

“Neil Anderson’s gifted insights into the reality of spiritual warfare scratched an itch and brought healing that had eluded the mainstream church. *Rough Road to Freedom* will be an inspiration, a book that helps one understand that the victorious Christian life has already been procured by Jesus Christ and is ours for the taking.”

– **Jerry Rankin, President Emeritus, International Mission Board, SBC**

“We have always been grateful for being part of Freedom in Christ Ministries... Neil is a man of integrity, living out his freedom in Christ. We’re sure the Lord looks at Neil’s life so far and says, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

– **Jerry and Sally Friesen**

“Neil and Freedom in Christ Ministries have impacted all of us in Community Bible Study. We are so grateful for the way our Lord has used Neil to help equip us as servant leaders. I highly recommend this book: it summarizes a lifetime of walking in obedience to His will and purpose. You will grow spiritually as you read these biblical principles lived out to His glory.”

– **Camilla L. Seabolt, CEO/Executive Director of  
Community Bible Study**

“Our lives have been forever changed by the road to freedom that Neil took. For years we have witnessed first-hand in Asia the liberating power of the message of freedom in Christ. It is thrilling to read how God used the experiences that shaped Neil’s life to bring forth the transforming message of freedom to so many people around the world.”

– **Dr. Rick and Laurel Langston, East Asia School of Theology,  
Singapore, and Campus Crusade for Christ**

“A truly inspiring story that reads like a movie script, and yet it’s real and true. This testimony of a life transformed is a must read.”

– **Arnold J. Enns, President of COICOM**

“Neil Anderson’s life journey – as he discovered the truth that sets people free, and learned how to communicate this to others – will inspire you.”

– **Colin Urquhart, founder of Kingdom Faith**

*“Rough Road to Freedom* chronicles biblical insights about our new identity as children of God. My friends and patients have been renewed in their faith as I have shared what I have learned from the many FICM resources.”

– **George A. Hurst, MD, FACP, FCCP, Director Emeritus, University of Texas Health Science Center**

“This book is a jewel. We catch a glimpse of the man behind the movement, and praise God for the remarkable fruit that resulted. Whenever God’s people implement his biblical teachings with genuine repentance, authentic faith and diligent follow-through, the lasting results are remarkable!”

– **Chuck Mylander, EFM Director**

“Inspiring and challenging. Neil’s rediscovery of these biblical truths – of truth encounter and our identity in Christ – has changed and liberated countless lives spiritually and emotionally, and transformed my perspective and my practice of spiritual warfare ministry. You will be enlightened and blessed by Neil’s story.”

– **Dr. Paul L. King, Associate Professor at Oral Roberts University**

“I have used Neil’s *Steps to Freedom* in my teaching at Liberty University, and I have outlined his steps in my writings. Praise God for Neil Anderson’s contribution to the Christian church, and for his awesome ministry.”

– **Dr. Elmer L. Towns, Co-Founder and Vice President, Liberty University**

“So many counselors deal only with symptoms, but Neil helps us find healing for the causes of emotional and spiritual problems. His memoirs show that he did not write from an ivory tower, but from the context of his own participation in the battle in which we are all engaged.”

– **Dr. Timothy Warner, Former Director of Professional Doctoral Programs, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School**

ROUGH ROAD TO  
FREEDOM

*A Memoir*

Neil T. Anderson

MONARCH  
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Copyright © 2012 by Neil T. Anderson

This edition copyright © 2012 Lion Hudson

The right of Neil T. Anderson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Monarch Books  
an imprint of

**Lion Hudson plc**

Wilkinson House, Jordan Hill Road, Oxford OX2 8DR, England

Tel: +44 (0)1865 302750 Fax: +44 (0)1865 302757

Email: [monarch@lionhudson.com](mailto:monarch@lionhudson.com)

[www.lionhudson.com](http://www.lionhudson.com)

ISBN 978 0 85721 294 8

e-ISBN 978 0 85721 388 4

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan and Hodder & Stoughton Limited. All rights reserved. The 'NIV' and 'New International Version' trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790. Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked KJV taken from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Scripture quotations marked NASB taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the USA.

