

STEPHANIE PAGE

renewed

joy

5 SIMPLE STEPS TO  
LASTING & POWERFUL  
JOY IN THE LORD

Renewed Joy

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Page Of Joy

P.O. Box 2956

Soldotna, Alaska 99669

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

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# Redeemed

Once saved by grace through faith, rejoice that your life is redeemed by the true and living God!

# Chapter 1

## Redeemed

### *The First Step to Joy: Salvation*

“...That the payment for my sin was the precious life He gave. But now He’s alive and there’s an empty grave. And I know my Redeemer, He lives.”

– Nicole C. Mullen<sup>1</sup>

A timid young woman, about thirteen years old, walked up in front of the crowd, trembling yet resolved, and declared her belief in Jesus and her desire to serve Him with her whole life. Her name was Stephanie Joy. That girl was me, of course.

I may not have known the entirety of the commitment I was making in that moment, but somehow I knew this: God is real, His Word is true and I wanted to follow Him wherever He would lead me. My heart, up until then, was brimming with fear, anxiety and longing. A painful and confusing childhood had left me in survival mode, treading the waters of school and life, anxiously desiring to *live with purpose* but not knowing where to find clear direction for life. Suddenly and yet gently, the beat of my heart and soul changed. I awakened to new life in Christ and breathed hope... purpose... peace...confidence... safety... joy! I have never been the same.

## *Do You Believe That God Is Real and His Word Is True?*

Salvation is the first step toward lasting, eternal joy. Where are you on this journey, friend?

The Bible—God’s very words—is compiled of 66 books written over about 1500 years by around 40 authors in three different languages and from three different continents, and it covers hundreds of topics. During this time in history, there were no light bulbs, much less the Internet and social media, yet every book aligns in complete harmony and no one was “tweeting” spoiler alerts to help keep each other’s stories straight. Not only that, but the Bible predicted, or prophesied, many events that have actually been accurately fulfilled!

The Bible is stunningly cohesive and lacks contradiction because it was written by one flawless author—God. *“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21). God breathed His words through men and gave us a true, living, powerful, inerrant, inspired and infallible gift. *That gift is the only perfect guide to life here on earth.* It was a perfect guide a hundred years ago and it will still be a perfect guide for hundreds of years to come, as Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away”* (Luke 21:33).

## *Since the Bible Is True, What Does It Say About God?*

The Bible begins by telling us that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth and all living things. As the only true God, He is fully good. God exists eternally in the form of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (often referred to as the Trinity). Sin—anything that we think, say or do that does not honor God—separates us from a holy God and demands justice.

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith... (Romans 3:23-25)*

People strive toward God or goodness through many forms of religion, but the one true God is unique because He mercifully reaches right down to save us. Jesus, God in the flesh, was born of the virgin Mary and lived a sinless life, though He faced temptation just like you and me. He took upon Himself the judgment that we deserve—death—because of our sin by dying on the cross in our place. After three days buried in a tomb, He rose from the dead, declaring victory over sin and death. This event actually happened!

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ completely satisfies the death penalty that we deserve for our sins, *“for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). He freely offers us the gift of complete forgiveness and salvation so that we can spend eternity with Him in heaven. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). What an amazing God, full of love and mercy! *“...But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). This is truly Good News!

Friend, God so loves you! As you take the step to believe in Him, tell God that you are sorry for the sins you have committed and repent of them, turning away from your sins. Tell Him you believe in what Jesus Christ did for your sins by His death, burial and resurrection. Accept the gift of salvation from the One who has the power to redeem your life.

Determine to follow Him with your life. In doing this, you are forgiven, redeemed by the power of His blood. You are then washed clean and restored to relationship with Him, assured of your home in heaven for eternity. Your life can now be filled with true purpose and hope.

God does not ultimately desire to punish you, but because He is perfect, and just, He cannot be in the presence of sin. When Jesus willingly offered Himself as a sacrifice, He broke that barrier between our sin and the presence of God. *The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). His death and resurrection made possible the relationship God truly desires to have with you—not to punish you but to draw near to you and wash you in His love.

Life is not just about being "good enough" to get to heaven. If we were able to be good enough, then why did God send Jesus to be born, live a sinless life and die in our place? Why did Jesus have to die? Remember Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* We could never be good enough. To be good enough, we need to be perfect from birth to death. Thankfully, that is not God's plan for salvation!

