

A SAVING MOMENT

So here we are. Have you wondered how I had the confidence to share what I have in the other chapters? Certainly, I would have said, “Who is she to write such things?” Who I am now is rooted in one pivotal experience, an experience that I wasn’t really prepared for. I didn’t know the proper words to describe it, didn’t even know it existed. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

... my life was a disaster. One might think that starting on the road to a more loving life would have immediately brought blessings and joy. But that wasn’t the case. My purpose and my spiritual conviction were in tatters, and my mental state was disintegrating along with my marriage. I was working in Boston at the Christian Science church headquarters at the time. My motive for going there, at least so I thought, was to find out what was missing in my understanding of God.

It’s probably more than just a little ironic that such a step, motivated as it was by zeal and ambition, would lead me to Christ. Each day I went to work with a heavy heart—even before my husband deserted me. When I was living alone, I prayed for joy, for some “surcease of sorrow,” but it didn’t come. My religion failed me completely. I hated who I was and, for the first time in my life, lost all direction and wondered what was going to happen to me.

Every day I dragged myself to work and dragged myself home again. Time seemed to stand still. Finally, one morning, I was in bed thinking, “I cannot get up. I just can’t carry it any more. The burden is too great.” It was as if I were lying out on the floor with all the gravity of the earth flattening every particle of my being. Then the words from a popular evangelical song came to me, words asking the Saviour to “raise my hand”** and then lift me up. I didn’t even need the strength to reach out to him. What utter helplessness, what complete yielding!

Then, he was there in the room with me. I can describe it no other way. The Saviour was standing beside the bed, lifting me up, filling me with warmth and light. He filled every crevice of need and longing and loneliness. The joy I had been seeking for months just bubbled up inside. The despair for my situation was gone. It didn’t matter that I was thousands of miles from friends and family—I wasn’t alone. It didn’t matter that I was gone eleven hours a day commuting to and from a job in a strange city. He was with me. The fear over my lack of money was not mine to carry any more. I was totally at peace, and he was there.

... You need to realize, however, that what I have written in these chapters did not become clear on that single, shining day. My religion had offered me no context for what I had just experienced. The direction my life would take was no clearer at the end of that day than it was at the beginning. Only the burden and the aloneness were gone.

In the years following this experience, I searched Christian writings to find something that was similar to what happened to me. What I found is that all the great Christian lights write in various ways of a saving moment. But the sense of a living being standing right there beside me finds its closest parallel in the experience Charles Raven describes in his book *A Wanderer’s*

Way (1929). Raven was visiting a friend who was ill, a Christian who had been struggling just as Raven was. Raven writes of his arrival in Stoke to see his friend:

“He was not alone. Since I had seen him, he had found Jesus, and the effect of the discovery was manifest. His whole direction and outlook were altered under the new influence: there was joy and quiet confidence in his face, purpose in his life, sympathy and strength in his actions. Jesus was alive and present to my friend as he had been to the eleven in the upper room. He was alive and present to me. ... Now I knew. It was not a dream for Saul of Tarsus, nor for a multitude of disciples through the ages. It was no longer a dream for me: for here was the reality of it. ... In describing it so I have tried to make plain that it was not simply my friend’s transfigured self which affected me. ... Jesus was objectively real, not subjectively realized. And as the day passed, this sense of a third person present with us extended itself to me: I was admitted to their partnership as surely as if I had been formally introduced to the newcomer. There was nothing strained or fantastic, abnormal or supernatural about it. Quite literally it was as simple and obvious as if my friend had with him a revered and sympathetic colleague who listened to our talk and influenced our every movement by the atmosphere of his presence.”

Raven later in the account would write that “the certainty then established has never faded or changed.” And I’ve found that to be true. As my life has become financially secure and more stable in all ways, I often have worried whether the worldly comforts and support from family and friends would dilute what I had experienced. That hasn’t been the case. ...But I’ve had to open myself to that “here and near” presence every day. It doesn’t store up! When I daily make a place for him, when I daily let his “larger, stronger, quieter life” (CS Lewis’ words) flow in, the Saviour’s strength and peace and comfort and tenderness are mine. (Power of Yielding, pp. 43-45)

**“Arms of Love.” Words and Music by Gary Chapman, Michael W. Smith, and Amy Grant. 1981 Meadowgreen Music Co. and Bug and Bear Music/ASCAP.