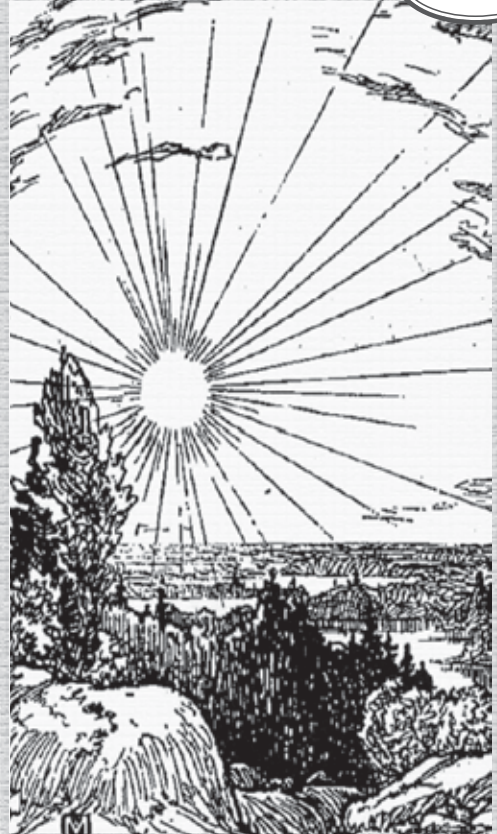


FREE



The  
Story  
of  
Lindsey:  
One who  
was



■ WILLING ■  
TO DO  
■ The FATHER'S ■  
WILL



A TWELVE TRIBES FREEPAPER

## To Follow the Will σ' God ...σr... the Will σ' the Wisp



*couldn't sleep. I decided to turn on the light and read my Bible for a little while. As usual it didn't make a lot of sense but there was something in me — that although a simple man, I really did want to do God's will. Every church I tried seemed to have a different idea about what it meant. Every pastor I asked gave me different Bible verses to read. I was beginning to think that finding God's will in Christianity was an illusion. No one really had the answer, but all pretended they did. But, who am I? I am only a simple man who probably just can't grasp it.*

*As my eyes drifted over the page I thought of how short life was — a mere 80 years if I was lucky. It seemed important to me that I would be able to do what I was supposed to do in this brief life time on earth. Thinking about this I finally drifted off to sleep... and I dreamed.*



In my dream I was walking through a dense forest down a well-worn path. Gnarly limbs from ancient cedar trees hung menacingly over my head. Green moss hung from their limbs like old lacy curtains shredded by the wind through the window of an abandoned house. I was alone and afraid. It was almost dusk and there was a slight cool breeze at my back. I pulled the collar of my sweater up around my neck.

The wind softly whistled through the dense foliage. "What are you looking for, little one?" In my dream I was startled, yet somehow I had expected the voice.

"I'm looking to do the will of God," I answered, my own voice sounding hollow and distant. The wind whistled behind me

as I heard what sounded like laughter in the rustling leaves... "the will of God..." the leaves seemed to echo in a mocking whisper.

The forest was dark now and I hesitated on the path — unsure of my steps. The ground was soft and I could feel the damp cold through my leather shoes. I sensed the indistinct whispering of those watching me from the darkness.

In my dream I came to a small clearing in the wood — a marshy field. As I peered into the darkness I saw faint lights hovering and slipping about near the ground.

"What?" I thought to myself catching my breath. I walked towards the glowing vapor. As I approached the lights, they seemed to recede further in the wood as if daring me to follow.

“What is this?” I spoke out loud.

I listened to the wind for an answer. “It is the will o’ God. Come, and follow me”

I hesitated, unsure whether to follow. It was the only light in this very dark wood and I was afraid to seek any other path. I took another step towards the light. It quickly receded a few paces hovering above the marshy ground. In my dream I remember thinking this would appear to be a game if it hadn’t been so frightening. But I can remember thinking in my dream, “I want to follow the will of God.” Would this lead me to the will of God?

The light seemed to approach me as if waiting for me to catch up. When I went to step towards it once again the vapor vanished and reappeared to my left above a rocky knoll. “What is this elusive light? Can it be the will of God?” I thought.

Suddenly I realized my feet were very cold. I looked down and realized I was sinking in the quagmire of the bog. I tried to pull up one foot only to have the other sink down further. The oozy muck sucked at my feet. The pull was too great for me. In my dream I knew I was caught; I was going to die here in the marsh.

“Oh, no,” I cried aloud. I was deathly terrified. There was no voice. Where was God?

