on you, Oh Sovereign Lord* (Psalm 141:8 NIV). This is the bottom line. Jesus is about grace.

A. Gram Ikin, in her book, *Victory Over Suffering*, states that "a Christian can respond to trouble in one of three ways: break down, break out, or break through. Breaking down means becoming ill and requiring care. Breaking out means resorting to hostile behavior toward others. Breaking through means acting with faith and hope in God's eventual purpose (2 Cor. 4:7-14)."

An off-the-wall experience opened the door to a new dimension of spiritual power and authority for me. God heard my cry. He knew how upset I was and He wanted me to know it was also breaking His Heart! When we intercede, He intervenes.

It was 1987. I was at the lowest point in my life. I had not preached for about eight years. Instead I had been the sales manager at the Chrysler, Dodge, Plymouth dealership in Lapeer, MI. I was doing great at my job, getting great honors and awards for the highest sales. I should have felt on top of the world. But I didn't. I felt empty inside. I had no happiness. I didn't like the thought of being stuck selling cars for the rest of my life.

My parents were coming to visit me. I knew Mom would notice my spirits were down. I knew the subject of me being a preacher would come up again and I dreaded it. My mom, a very Godly woman, told me after they arrived, "Art, you need to let go of the ministry idea. You're



doing well in car sales. Everything will be okay.” She knew I was struggling emotionally. She knew I was caught in the desire to preach again. But she was going by tradition that said, because of my divorce, I could never be a minister again.

I said, “But, Mom. It’s not okay. I don’t have the joy of the Lord. I’m miserable.”

That night I prayed, “Lord, please just take away the desire in me to preach because it is killing me. I give up. I just want to walk away and forget about ministry. Just take the desire away and I will accept the fact that I am to live a normal life and never preach again. I’ve got to know tonight. I’ve got to hear from You, God!!”

I went to bed feeling horribly down, wondering, “Is there a God who cares about me? Will He help me get out of the mess I’m in? Will He comfort me, forgive me, restore me, heal me?” I was at the end of my rope.

Who’s voice are you listening to? It can’t be Mom or Dad. It can’t be the church. It can’t be a denomination. We have to be careful who we listen to—even the best person. (My mom who has since passed away was a devoted, Godly woman. My dad still loves the Lord today.) If they’re making the calls to the next pitch, it’s not the right pitch. The voice we need to listen to is God’s; deep speaking to deep; His Spirit imparting into our inner spirit.

I knew deep down that I was called by God. Because of that, no matter all the “Atta boys” I was getting from sales, they weren’t helping me feel any better. I wondered, “Was it really true that *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* (Rom. 11:29)—even in my messed up case?”

From the vantage point of the years later, looking back, I can say that the road of life I had traveled was not a straight line. It had many a turn and twist and bump and detour. Christians do not arrive at maturity all at once. Our life is a walk!

In searching for God’s purpose, I see that when I came to Jesus, stripped of pretensions, with a needy spirit, ready to listen to Him, and to receive what He had for me, He met me at my point of need. God doesn’t visit us until we’re real with Him, and He always starts with where we’re at.

I am well aware that we don’t get everything we ask for; we have to ask according to God’s will. But let us not illogically dodge the fact that we often go without things God wants us to have right now today because we fail to ask. Too seldom do we get honest enough to admit, “Lord, I can’t handle this alone.” “Jesus, help me! I can’t take it anymore!”

That evening when I was at my lowest point, confounded by obstacles, and bewildered by the darkness that surrounded me, I discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weakness. He can’t resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him. Our weakness, in fact, makes room for His power. In fact, God’s first people were not called, “Jews” or “the Children of Israel” or “Hebrews.” In the very beginning their original name was, “those who called on the name of the Lord.” After Moses came down from Mount Sinai, calling on God became an earmark of his people’s successes. The patriarch spotlighted this most dramatically in his farewell address: *What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?* (Deut. 4:7).

The other nations may have had better chariots and horses and better weaponry, but that wouldn’t matter in the end. They didn’t have what Israel had: a God who responded when they called upon Him. I needed to learn that God was not only concerned about whether or not I was doing His work, but also how and why I was doing it. Why was I pastoring and in what spirit? I was out of sync with the purposes of the Lord!

In my spirit of brokenness and calling on God, I freely expressed my need. I wanted to KNOW would God pick me back up and give me a second chance? I desired life, joy, a sense of family, and love. Could God still change people and deliver them from evil? A.W. Tozer says in his book, *Divine Conquest*, Living Books, 1995:

“The desire to be filled must be all-consuming. ... Only the hopeless will benefit. ... For all who will hear, for all who will obey, here is God’s answer to our need—HIMSELF.

We cannot think rightly of God until we begin to think of Him as always being there, and there first.

... Wherever faith has been original; wherever it has proved itself to be real, it has invariably had upon it a sense of the “present God” ... [an] actual encounter with a real person.

## **My Real Encounter with the Real God**

In my despair, God met me. I went to sleep praying and God intervened (Heb. 4:16). He gave me a dream. In the dream He gave me a baseball sermon. He told me who the players were, what their line-up was, and what their positions were. It was such a vivid, real dream. It was as if God were in the room speaking directly to me. This was a totally new experience to me because up to that point I didn’t believe that God speaks to people today. I had even preached against people hearing God’s voice. God told me in the dream that I would preach this sermon all over the world starting with three times that weekend.

When I woke up, I immediately wrote down the players’ line-up and what God told me about them. Here is what I wrote.