# Contents

Dedication and Acknowledgments	7
Foreword	10
1 Learning to be Trustworthy	15
2 Called into Ministry	30
3 Forgetting What Lies Behind	48
4 Ministry 101	61
5 Struck Down	76
6 God's Ministry of Darkness	90
7 The Whole Gospel	104
8 A New Identity	118
9 The Truth Encounter	134
10 Paradigm Shifts	148
11 Brokenness	163
12 The Dark Side	176
13 Fresh Wind	193
14 Moving On	207
15 Corporate Conflict Resolution	221
16 Growing Pains	236
17 Recovery in Christ	250
Afterword: Discipleship Counseling Training	265



# Dedication and Acknowledgments

I want to thank Tony Collins, and Monarch Books, for believing the message of Freedom In Christ Ministries. Tony has been an invaluable support to Steve Goss, our United Kingdom Director and now the International Director. Because of his support the message has spread to thousands of churches in the UK and around the world.

Freedom In Christ Ministries would not be what it is today if it hadn't been for Jerry and Sally Friesen, who were the first to come alongside and help me. Jerry saw that the ministry in the States was incorporated, and served as the first operations officer. Ron and Carole Wormser were essential to the ministry and traveled with Joanne and myself for years. Their many years of experience were a great contribution to the ministry. The same is true for Tim and Eleanor Warner, who helped spread the message around the world. When we needed Ron and Carole's input at the home office, Hal and Alandra Parks stepped forward and traveled with me for years. Robert and Grace Toews took the message to Canada, where it has spread throughout the land. The ministry is indebted to their

contribution, and those who follow will stand on their shoulders.

When this book is published I will have completed forty years of service and be 70 years old. It is time to pass the baton to the next generation, which is why I dedicate this book to our international directors:

**Rich Miller** has co-authored books with me, and directed our United States office for many years. We first met when I was doing a conference in the Philippines, and Rich was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ. Rich caught the vision and brought a rich devotional spirit to our team. He is a genuine peacekeeper.

**Clay Bergen** became our Canadian Director when the Toews retired. For seventeen years he has faithfully taken the message all over Canada. Clay's major contribution to our International Council is prayer. He makes sure that we stay connected through prayer.

**Victor Manogarom** came out of retirement to be the Director in India, but that was only to help set up his son Isaac. Isaac is our networker, and had to grow up fast when Victor passed away. He and his wife Tara also have a "Steps" home for abandoned children, which reflects the nature of their hearts.

**Roger Reber** is our Director in Switzerland, and he was handed the ministry when the previous director became ill. Roger has a remarkable testimony of God's grace. The police had to rescue him from a very dysfunctional home, and Roger knows how to empathize with those in despair. He also has many technical skills to advance the ministry.

**Bob Genock** has been a gift from God to me for the last few years. Bob retired from Xerox and traveled with his wife to Holland as missionaries where he discovered our ministry. After he lost his dear wife to a brain tumor I asked him to help me with international ministry. Only then did I find out that most of his



professional career had been in Latin America, and that he spoke fluent Spanish. He became our Latin American Director, and my traveling buddy when we went south.

**Steve Goss** was our United Kingdom Director, and he has now become our International Director. Steve and his wife Zoe have been a model of consistency. In ten years Steve has developed teams throughout the United Kingdom and introduced our ministry to thousands of churches. Several European countries now have representatives for our ministry under his leadership. I have always been a message-driven person, but Steve has the talents, gifts, and vision that are necessary to expand the ministry.

Finally, I thank God for all those who represent our ministry throughout the world. Many labor in obscurity and sometimes alone. But they know who they are in Christ and have seen God set people free, and no one is ever the same after that. May God bless all of you, and reward you greatly for being faithful.

*Neil T. Anderson*

# Foreword

A little before noon, Stanley Johnson entered our one-room country school and told the teacher to send the children home, and to leave herself. Stanley was the farmer who lived closest to the school and a school board member. The forecast looked grim. A “northerner” was moving in faster than expected and the county roads would soon become impassable. Such winter blasts could come suddenly and engulf prairie communities like ours with high winds and heavy snows.