I woke up. Thank God, it had only been a dream!

**T**he next day at work I related my story to a friend on our lunch break. He seemed to find it amusing and replied, “Have you never heard of the legendary will o’ the wisp?”

“No, what is the ‘will of the...’ what?”

“The will of the wisp.” My friend repeated. “I heard it’s a pale, flickering light that appears over marshlands at night.”

“A pale, flickering light... like the one in my dream?” I replied.

My friend continued, “Don’t know how it works... something about methane gases igniting from rotting dead plant and animal stuff. All I know is people have said it is very eerie.”

“Oh my... yes, it is very eerie.”

“Yeah, I have heard that the really weird thing about it is that if you attempt to approach the lights they seem to move away from you or vanish, sometimes to appear somewhere else.”

“That’s what the light did in my dream! I couldn’t reach it. It moved every time I got near.”

“They call it something else,” my friend said thoughtfully stuffing the last bite of sandwich in his mouth, “Oh yeah... they call it the ‘foolish fire.’”

Jumping up from the bench he grabbed his lunch box. “There’s the whistle; got to get back to work.”

Going back to my place at the assembly line I couldn’t stop thinking about my dream and the elusive light... the foolish fire. I thought of how it had beckoned to me to travel further into the marsh giving me hope to find the will of God. I don’t claim to know how to interpret dreams... but finding the will of God seems like an elusive hope... an illusion. Maybe... Christianity is the marsh and it can only offer the elusive hope without actually giving you the light. I am disappointed and never satisfied. Maybe, just maybe, to find the will of God I need to look...elsewhere. But, I am only a simple man.

Putting my thoughts aside, I went back to work. ☹

*How many have wanted to follow God’s will  
and instead have followed the  
“Will o’ the Wisp”?*





The  
Story  
of  
Lindsey

LINDSEY FELT GUILTY that she was glancing at her watch for the *third* time. Her back was sticky with moisture, and she shifted in her pew.

The preacher's voice, ringing with fervor, shot out over the edge of the podium. He leaned further towards the audience, his sweating hands white-knuckled on the sides of the lectern, as his massive chest heaved with a sincere appeal. "Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and savior. Pray, out loud, even just a whisper, and tell Him that you *believe* that He came to earth and died for your sins." His voice rose to a fevered pitch. "Tell Him you're sorry for your sins and that you will try to not sin again. Ask Him to live in your heart and be the Lord of your life!"

The congregation responded predictably to his passion, "Amen, brother! That's right!"

Lindsey started to fidget again in her seat, uncomfortable under the preacher's sweaty gaze. The pastor's words droned on and his face blurred in her tired brain.

"But I'm saved. I do believe!" she thought to herself, "I've heard this message a million times before. I've *said* the sinner's prayer!" But even so, she knew something was missing. Maybe a lot of things were missing.

The preacher droned on, "Realize, though, that living for Christ doesn't just mean that you say a prayer, get out of going to hell, and live the same life you always have. Salvation is an ongoing and life-long process. It is dying to your own

desires and living for the desires of God."

"What does he mean, *the desires of God*?" Lindsey wondered. "What are God's desires? That I wouldn't sin? Is that all he wants us to do?"

The pastor's voice faded further off into the distance as she wondered what drove her to keep going from one church to another. What was she looking for? Why couldn't she just be satisfied like everyone else and not feel so alone?

The air was stifling. A trickle of perspiration ran down her back, and her thoughts raced, "How come they always talk about being saved *from* my sins but never tell me what I've been saved *for*?"

Her heart began to pound with a daring thought, "What if I stood up right now in front of all these people and shouted, '*So what?* How does His dying for our sins change our lives? How come you all look so self-satisfied? Are you convinced your life is pleasing to God, or are you just smug about having a ticket to heaven? Do you *really* know you're saved?"

But she didn't stand up. She couldn't. She wasn't *totally* sure of her *own* salvation. Something she had read in the Bible about good trees bearing *only* good fruit gnawed at the back of her mind.

Lindsey turned in her seat and looked around the room. A few rows back sat a middle aged, slightly graying man in a black suit. His cheeks were bright red, and it looked like his tie was too tight. "What are you thinking about?" she wondered silently. "Did your stocks drop a few more points last week? Are you worried what they'll do on Monday?"

Behind him a man kept looking at his watch. Was he planning which fast food restaurant to hit on the way home to his football game? Was the woman in the

*"How come they always talk about being saved FROM my sins but never tell me what I've been saved FOR?"*

*In the Book of Acts all the believers had a life together and shared their possessions. They took care of each other. It must have been amazing. But somewhere down the line it vanished... or died.*

Lindsey

low cut dress wondering whether her outfit was as eye-catching as the one the lady in front of her was wearing?