Do you believe that God is real and His Word is true? Do you understand that He is pure and good and you cannot ever be good enough to reach His standard by your own merit? Do you see this incredible God who freely offers to restore you to relationship with Himself, forgiving all of your sins and creating an eternal home for you? If you have not asked Him to forgive you for your sins and to become Lord of your life, I urge you to do that now. You never know what tomorrow may bring.

Do not wait.

### *Plane Down in the Bering Sea*

Following a week-long evangelistic and humanitarian aid trip to Lavrentiya, Russia, Dave and Barb Anderson, Cary Dietsche, Brian Brasher, Don Wharton and Pam Swedberg boarded an eight-seat Piper Navajo airplane that would take them back to the United States by flying over the Bering Sea. Dave Cochran, a missionary pilot with fifty years' experience, refueled the plane, packing the empty gas cans into its aisles. The plane took off on the long flight to Gambell, Alaska, where they would re-enter the United States.

From there the pilot would again take off and climb to 7,000 feet for the 45-minute flight to Nome. Some of the passengers began to doze off while reflecting on the amazing week of ministry that had occurred in this “end of the earth” region of Chukotka.

The story continues in Dave Anderson’s words:

My wife, Barb, sitting in the second row, couldn’t take her eyes off the gas gauges. Uneasy, she prayed for God’s protection. When the skies began to clear, Barb relaxed, but continued to watch the instrument panel silently.

### *Crash Landing*

When the right engine sputtered, Barb jumped. The second sputter woke me up. Glancing out my window, I watched the propeller slow down, shake unsteadily, and stop. In the cockpit, Dave Cochran calmly switched on a pump to cross-feed fuel from the left engine to the right engine. Almost at the same instant, we all heard him radio to Nome, “Out of fuel on one tank...descending from seven thousand feet...seven souls on board.”

A few moments later, the left engine went dead. We were two miles from the nearest land—Sledge Island—and plummeting from 3,500 feet toward the frigid waters of the Bering Sea. Before we lost transmission with Nome, Dave was able to relay our position.

We were all praying aloud now, especially for Dave. Even with 18,000 hours of airtime, nothing like this had ever happened to him. As long as our pilot didn’t panic, we felt we had a chance.

In seconds, Dave had made critical decisions: feathering the propellers to slow us down, concentrating on keeping the plane’s nose up, not retracting the landing gear to minimize possible cart-wheeling. We watched out the windows as the plane began to skim and bounce off the four-foot waves.



The Piper Navajo's speed was 90 mph when we hit, sending a geyser of water heavenward. Amazingly, Dave kept the nose up as we careened another 300 feet through the water. Spinning 180 degrees, the crippled craft finally stopped, bobbing on the waves. Water immediately began pouring in.

Upon impact, Don Wharton hit the emergency window exit. Though his seat had been ripped from its frame as luggage catapulted against it, Cary Dietsche escaped through the rear door. There were no life jackets or rafts on board, but we were in luck. "Everyone grab a gas can," Dave yelled. In less than a minute, while we all clung to our five-gallon cans, the plane disappeared under the frigid water.

The youngest member of our group, Brian Brasher, began shouting, "God is our refuge and our strength; a very present help in trouble." We took turns reciting Scripture, calling out our locations every few seconds since the sea was carrying us away from the crash site. I tried to grab Barb, but she drifted out of reach.

Since we were in shock, at first the water seemed tolerable. We were all wearing light winter clothing. Thankfully, we were unaware of three things: the water temperature was 36 degrees, survival in that temperature is at best 15-20 minutes, and no one had ever survived a crash in the Bering Sea.

### *A Life-Saving Delay*

An hour behind schedule, Bering Air pilot Terry Day was trying to make up time from St. Lawrence Island to Nome. Cruising at 2,000 feet above the open sea, he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. A white plume of water shooting up. In an instant, it was gone.

A whale spouting, Day thought. A few minutes later, his radio crackled. "Aircraft in difficulty...attempting a

landing at Sledge Island...deviate [your course]...let me know if you spot the aircraft..."

The plume of water, Day remembered. Could it have been that plane hitting the water? Turning back and descending, he alerted his passengers of the detour.

In the water, we saw the plane approaching. Would he see us? Night was beginning to fall. The plane kept heading west, then disappeared. Miraculously, a few minutes later, the plane circled back. We waved and splashed, but couldn't keep it up long. We needed our energy to hold on to the gas cans.