Normally my sister Peg and I would walk the mile home, but this storm had taken us all by surprise. So the teacher drove us halfway home on the county road. We would have to walk the last half mile on the township road. Such roads were sparsely graveled, barely more than a lane wide, and maintained by the farmers who made up the township. Nobody would clear that road until after the storm, and then only after they had plowed the lanes that connected their own farms to county or township roads.

We were experiencing a “white-out” when the teacher dropped us off. It didn’t have to be snowing that much for visibility to be less than a few feet. Howling winds would blow the snow across the plowed fields and gather in the ditches that lined every road.

Our Scandinavian ancestors had settled this rural community and planted groves of trees on the north and west sides of the farmyards. They provided some shelter for the livestock that huddled in the barns, hog houses, and chicken coops. Much of the snow would collect in the groves, but enough got through to make large drifts that had to be cleared in order to do our daily chores.

My grandfather had immigrated from Norway and settled that farm. He was more of a carpenter than a farmer. He built most of the buildings on our farm as well as the school that my father attended, as did I, my brother and two of my sisters. My father was born in the patched-together house that I knew as home for twelve years. His mother died at his birth, which created a rift between him and his father that was never repaired. He was sent to live with his grandparents in Iowa who spoke only Norwegian. When my grandfather remarried, my father was brought back to the farm around the age of six and had to learn English in the country school he attended until his eighth and final year of education.

My sister and I barely made it home that day. Peg got sick from the intense cold and threw up, but we struggled through the snow and blinding conditions that made it almost impossible to see where we were going. Mom and Dad were greatly relieved to see us trudging through the snow. We were frozen to the bone. Life wasn't easy in those post-Second World War days. My father had been exempt from the draft because he was a farmer, but also because of a bout with polio that had left one leg shriveled. He was to lose that leg in a farm accident when I was little more than two years old. That was my earliest childhood memory, seeing him in that hospital bed.

We were poor by today's standards, but we didn't know it. In hindsight we were rich in other ways. I truly cherish my childhood.

I was raised in a community where neighbors looked after one another, and family was the bedrock of our culture. There would be no money to help us kids with our education, but that didn't stop us. Paul, the eldest, would complete his doctorate and do post doctoral work at Tufts University. He taught at the University of Minnesota Medical School in Duluth, Minnesota, for thirty plus years. Shirley, my elder sister, would finish nursing school. Peg, the fourth to be born, would finish a master's degree in sociology, and be intimately involved with Freedom In Christ Ministry. My youngest sister, Alice, would finish her doctorate in education.

I was the fun-loving and adventurous one of the bunch who never took school too seriously. Nobody, including myself, would have predicted at the time that I would eventually go into ministry, complete five degrees, author or co-author sixty books and be the founder of a ministry that has spread around the world. This book is about a couple called into ministry, who struggled to grow through the trials and tribulations, as every child of God is called to do. It's about the rough road to freedom that Joanne, my wife, and I have traveled to be where we are today, and the lessons we have learned along the way. I still wonder, "Why me?" I certainly did not plan this amazing adventure.

Somewhere on this fascinating journey God put a burden on my heart to see captives set free and their emotional wounds healed. First, I had to discover who I was in Christ, and allow God to guide me through a lot of paradigm shifts. My early education was steeped in western rationalism and naturalism. It has taken me years to discover the reality of the spiritual world, and to learn to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It was even more difficult to learn how to overcome the evil one and to believe the truth that the whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19). I have gotten beyond

denominations, and sense no obligation to defend any systematic theology. I am just a child of God serving Him in His kingdom. Over the years I have heard people say, “I can’t peg you.” To which I respond, “Try ‘Christian’.”

I had no early plans to go into ministry, although I can look back and see little seeds that were sown along the way. I wanted to be a farmer, but God had something else in mind. I served in the Navy before completing my degree in electrical engineering. I worked as an aerospace engineer for four years before I sensed a call to go into ministry. I was a high school campus pastor, a college age pastor in a large church, and an associate pastor before I was a senior pastor. I had no ambition to be a seminary professor, but that was my job for ten years. I thought I had found my life’s work at the seminary, but God led me to start Freedom In Christ Ministries.