The organ sounded a familiar tune, and she realized the sermon was over.

“Here comes the offering plate,” she thought sarcastically. “The preacher is going to say, ‘Dig deep brother... God sees.... He *knows* there’s a twenty down in that pocket.’ It’s the same in every church I go to. But what about the older lady with the frayed velvet hat in front of me – what if she can’t pay the mortgage on the house she has lived in for forty years? Will they give the money in the plate to her?”

Lindsey started feeling embarrassed about her thoughts. In some ways she was just as big a hypocrite as the people she was judging. She didn’t really love her neighbor any better than they did. She *wanted* to love Jesus and live for Him. She *wanted* to know God’s will for her life. But no matter how many books she read about it, she still didn’t have confidence that she was doing what she was put here on the earth for. Even reading the Bible didn’t help. It seemed so out of context with today’s world. In the Book of Acts all the believers had a life together and shared their possessions. They took care of each other. It must have been amazing. But somewhere down the line it vanished... or died.

She had gone to different pastors privately and asked why that life didn’t exist today, but they had all scoffed at her. That communal life, they told her, was only for that time. Jesus never meant for Christians to live like that now.

*Maybe*, she had thought.

Obviously everyone nowadays was so preoccupied with money and personal success that such a life wouldn’t work. People were too selfish. Lindsey knew *she* was selfish. But did that mean Jesus didn’t want us to live that way? Jesus wasn’t selfish. Shouldn’t we be like him?

Lindsey was jolted back to the present when the preacher passed her, wiping his beefy brow with a handkerchief the size of a small tablecloth. The service was over and he was striding to the foyer to greet everyone as they spilled out into

the bright morning sunlight. She gathered up her Bible and sweater and made for the door. Filing out with the others, Lindsey dutifully shook the preacher’s hand and thanked him for his message, but she knew she didn’t mean it. She was just glad to get out into the fresh air and go home.



WALKING DOWN THE SIDEWALK, Lindsey thought about how she hadn’t always been this way... so disappointed about her faith. She hadn’t grown up questioning her parents’ religion... well, her mother’s anyway—her dad had left home when she was a little girl. Her mother had always said, “Jesus will take care of us,” and she had believed it. But, looking back on it now, it didn’t seem like He had done a very good job. Somehow Daddy’s promised child support checks never came in the mail, and her mom had wound up working two jobs to meet their material needs. But what she and her brother had really needed was a mom to come home to. Her brother started getting in a lot of trouble at school. Lindsey had often seen her mother crying at night when she thought the children were sleeping.

Lindsey tried to be a good girl so her mother wouldn’t cry. She prayed every night for her mother and asked Jesus to help them pay the bills and keep them safe. She faithfully went to Sunday school and first said the ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ when she was only ten.

But when she got older the questions started. The things she learned in public school were in direct conflict with the morals her mother had tried to teach her at home. Mom had always told her to do what she knew in her own heart was right. Lindsey wanted to be pleasing to Jesus, but the peer pressure was constant and persuasive. After weeks of being taunted about her modest clothing, she finally gave in and started dressing more like the other girls. When she came down to breakfast in the mornings her mother would yell, “You can’t

wear that out of this house. I forbid it! You look like a common prostitute!” But Mom had to rush out the door to get to work, so Lindsey always won.

She felt bad about displeasing her mother, but not as bad as she felt about the things her peers would say if her clothes and makeup weren’t “just right.” Sometimes she would pray and ask Jesus to forgive her, but mostly she was too preoccupied with what the other teenagers thought to be concerned about her Christian faith. She just wanted to fit in.

College had almost finished off her beliefs. Breaking her vow of abstinence and losing her virginity had initially devastated her. Her friends had convinced her that Christians shouldn’t be so “quirky” but lighten up and be like the rest of society. Her Christian friends even quoted the apostle Paul about “being all things to all men.” It was okay to have a few “social” drinks and enjoy life. But after each worldly and fleshly indulgence, Lindsey found herself praying and asking Jesus to forgive her, just as she had done in her childhood.

Brushing her thoughts aside, Lindsey arrived back at the apartment she and her boyfriend shared overlooking the park. They had been together for two years and she wanted to get married. Tim, tall, pleasant-looking, and blonde, told her it was just her old-fashioned conscience bothering her. They didn’t need to get a piece of paper to make their relationship legit. She had also hoped they could have a child someday but Tim was not interested in the commitment. Lindsey had hoped that in time he would change his mind.