A passenger looking out the window of the Bering Air taxi saw the commotion in the water and yelled at Day, "There's people down there!" Immediately, an Eskimo Christian on board began praying for our safety.

Day radioed Nome, "There are people in the water using some kind of flotation devices. But I don't have enough fuel to keep circling. I have to head back to Nome."

Just then, another voice broke into the transmission. Vic Olson, a pilot minutes away, volunteered to take over for Day. When he arrived, he dropped to 500 feet above us and circled.

In the water, we were beginning to feel the cold through our bones. Numb and shivering, we continued to encourage each other. "We're going to make it!" "They know we're here. Hold on!" Gripping the gas cans was becoming more difficult. We were all getting weaker. We knew we needed to be rescued soon.

### *Heroics In The Sky*

At the Nome airport, the emergency call went out. Eric Penttila, a pilot for Evergreen Helicopters of Alaska, had originally planned to go salmon fishing that evening. But

at the last minute, he changed his mind and was home when the phone call came. He contacted his friend and mechanic, Jerry Austin, and told him to meet him at the hangar where he kept his helicopter used for food and mail deliveries to isolated Alaskan villages. Just before takeoff, Randy Oles, a Nome firefighter and search-and-rescue veteran, also jumped on board. Twenty minutes later, they pinpointed Olson's circling Navajo. Scanning the water, they counted at least six people floating.

A geological survey helicopter piloted by Walter Greaves offered assistance. He and his passenger, Dave Miles, happened to be out testing a newly replaced altimeter. Penttila radioed his position and Greaves was on his way.

Seeing Penttila's helicopter, Barb cried out to the rest of us to hold on. Above us, the three men were shocked. "I can't believe they're actually alive," they admitted to each other. It was a race against the clock—and the cold—to keep us that way.

Barb noticed the helicopter had no pontoons; it would not be able to land on the water. Inside the chopper, the men were assessing what little rescue equipment they had. They would have to rely primarily on human strength.

Penttila's chopper slowly descended, hovering inches above Brian Brasher. Over the roar of the rotors, Brian directed them to Cary Dietsche. "Get him first." He was injured in the crash and said his legs were cramping.

Firefighter Randy Oles, balancing on one of the skids, watched Cary disappear under the water, forced down by the velocity of the helicopter's rotors. He leaned over and tapped him on the head. Cary was too weak to even raise his hand to help, but Oles grabbed his coat and pulled him to safety.

The Evergreen crew headed toward me. Oles again climbed onto the skid and grabbed my hand. Several

times my fingers slipped. Between the sea's swells and the water spray kicked up by the helicopter's rotors, I felt like I was in a car wash. In a daring move, Penttila dipped the skid far enough into the water so I could get my leg on it. Grabbing my belt, Oles and Jerry Austin got me inside.

Not far off, Dave Cochran was in the late stages of hypothermia—drifting in and out of consciousness. Minutes earlier, he had let go of his gas can and was floating freely. His waterlogged coat began to drag him under. Oles and Austin, with a rope, both positioned themselves on the skid. Amazingly, after a few attempts, they were able to get the rope wrapped around Cochran. Pulling him up was another story; whenever they came close, a wave would hit Cochran and he'd disappear. Fortunately, the rope kept him connected.

Finally, the two rescuers resorted to another plan. Throwing the free end of the rope to Cary and me, they stayed outside the chopper, precariously holding on to Cochran and the skid.

Penttila lifted the helicopter and headed slowly for Sledge Island, two-and-a-half miles away. Cochran was half-dangling from the skid. Penttila gently put the chopper down on the island tundra, and Cary and I got out and wrapped the missionary pilot in a sleeping bag and stayed with him.

Walter Greaves and Dave Miles in the second helicopter were zeroing in on Barb. Miles sat on the skid and got his hands on her, but Barb's clothing made her a dead weight. No longer aided by a gas can, she would certainly drown.

After several attempts, Miles held on to a black strap anchored to the chopper, and edged his way to the end of the skid. When the strap began to give, Miles grabbed the helicopter's strut and Barb. Pulling her up, Miles locked Barb's head between his knees. With his back to the helicopter, he wrapped his legs tightly around her body,

held Barb with one hand and the strut with the other. Barb's feet skimmed the water.

Reaching the island, Miles realized with horror that Barb was slipping. If she fell from this height on the rocks, she would certainly be killed. Signaling Greaves, they headed back to sea-fifty yards out. Barb wiggled loose because she was having difficulty breathing—Miles was holding her so tightly.