I have never advertised or sought to market Freedom In Christ Ministries. I have never sought a position in ministry. I have never gone where I haven’t been invited. I have never tried to raise support for this ministry, or charged for my services. All my individual counseling has been free. Freedom In Christ has offices around the world and many representatives, but doesn’t own anything. We raise our own support, and rent our facilities. I will not spend a minute of my time to keep this ministry afloat. I believe parachurch ministries like the one I founded are meant to come and go. The Church, however, will remain until the Lord comes back, which is why I remain committed to the local church. Our purpose is to equip the Church worldwide so they can establish their people, marriages, and ministries alive and free in Christ through genuine repentance and faith in God. As a ministry, we exist to help others and their ministries to become more successful.

As I share my own journey of discovery, I pray that it will

strengthen your faith and equip you to be an instrument in His hand to set captives free and bind up the broken-hearted, which is what Jesus came to do. May God truly bless you in your own journey toward fulfilment in Christ.

## Learning to be Trustworthy

Life was simple on the farm. Nobody owed you a living so you worked hard. What we planted in the spring determined what we harvested in the fall. Farmers inherently know that what they sow they shall also reap (Galatians 6:7). Cause and effect were built into the system and that left an indelible impression on my thinking. Presenting problems have a precipitating cause.

My father's wooden leg affected our whole family. Until the accident he had been the most ambitious farmer in the community. He had been the first to buy a combine which cut the grain and threshed it in one operation. He not only tilled the family farm, he rented other property, which he had to let go after the accident. He fed cattle, but that had to stop since it required more manpower than he could manage. So he gave up cattle and started to raise sheep. My brother and I were the beneficiaries and we alternately became the "lamb kings" of Jackson County.

All summer we groomed our lambs and showed them at the county fair. That led to many blue ribbons and occasional trips

to the State fair. I looked forward to the county fair as much as I looked forward to Christmas. More than once I stayed the night sleeping in the pen with my lamb. Next to the fair grounds was the town's swimming hole. It was fed by an underground spring so it stayed fairly clean until the "dog days of summer." Usually by August they had to close it for health reasons, but that didn't keep us from climbing over the fence and doing a little skinny-dipping after dark.

Dad's handicap also affected how he raised us. I became "his legs", and when he told me to run and get a tool, he meant run. If I walked after that wrench it would be best if I just kept walking that day. I learned obedience through the things I suffered, much like someone else I know (see Hebrews 5:8). I also was the one who had to go in to stores and ask questions on behalf of my father. I learned to take the initiative at an early age and not to feel embarrassed to ask questions when I lacked understanding. Dad was a taskmaster and I learned from him how to work and take orders, but I didn't learn much from him about how to live with or relate to others. That I learned from my mother.

My mom lost her mother when she was nine. Her father immigrated from Sweden and settled into our Scandinavian community. Her mother was half Scotch-Irish. She taught my mother those good old Irish songs and Mom sang them to us on the farm. To this day I love those old Irish songs. When my grandmother died, my grandfather hired a Canadian woman to be his housekeeper and to help with the children. Later they married, which turned into a difficult situation for my mother. Partly to escape a dysfunctional home, she married my dad before she completed high school, and became a farmer's wife. Married at seventeen, she had four children by the time she was 23 years



old. (My youngest sister, Alice, was born thirteen years after the fourth child.) Mom knew how to cook and sew, but as a new wife she had to learn to plant a garden and preserve the vegetables and fruit for the winter. That was what we lived on from fall to spring each year.

After harvest we spent every weekend cutting wood for the furnace that heated our home. By midnight the fire would go out, and Mom would get up every morning and start a new fire in the basement furnace. There was no heat in the upstairs room where my brother and I slept. In the winter we would take hot water bottles to bed with us to warm the sheets and our feet. One night my bottle slipped out from under my sheets and froze solid. There was frost on the inside walls of our room. The most dreaded task my brother and I had in the winter during lambing season was to take turns waking up in the middle of the night. Someone had to see if a lamb had been born during the night. If it were lying too close to the wall it would likely freeze to death before morning. We had to put the lamb in a pen with its mother and place a heat lamp over the newborn. Returning to that frigid room and bed that was no longer warm was painful. We had an occasional fight over whose turn it was.