“Where have you been?” he asked as she came through the door and threw her Bible on the kitchen table.

“Oh, I tried that Pentecostal Church over on Second Street.”

Tim laughed, “When are you ever going to give it up and stay home on Sunday mornings? Look, I did the entire *New York Times* crossword puzzle,” he said, tossing the paper on the table before returning to his easy chair in the living room.

“Tim,” Lindsey called from the

kitchen, “there’s got to be somebody somewhere living the way Jesus talked about. You know... loving and caring for each other? When I read the Bible it seems as if those first believers had a real life together — real faith rather than just a church service on Sunday morning.”

Tim sighed, “You try too hard, you know that? It’s not good to be overly conscientious. You’ll go crazy. Besides, times have changed. Nowadays people pick and choose what meets their needs. Ours is a consumer-oriented, market-driven society, you know. That’s what American Christianity is all about. Christians value personal fulfillment and independence — just like every other American.”

“Do you have to be so sarcastic?” she blurted out, and then blushed as she remembered her own sarcastic thoughts in church earlier.

“Hey, take a look around, honey. Didn’t Jesus scold the religious people for trying to put new wine in old wineskins? Times are changing — you need to be more flexible. Churches are dropping their preconceived ideas and traditions. Lighten up and be like everyone else. You’ve got to do what works today, not what worked back in ancient times.” Tim was now in the kitchen, gently brushing her brown hair off her cheek. He gazed tenderly into her eyes, “Why, my girl, do you have to be so different?”

“I’m not *trying* to be different,” Lindsey insisted, moving away from him to put some dirty dishes in the sink. “I’m just trying to make sense out of life. If Christians claim to love Jesus, shouldn’t they be more like Him? If we say we follow Him, shouldn’t we obey what He says to do?”

Becoming slightly annoyed, Tim fired back, “Look, Jesus just wants people to be happy!” Catching himself, he lightened his tone. “Life was tough back in His day, Lindsey. But now God has given us all these modern conveniences.” He swept his arm dramatically across the room and added, “All we have to do is figure out how to pay for them.”

“Honestly, Tim, you can be so shallow

*“There’s got to be somebody somewhere living the way Jesus talked about. You know... loving and caring for each other? When I read the Bible it seems as if those first believers had a real life together — real faith rather than just a church service on Sunday morning.”*

sometimes. You used to think about the purpose of life? Don't you ever wonder about eternity?

"Oh, the *great* purpose of life!" Tim answered scornfully. "No, I don't allow myself the frustration of such questions anymore. Deep thoughts about life always produce more questions than answers, so why even go there?"

Setting a bowl on the counter, Lindsey announced, "I'm going out for a walk. These conversations with you never go anywhere."

"Adios," Tim shrugged, and walked back into the living room to flip on the TV.

As Lindsey ran down the steps of her apartment she couldn't stop the tears from flowing. Tim's words had hurt her — deeply. She groped for a word to describe the pain and found it: *loneliness*. It was crushing to face the reality that the dearest things in her heart meant nothing to the man she thought of as her soul mate. Could it be that he was



right? Was she just trying too hard — and going a little crazy in the process?

Her heart didn't take long to answer. No, she decided. There had to be more to life than prosperity, entertainment, and playing church. She heaved a sigh and wiped her eyes with her sleeve.



AT THIS POINT SHE STARTED TO NOTICE music coming from the park. She looked up to see several people dancing in a circle. At first she didn't think much of it. People played music in the park all the time. But as she stepped off the curb she noticed there were children in the dance circle with the adults. "Hmm,

that's different," she thought. "I wonder who they are?"

Lindsey crossed the street again and slowly wandered over to the green. She stood back a little ways and listened to the music and heard some people laughing. A few women and children were setting out what looked like a picnic lunch.

Someone saw her watching and came over to her. "Oh, I guess I'm committed to meeting them now," she thought to herself.

It was a young woman in her twenties with a day pack slung over one shoulder. She was wearing a silky, festive blouse and modest loose-fitting pants. "Hi, my name is Sarah. How are you doing?"

The question was sincere, like the woman actually cared. Lindsey wondered if she had noticed her tears. "I'm fine, thank you," she replied, willing it to be so. "My name is Lindsey. I live in that apartment over there," she said, pointing to the brownstone building behind her. "Who are you people? Why are you dancing in the park?"

"Well, our community has a large house over in the next town, and dancing is a big part of our culture."