Hitting the water and sinking, Barb still managed to pray, "Oh, God, help me, my strength is gone." Struggling with her last bit of energy, she broke the surface, choking and gasping for air. When she tried to swim, there was nothing left. Her water-filled jacket became a lopsided flotation device, and Barb lay back, expecting to die.

A noise got her attention. Miles was swimming out to her. Clutching her coat once again, the two half-swam, half-stumbled to the rocky shore.

Meanwhile, Penttila's rescue team headed out for Pam Swedberg and Don Wharton. With effort, Swedberg got into the helicopter; Wharton dangled between Oles and Austin on the skid as they ascended 760 feet to the highest point on the island. There was no beach or shoreline to land on.

Greaves headed out to locate Brian Brasher.

The last survivor had drifted; after four passes over the area, Greaves spotted him. Hovering, Greaves waited for Penttila to return from Sledge Island. Brasher fought to keep his head above water as the lethargy of hypothermia set in. Fifteen minutes later, he was reunited with our group. He had been in the water sixty-five to seventy minutes. Ambulances were waiting for all of us at the Nome Airport for transport to the hospital. There, we were treated for hypothermia and released. Barb and Dave Cochran were kept another day.

In 1994, all of our rescuers were honored by the U.S. government. Eric Penttila, Walt Greaves, Terry Day, Vic Olson, Randy Olsen, and Jerry Austin each received the Distinguished Service Award from the Federal Aviation Administration. For his outstanding heroic efforts to save Barb, Dave Miles, a Canadian, was awarded the American Medal of Heroism. It was the first time a Canadian had ever received such an honor.

To this day, we can't get over the amazing series of small things that "happened" to fall in place on that day. Gas cans, late flights, available helicopters. Only God could have orchestrated such a miracle. His rescue from overwhelming circumstances is a constant reminder to us of his faithfulness.<sup>2</sup>

My dear mother-in-law, Kathy, was supposed to be on that plane. I believe God preserved her for many reasons, one being to love me and my family well and to influence our hearts for the glory of God. Pam Swedberg, one of the survivors of that plane crash, is a friend of ours. She makes the most delicious desserts, but that is not why God saved her (although it is a wonderful bonus). God has a specific purpose for her life and He spared her unto His glory.

God has a plan for your life too.

Don Wharton, one of the Bering Sea Plane Crash survivors reflects:

"Dealing with life's challenges is a matter of trusting God in all situations. Make no mistake about it, if we would have died in the crash, we would have still been rescued. Jesus Christ provided that rescue 2,000 years ago on Calvary. However, God didn't take us to heaven on August 13, 1993. He provided our rescue, perhaps so we could share the message that if God can rescue us, then He can rescue anyone. It won't be easy. You might not even be rescued in the way you want to be rescued or on your time schedule. But His Word is true when it says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your*

*heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6).<sup>3</sup>*

So, friend, have you been rescued? Have you believed in Jesus, the Son of God, repented of your sin and trusted in Him for salvation? Have you chosen to follow Him? (Learn more about following Jesus by reading the Gospel of John in the Bible.)

When those seven people were in the turbulent waters of the Bering Sea, they were desperately in need of a rescuer—they could not rescue themselves. Swimming to shore was not possible due to distance and the water’s temperature. Each of us at one point or another lives in the turbulent waters of sin; we too need a Rescuer—we cannot get out of those waters and save ourselves. Do not put your confidence in any other way but Christ who is the Way. *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”* (Proverbs 14:12), but *“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Romans 10:9).

If you have already put your faith in Jesus but have somehow lost your joy in Him, and find yourself discouraged or broken, then I want you to think back to the first time you discovered His great love. Today, thank Him for all that He has done and for who He is and move forward. Take the time to delight yourself in the Lord and His gift of salvation—healing will come.

Whether you have been a believer for five minutes or five decades, the beautiful truth of our salvation through God’s grace never grows old. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). Friend, once saved by grace through faith, rejoice that your life is redeemed by the true and living God!.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now I’m found  
was blind but now I see!<sup>4</sup>

The first step toward joy is to be redeemed by the grace of God!  
Pray and thank God for saving you. Specifically thank Him for the changes that you have seen in your heart, and ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him and His Word as He continues to lead you through your life on earth for His glory.