Social life was centered around 4-H and church. 4-H is a youth organization administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Their mission is to engage youth to reach their fullest potential. The name represents four personal development areas: head, heart, hands, and health. We had monthly meetings at the local township hall, which had a small meeting room and kitchen. It was great. We sang, played games, and planned yearly events, which included our own softball team that played other townships. My brother was the pitcher, a position that I later

assumed. The big event every year was the county fair. A couple months before the fair we all caravanned to each other's farms, and saw their gardens and the livestock that would be shown at the fair.

Dad was raised Lutheran, but Mom was the spiritual leader and we attended the Methodist church she was raised in. There was a processional every Sunday morning with the choir singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty..." On one particular Sunday morning while the pastor was delivering his sermon I recall thinking, *I could do that*. For some totally unknown reason, when the choir and pastor did the recession that morning, I got up and followed the pastor out the door! Mom was shocked and asked me why I had done that. I said, "I don't know." It just seemed like the thing to do at the time!

I'm thankful for all the Bible stories I heard and the wonderful potlucks I attended. I can't remember a time in my life when I challenged the credibility of the miracles and events depicted in Scripture, and I have always thought of myself as a Christian. Only years later did I discover that I wasn't. If the gospel was preached, I never got it.

The little country school had seasonal events that other family members attended. One Mother's Day we acted out the play Hansel and Gretel. I was in the third grade and the narrator. I was supposed to say that Hansel and Gretel went into the heart of the woods, but the "h" in heart came out an "f" – quite by mistake. That made it a memorable Mother's Day for the mothers, but not for me. Even though I was generally the life of the party and the consummate joker, I had trouble standing in front of people. My eyes would water and I struggled to maintain any composure. Two events changed that; one was helpful, the other not!

The first was in my seventh grade. I had just started attending school in town. At first I was a little intimidated – being a farmer’s son and coming from a one-room school in the country. Most of the students had been raised in town and they already knew each other. It didn’t help that upon my first entry into my homeroom I tripped over the doorsill and fell on my face, to everyone else’s delight. However, two weeks later I was elected class president. I was by nature a socially inclined person in spite of the pratfalls.

That fall my brother, Paul, and I were champion and reserve champion of the Western Lamb Show. The Jackson Junior Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club honored us with a luncheon on Monday at noon. I carried my hand-me-down suit to school with me on the bus and changed before the luncheon. I sat to the right of the mayor of this small country town and tried my best to cut through the toughest Swiss steak I had ever encountered. Suddenly my knife slipped and my left hand that was holding the steak in place with a fork cleanly left the plate and implanted itself on the white table cloth between myself and the mayor. The retreat to the plate was just as speedy, but it left an unmistakable mark on the cloth inches from the “significant other.” Somehow he kept a straight face.

Paul was introduced at the luncheon and said very little, other than to emphasize that he was just the reserve champion and the one they wanted to hear from was me, the grand champion. My eyes were already moist and what I really needed was the bathroom. Somehow I got through my speech, but nobody was overwhelmed, except me, and not in a positive way. My proud mother was watching in the wings, but my first public speaking event offered no promise of my becoming an orator.

In the eighth grade, my homeroom teacher persuaded me to

enter a speech-giving contest. Why I did, I have no idea. It certainly was not my natural inclination. The speeches had to be memorized and given after class one afternoon. To my astonishment I actually won, even though four of my friends were standing outside the door making faces at me and laughing their guts out. There was a stiff penalty for winning. I had to give the speech in front of the whole student body. How much of life is providential? How much do I owe that teacher for helping me get over one of the biggest hurdles in my life? I never struggled with speaking in front of people again.

Our school had a program called “religious day instruction.” Every Tuesday afternoon the classes were shortened, and for the last hour we could go to the church of our choice. It wasn’t forced religion. Students could go to the study hall if they wanted. I went to the church of my mother’s choice! But one warm fall day I decided to skip the class and went to the park with a friend. I came back in time to catch the bus, and went home thinking that I had gotten away with it.