"Do you mean a commune? Are you guys a throwback to the '60s, or something?" Lindsey was a little embarrassed how rude the question sounded, but the girl seemed not to notice.

"No," Sarah laughed. "We're believers. We live like the early church did in the Book of Acts. You know... the Bible?" She seemed uncertain whether Lindsey understood.

"So, are you Christians?" Lindsey asked hopefully. "I am."

"Oh, yes! We believe that Jesus died for us and rose again — only we call him Yahshua.\* That's His Hebrew birth name. We've left all our own plans and ambitions to follow Him and be His disciples." Sarah paused and smiled. "But we don't usually refer to ourselves as Christians. So many things today are called *Christian* that don't really represent Him."

"Oh," Lindsey replied thoughtfully. What Sarah said rang true with her, but she didn't want to get into it quite yet. Instead she asked, "So, what do you do

\* *The Twelve Tribes* Communites use the name *Yahshua*, the original Hebrew name for Jesus. Please see the article *What's in a Name* on our web site.



in your community?"

"Well, we have a cafe that we run together, and a small home repair business. We also home-school our children, have a few goats, and a small garden. We share what we have all in common as the disciples did in the first century."

"Really?" Lindsey said. "Looks like there are a lot of you. How do you manage the practical stuff like feeding everybody and doing laundry?"

Sarah smiled and glanced over at the women setting out lunch. "We work together and have different responsibilities. We take turns cooking and every family has a laundry day, plus taking care of one of the single people. Some of us work in the café, some home-school the children."

Lindsey was intrigued. "But do you all get along? I mean, what happens when there is a disagreement?"

"Oh, our unity is of the *utmost* importance. Our Master prayed that His disciples would be one just as He and His Father are one. We can't even call ourselves His people if we aren't in unity. So we have to work out our differences. But we can confess our sins to one another and forgive each other because our Master has forgiven us. It's part of being saved. For us, salvation is an ongoing and life-long process."

"Yes," Lindsey said, enthusiastically. "I heard something about that this morning in church..."

"You did?" Sarah asked, incredulous.

"Well, at least the part about salvation being an ongoing and life-long process. But what does that even mean? Whenever I ask pastors about this, they say it means we can't get irritated with people and have to forbear... You know, like *'picking up your cross and following Him'* when times are tough and your unbelieving coworkers make fun of your faith. They say you have to forgive the person next to you in the choir who is singing off key. But that seems so shallow, because you only have to put up with them for an hour once a week on Sunday. How is that an 'ongoing process'?"

"Exactly!" Sarah exclaimed. "We can

only be saved in the living, tangible Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit has to have a physical home. He isn't just hovering over the earth on Sunday mornings, trying to keep an eye on the 40,000 Christian denominations. That's part of the reason we don't refer to ourselves as *Christians*. To be a Christian means thousands of different things — just about everything under the sun, really, except being a *disciple*."

"Disciple?" Lindsey asked. She wondered why Sarah found the word so significant.

"That's what Yahshua called His followers. It means someone who is being trained to obey all His commands."

"Like what, for instance?"

"Well, the most important one is this right here..." Sarah slipped the day pack off her shoulder and pulled a small Bible from one of the compartments. "In John 13, He gives us a new commandment... This, right here: *'Love one another, even as I have loved you.'* And He says right here that this is how all men will know that we're His disciples. He even repeats the commandment two chapters later, and says this: *'Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends...'*"

"But what does that even mean? Of course, I know Jesus laid down His life for us — He died in our place — but we don't die for each other's sins..."

Sarah's smile was warm and she answered gently, "For me, laying down my life is a daily, ongoing expression of love. I'm learning to value others more highly than I value myself. So when I give up my time, my things, my comfort, and



Lindsey

so on, for the benefit of my friends, I'm loving them the same way our Master loved us. And in our life together, we have constant opportunity for His love to flourish. All most people can imagine when they hear, "lay down your life," is to get killed jumping in front of a truck



to save somebody's life. But you have to think outside the box of traditional religion that actually is no different than the world. The first believers had a life separate from the society they lived in. They didn't have to look out for their own interests, like the rest of the world. Their brothers took care of that, so they were free to be devoted to the interests of their brothers... and sisters, of course."

"Wow. That's pretty radical. I can see what you mean about thinking outside the box. My boyfriend looks at the way society is set up and decides that Jesus doesn't expect people to be able to obey Him. He said Jesus even scolded the religious people of His day for trying to put new wine in an old wineskin... you know, like, 'Don't try to force something...'"

"Really?" Sarah seemed surprised.

"Well, that's sort of what it means, isn't it? Or maybe He's saying that we have to be flexible and change with the circumstances. Well, actually I don't know what it means, really. What do you folks think?"

Sarah flipped to the passage they were discussing. "Actually, Yahshua was comparing new wine to the fresh, new life of the Holy Spirit. He was saying that nobody would even think of putting new wine in old wineskins. The wine would burst the skins and make a big mess. So why would anyone think you could put the fervent love that Messiah brought to earth into the dead, religious system

of the day? Yahshua said this new life couldn't mix with the old. The new wine would burst the old, dried-up wineskin." Lindsey waited and anticipated what Sarah would say next. She watched her face and was amazed to see the clarity in her eyes.

"The point he was making is there needed to be a *new* wineskin. But, really, the question is, what happened to that new wine, that bubbly, sparkling, life? People will say Christianity is that new life, but it's not true.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we believe the first church went off course. At first they had a vibrant life of love and sharing, but their hearts and love grew cool over time and their fleshly desires and carnal ways took them off course. False prophets brought in strange doctrines... different Jesuses. The people allowed themselves to be deceived because they stopped being willing to do His will. They stopped being willing to lay down their lives and love one another."

"Too worried about their own lives?"

Lindsey wondered.

"Christianity is the outcome of the first church slipping off the original foundation of love. When the first believers gathered together daily to worship, they were all exhorted to bring a psalm, a song, a revelation... Their gatherings were lively and everyone participated. But because their love grew cool they lost their outspokenness, and gradually the 'gifted' speakers took over and started doing all the talking. The once-enthused believers ended up in pews, staring at the back of each other's heads while they all listened to the Pope... or the pastor."

"Wow, I never saw it that way..."

Lindsey replied thoughtfully as she brushed some dry leaves with her foot.

"You can read about it in the epistles," Sarah continued. "But, John 13:34-35 says '*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this you will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*'"

Looking up from the ground and brushing her hand over her hair, Lindsey took a deep breath and said, "Whew! This is so much to think about."

"Why don't you stay and have lunch with us? I'll introduce you to my friends."

"No, thank you. My boyfriend will wonder why I have been gone so long." Actually, Lindsey was somewhat overwhelmed with all she had heard and didn't think she could take in any more. She wanted to get back to the security of her apartment.

"Would you like one of our papers?" Sarah asked reaching into a bag on the ground. "It has our address on the back."

"Yes, I will take one. I really must go. It was very pleasant talking to you." Lindsey said sincerely. "Bye, now!"



TIM WAS NAPPING when Lindsey came back into their apartment. He woke up when she came into the living room. "You aren't still mad at me, are you?" he said sheepishly as he got up and stretched.

"No," Lindsey replied, walking over to the window to see if she could catch a glimpse of the community.

"I just met the most amazing group of people over on the green."

"Really," Tim replied as he joined her at the window. "The circus in town?"

"Oh, Tim, can't you be serious?" she said "They are a community of believers. They live like the first Christians in the book of Acts. They were dancing and playing Israeli folk music."

"Really," Tim nonchalantly replied as he picked up a magazine.

"Yeah, they actually live together and share their possessions. They talk about love and forgiving each other. They believe that salvation isn't just saying the sinner's prayer, but an on-going life of learning how to love."

"I'll bet. Living with a bunch of people would be salvation for me. I'd probably go nuts."

"No, really Tim. They believe it's

possible to obey the commandments of Jesus. They call him Yahshua, His Hebrew name. They seemed to really care about each other."

"Oh, here you go on this loving and caring business. I'm jumping in the shower, then meeting some friends. Want to come?"

"No, I think I'll stick around the apartment for the rest of the day."

"Suit yourself, but you might miss a good movie," Tim replied as he headed for the bedroom.

A few minutes later Lindsey was lingering in the kitchen. She watched Tim grab his coat and head to the door without a backward glance.

"See you later," he called over his shoulder.

"Bye," Lindsey answered, a little disappointed he didn't try and persuade her to come with him.

While Tim was gone Lindsey decided to look up the scriptures Sarah had told her about. She remembered the paper she had given her and pulled it out of her bag. "Could it be true? Could it be possible?" she wondered to herself. "Do believers really have to live in community?"

Lindsey couldn't put the "freepaper" down. What she read fascinated her, especially the personal stories about how people came to live in the community. The writers seemed to have such insight into what works in people and why people aren't able to care for each other in the world today. Glancing up at the clock, she realized how late it was. Tim should be back any time.