I did not. On Wednesday morning the junior high principal called me in to his office and chewed me out. This man was scary. He even looked like Hitler, with his beady eyes and mustache. He finished his lecture by saying, “I’ve arranged for you to be off this Thursday and Friday.” I was shocked. Expelled from school for two days, because I skipped religious day instruction?

I was not looking forward to going home that evening. Alternative plans were forming in my mind. I considered getting up on Thursday morning and pretending I was sick for two days. Or I could get up, do my chores, pretend to catch the bus, and then hide in the woods until it was time to come home. I knew my sister would rat on me so I had no choice. I had to face my parents,

but I was not looking forward to it. Approaching one's authority figures when guilty is a daunting prospect. In my case I knew who to approach first: that would be my mother. There would be some mercy in her presence.

So I said, "Mom, I have been expelled from school for two days, because I skipped religious day instruction." Her countenance took on a strange look and then a smile broke out on her face. "Oh Neil, I forgot to tell you. I called the school yesterday and asked if you could be excused Thursday and Friday to help us pick corn." I could have gotten away with my indiscretion, but God arranged it so there would be no secrets between me and my parents.

If I had known that Thursday and Friday's absence from school was excused, would I have dreaded going home that evening? Of course not. In fact I would have run up the lane and joyfully approached my parents. That whole experience was so much like our relationship with God. The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1 ESV), and "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1 ESV). Too many Christians live as if they are walking on glass, afraid to make the next step lest the hammer of God should fall on them. The hammer has already fallen. It fell on Christ. He has already died for all our sins. We are not sinners in the hands of an angry God. We are saints in the hands of a loving God who has called us to come before His presence with confidence and boldness (Ephesians 3:12 ESV), and with our hearts sprinkled clean (Hebrews 10:22 ESV). Such insights about our relationship with God would come years later.

After my eighth grade, everything changed. My father saw the handwriting on the wall: when he saw his eldest son go off

to college he knew that farming did not hold a good future for him. In the middle of lambing season, which was in the dead of winter, my mother and father made a trip to Arizona. They left me in charge of the farm. The house was the responsibility of Shirley, my elder sister. They came back three weeks later and announced that they were going to rent the farm to a neighbor and move to Arizona after the school year. It jolted me out of my comfort zone. To this day there is an image in my mind, planted as we drove away from the farm. My sister Peg and I were on our knees in the back seat looking out the rear window and watching our dog chasing after the car. Slowly he disappeared out of sight, never to be seen again. Mom and Dad had visited Arizona in February when it was pleasant, and now we were moving there in June. For the next four months the daytime high was never lower than 100 degrees. I thought we had moved to hell.

Dad had no job, and no particular trade skills. However, every farmer that I grew up with was an electrician, plumber, carpenter, painter, welder, roofer, and mechanic. Dad worked at odd jobs that summer until he landed employment at Air Research as a mechanic. He kept that job for twenty years and hated every minute of it. Dad had never taken orders from anyone other than the father he despised, and he winced every time the whistle blew signaling a crew change. When the opportunity presented itself for him to transfer to the night shift, he took it. The night shift gave him some respite from daytime supervisors, and the white-collar workers left him alone.

However, there was no way my Dad would let his son to sit around all summer. So I worked as a migrant farm worker that first summer in the Arizona heat. I picked onions and water melons for most of that summer. I did wonder why I was the only white

kid out there. At the end of one row were two cream cans of water for drinking. I walked over to one and took the ladle for a drink, only to get it knocked out of my hand by the foreman. "That's for coloreds," he said. That was my first exposure to racism. I grew up in a Scandinavian community where racism was playful bantering between the Norwegians and the Swedes. I asked my parents about it that evening and they had little to offer in terms of insight. Racism was new to them as well. At the end of the week, I got paid in cash as my brothers, and when I got home it just went into the family coffer. I had never been paid to work before and, anyway, it didn't belong to me. It belonged to the family. Farm boys didn't get paid for working in those days. It was just expected of us. It was part of our chores. People today would probably call that child abuse, but I didn't think it was.

At the city swimming pool I stood in line waiting my turn on the springboard. Some Mexican boys jumped in front of me and that really riled my fairness factor so I challenged the one who cut right in front of me. Next thing I knew I was outside the swimming pool facing-off with a Mexican boy surrounded by many others who were not rooting for me. I think that was my first fistfight with another person, and it was my last. The fight was a draw, but it left me longing for Minnesota.

My mother took a couple of night classes and finished her GED (General Equivalency Diploma), and applied for a position in a bank. Two years later she was the operations officer. My mother could have been anything she wanted to be, but she chose to be a servant. At the age of eighty-five she was still volunteering for hospice, making calls on "old people" and shut-ins. There was a lot she could complain about, but she never did. I have always said, the good you see in me is Jesus and if there is

any other good in me it is my mother.

I struggled in Arizona. It wasn't home to me. We joined another Methodist church and that was an OK experience. No conversion took place, but I found friends and some social outlet. Still I longed for Minnesota. After my sophomore year I asked my parents for permission to go back to Minnesota for the summer. I had made enough from a morning paper route to pay for a one-way ticket on a bus. At the end of the school year I left on a two-day trip with \$10 in my pocket. After driving all night we stopped at a bus depot, and they gave us enough time to eat breakfast. I was hungry and I piled my plate full in the buffet line. It came to over \$7 and now I had less than three dollars to last for the next day and a half.

The bus stopped at Fairmont, Minnesota, which was thirty miles from Jackson, my hometown. So I took my suitcase, walked to the highway and stuck my thumb out. The third car picked me up and, remarkably, the driver lived three doors from my uncle, which is where he dropped me off. It had been arranged that I could stay with his family until I got a job. I had no idea what my prospects were at the ripe old age of fifteen. I called my childhood friend, Ronnie Fransen, at the first opportunity I had. He was surprised to hear my voice. Two hours later he called back and said I could work for his uncle that summer and live with him and his family.

That began one of the best experiences of my life. Ronnie's uncle, Russell Fransen, and his wife Merva had two young daughters, but no sons. Russ and I bonded that summer. In many ways he became the father I never had, and I was the son he never had. We arm wrestled, raced each other and worked like dogs. I attended the Lutheran church with the family. I loved every minute of it.



My own father believed that his father blamed him for his first wife's death. I never knew my grandfather, because he died in a car accident before I was born. Everything on the farm where I was raised spoke of my grandfather, but I never heard my father mention him until Dad was 75 years old. When he did, he just said, "That man!" in disgust. The only other time was when Dad was about 85 years old and he said, "That man should never have had children." It is painful to know that my father remained bitter all those years. To my knowledge he never forgave his own father. By the grace of God I did forgive my father, but I have often wondered why his bitterness didn't have more of a negative impact on me than it did. It think it affected my sisters more than it did me. To me, Dad was like a tough boss and life was OK if I obeyed him, which I did. I always had my mother to go to for advice and sympathy, but my sisters would receive no emotional support from their father.

I believe there is another reason why I was not embittered. I grew up in a close farming community. There were so many other men around that I could, and did, look up to. They always liked me, and I looked forward to the times they came over to help us, or when we went to their farms to help them. But more significant were Russell Fransen and his brother Teal, who farmed together. They were great role models.

At the end of that summer Russell and his family drove me to Colorado Springs where we spent the night and saw the sights. The next day they put me on a bus and I went back to Arizona.

In my junior year I tried out for the varsity wrestling team. I had put on some muscle that summer and I was ready for the contest. The team captain was also in my weight group and I could beat him, or at least wrestle him to a draw, but the coach let him

wrestle at that weight which was 154 pounds, because he was a senior. I could try out for another weight, but I couldn't beat the two guys at 165 or 177 pounds so I tried out for the 191-pound weight group. That is the weight I wrestled at in my junior year and I won half my matches even though I weighed less than 160 pounds.

The most memorable match of my life, and the one I recall and feel the best about, was our match at South Mountain High School in Phoenix. The man (he wasn't a boy) I was destined to wrestle was an All State center in football that year, and he had won the State championship in wrestling the year before as a junior at the same weight. When we weighed in he had to strip naked to make weight. I could have jumped on the scale fully clothed and the arm wouldn't have wavered a bit. When our weight was called, our team was leading by nine points. Our heavyweight wrestler was a sure loss and destined to be pinned. That would cost us five points. If I got pinned, we would lose the match. If I lost without being pinned, we would lose three points, but the team would win.