She decided to not get into a conversation about what she was reading with Tim tonight. Lindsey thought about how much she loved Tim, and tried to ignore the nagging fear in her heart that they were drifting apart. They had met in college and at first had many similar interests. Tim was intelligent and witty and could make Lindsey laugh at the slightest provocation. Yet, at the same time, he had seemed so deep and sensitive. She especially loved those times when they first started dating, in the quiet of an evening, when they would talk about the

Lindsey

*"Could it be true? Could it be possible?" she wondered to herself. "Do believers really have to live in community?"*

meaning of life and what the future held for them. His teasing about her church hopping had been light over the years they had known each other, but lately



there was more of an edge to his remarks. He seemed to be growing more cynical about the things he himself had once believed in. She turned over the paper and saw where Sarah had circled their address and phone number. She was torn in her emotions, but determined to go see if these people really lived the life they wrote about. In her heart she hoped she wouldn't be disappointed. Her reverie was suddenly interrupted.



"The pizza man is here!" Tim called through the door. "Open the door, lady." Throwing the Freepaper in the magazine rack, Lindsey ran to the door to greet Tim.

A couple of weeks slipped by before Lindsey decided to take a day off from work and visit the community. She thought she would begin by going to their café where she could casually observe the community's interactions.



WHEN SHE WALKED INTO the community's café she was pleasantly surprised by the warm atmosphere. A smiling, gray-bearded man offered her a menu and a cozy booth of rustic barn wood. On one wall was a beautiful hand-painted mural of a lovely field of golden grain. Soft acoustic music played in the background. She could hear laughter

coming from the kitchen. Lindsey was enthralled by the peace she felt. As she was sipping her hot drink, one of the women she saw in the park recognized her and came over to her table.

"We are so glad you came," she warmly greeted her. "Sarah is out back in the bakery. I'll tell her you are here. Is there anything else we can get you?" A small boy came up to the woman and held the hem of her shirt. He looked up at Lindsey with big brown eyes and a totally uninhibited smile. "Hi, my name is Obadiah."

"It's nice to meet you, Obadiah. My name is Lindsey."

Obadiah told her all about what he had done in his school work that day. "In art class we made a huge boat out of papier mâché," he told her, "and we're going to have a play. Can you come?"

A few minutes later Sarah came out from the bakery, wiping her floured hands on an apron. "I'm so glad you came. I've been thinking about you!"

She sat down at the table with Lindsey.

"I have read your paper cover to cover and have been thinking about the parable of the new wine." Lindsey eagerly blurted out. "I was also reading the parable about how no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. When the garment was washed the patch would shrink and tear the cloth. It seems like Christianity has tried to patch up the old stiff religious services with upbeat music, and more dynamic preachers. Even the Catholics have loosened up their Mass and tried to make it less formal. You know, trying to go with the times — the culture of today."

"It's still the old wine," Sarah replied.

"I'm starting to understand what you are saying." Lindsey could hardly contain her excitement, and continued on, "And I read the scriptures you told me about judging a tree by its fruit, and John 15 about the branches bearing fruit. I think I'm starting to see what you have tried to explain."

"It must be because you are willing."

Sarah replied

"Willing?"

“John 7:17 says, *‘If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself.’* The word *willing* means someone who is determined to respond to the truth... without reluctance. The rich young ruler was not willing to do Yahshua’s will even though he obeyed all the commandments and wanted to go to heaven when he died.”

“Is that in Mark 10?” Lindsey asked taking her Bible out of her bag and opening it on the table.

“Yes, right here,” Sarah said, “And here, it says Yahshua felt a love for him, and said to him, *‘One thing you lack; go and sell all of your possessions, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasures in heaven; and come, follow Me.’* But he couldn’t do it and he went away disappointed.”

“You know, I always wondered about the rich young ruler.” Lindsey said. “I was at a Billy Graham Crusade in New York a couple of years ago and Mr. Graham brought this story up. He read these scriptures and I was eager to hear what he thought about what Jesus, I mean Yahshua, said about the man giving up all his possessions. All Mr. Graham said was the rich young ruler made the wrong choice. I was waiting for him to say more.” Lindsey took a sip of her tea. “That’s all he said... I couldn’t figure out if he was agreeing that the rich young ruler should have given up all his possessions and followed Yahshua or what.”

“We were there! Corona Park in the Queens, right?” Sarah said excitedly.

Lindsey nodded as she swallowed another sip of tea, “What were you doing at a Billy Graham Crusade?”