I even remember that guy's name. It was Stacy Ostland. When I walked out on the mat, the small crowd of spectators laughed. They laughed! My coach's parting words were, "Just don't get pinned." Hey, thanks coach!

Thirty seconds into the match he made a move that landed me on my back. I bridged for the rest of that period and he never got me in that position again. In fact I scored two escape points on him, which represented two of the five points scored against him that whole season. The team went nuts. In the locker room afterwards, two African American students from South Mountain came up to me and said, "We are so glad that you didn't get pinned, now

he won't think he is so hot." That was not the proudest moment I suffered in defeat – that would come many years later.

The following summer my parents let me drive a dilapidated 1950 Studebaker back to Minnesota to work again on the farm. I paid \$200 for that piece of junk, and I could write a whole book on my exploits with that car. It looked like a two-row corn picker and you couldn't tell whether it was coming or going. Russ and Merva had had another daughter that winter, so that summer I stayed with Teal and Evelyn Fransen, who had three rowdy boys that wrestled and tussled with me all summer. When the end of summer came, they invited me to stay and help with the harvest. I moved across the road and stayed again with Russ and Merva for the winter. I spent my senior year with them and graduated from Jackson High School in 1960.

Merva left a letter out for me to see that she'd received from my mother. In the letter Mom said, "Take care of my son, he is my favorite." I don't think Mom had any favorites, she just wanted me to believe that. But I cherished that thought and thank her for it.

Living in the United States was different in those days. How many parents would let their child get in a bus with a one-way ticket, travel halfway across the country with no plans in place for when they arrived at their destination? How many would let a 16-year-old boy drive a clunk of a car across the country? I was thinking about this years later and wrote my parents a letter thanking them for trusting me. This trust in me had a profound effect on my life. I wanted to live up to their expectations, but was I perfectly trustworthy? Nobody is, and yet God has entrusted us with the gospel and to preserve the integrity of ministry. That is a challenge I want to live up to.

Living away from home, I could have easily abused that trust,

but I didn't want to let my parents down, and I didn't want to let God down. That was one of the biggest lessons of life that I have ever learned. As a parent or a pastor, we can communicate trust or a lack of it. As a pastor I have had parents tell me that one of their children has run away. Usually that happens at about the age of fourteen. When I ask them what they are going to do when the child comes back, you can almost guess what the typical answer will be. A lack of trust is probably why they left in the first place. I have the normal amount of blind spots and character defects, but if you were to ask me what I thought my greatest strength was, I would say, "Trustworthiness," and I have my parents to thank for that.

During that senior year of high school, I talked a lot about farming with Russ and Teal, and they offered me an opportunity to farm with them. Essentially, I would work for them and I could use their machinery to farm the old family farm. That was the direction I was heading until word came to me that my father and his sisters had sold the farm. There was a moment of disappointment, but I accepted it as God's will. Now that the farm had been sold, what would I do?

My brother had just graduated from the University of Minnesota and was working as a grad assistant heading toward a doctoral degree in biochemistry. Although I hadn't taken high school seriously and I had no real direction, that spring I applied for admission to the liberal arts program at the same university. To qualify for admission the university sent an exam to my high school, which I was given a full day to finish. We needed to bale hay the day I was to take the exam, because you have to make hay when the sun is shining. So I finished the exam before noon and went home to work on the farm. Needless to say I wasn't accepted.

So I applied for the school of engineering instead; I always received good grades in math and science without trying. This time I had to take the exam at the university, and I passed.

That fall I enrolled in the school of engineering with the goal of being a chemical engineer. How well do you think that worked out? I left school before the semester was even finished. All my grades went to an F, because I never officially canceled my classes. I did get something out of that failed effort. I met Joanne Espe, a sophomore transfer student from a small Lutheran college. We dated for most of that semester, but when I left the university we parted ways with no commitments, and I joined the Navy.