“We were dancing, handing out papers, and talking to loads of people. I heard what Mr. Graham said also,” Sarah said excitedly. “It did seem as if Mr. Graham knew that was what the rich young ruler *should have done*, but he wouldn’t come right out and say it. We thought because if he had agreed, then the question would be, why aren’t all believers obedient to Luke 14:33... including Mr. Graham?”

Lindsey quickly turned to the

scripture and read it out loud: “*Therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.*”

Lindsey looked up at Sarah with a huge sheepish grin, “Isn’t that something?”

“Yes... isn’t it?” Sarah smiled.

Sarah excused herself to go check on her bread. When she came back to the table she said, “Why don’t you come on home with me and I’ll show you our garden. Maybe you can stay for our evening gathering.”

“Yes, I’d like that,” Lindsey answered. Lindsey’s heart was drawn to these people. She sensed that these people had once had the same questions about life and God that she had.

Lindsey met the other people who lived in the household. “I’ll never be able to remember all these names!” she exclaimed. Everyone laughed and said they understood. She enjoyed the singing and especially the children dancing with the adults. Little Obadiah would smile at her with his bright eyes every time he passed her in the circle dance. Lindsey was surprised at how comfortable she felt. Everyone seemed at ease with each other.

Later on, after supper, Lindsey said she needed to get home. Sarah walked Lindsey to her car. The heat of the day had been replaced by a cool evening breeze. “The first chance you get, read the rest of Mark 10,” Sarah mentioned referring back to their conversation at the café.

“Yes, I will.” Lindsey answered as she slid into the driver’s seat.

“After Yahshua’s disciples witnessed what happened to the rich young ruler and what Yahshua said about how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, they asked, *‘Who then can be saved?’*”

“And...?” Lindsey inquired.

“Oh, just read it when you can,” Sarah said as she affectionately patted Lindsey’s arm. “But I know the only ones who can be saved are those who are willing to do His will.”

Lindsey said, “I’m starting to understand that. Thank you so much for your

Lindsey

*The word willing means someone who is determined to respond to the truth... without reluctance.*

time today.”

“It is our pleasure. We love you Lindsey. We hope you come back.”

Lindsey thought she could see tears in



Sarah’s eyes. She started her car. Swallowing hard, she said, “I’ll be back.”



THE NEXT MORNING Lindsey attempted a conversation with Tim.

Tim was checking his e-mail before leaving for work.

“Tim, you need to come meet these people. It’s amazing how they all work together. There isn’t someone in charge telling everybody what to do but they just see the need and work together.” Lindsey waited for a response. “I watched them working in the garden with their children.” Lindsey came over to Tim and put her hands on his shoulders. He didn’t say anything. “The children are so obedient and respectful.”

Pausing for breath she continued, “I saw two men disagreeing on how to plant potatoes. The first man humbled himself and then they both started laughing. It was obvious they loved each other more than they loved being right.”

Lindsey looked at the back of Tim’s head hoping for some kind of positive response. “It makes sense when you read John 13:34 and 35, you know, “*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another...*” Tim made no response. Lindsey squeezed Tim’s shoulders slightly.

Tim said, “Hmm,” without taking his eyes off the screen.

“*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*’ You don’t see that in

Christianity, Tim”

Tim finally looked up from the computer, “You are really serious about this group aren’t you? You really think they are on to something, don’t you?”

“Well, yes, I do. I see love, Tim. I see people laying down their lives for each other just like the Scriptures talk about. I see the Scriptures coming alive. These people really walk the walk.” They were both quiet for a few minutes.

“Tim, please try and understand. I can’t claim to be a believer if I don’t trust Him with my life and give my whole heart, soul, and strength to do His will.”

“That’s ridiculous, Lindsey. Nobody knows what God’s will is for their life. Hardly anybody in this day and age has clearly defined convictions. And even if you did know *what* His will was, you only have to be willing — it’s an attitude thing and not some law. It’s all subjective in your own eyes.” Tim reached over and grabbed his coat. “You only have to be willing. That’s all Jesus is looking for.” Driving his arm through his coat sleeve he said, “I have no interest in meeting these people.” Looking up at Lindsey he said, “Why am I not good enough for you? Why isn’t loving me enough?” Pausing slightly, he coolly went on, “Got to go. I have a meeting down town. See you later.” Half way out the door, he turned back to Lindsey as she stood crying by the sink, “Love you,” he said gently. And then he was gone.

Over the next few days Lindsey tried to put her visit to the community out of her mind. She kept busy at work and when she came home she threw herself into cleaning the apartment and cooking appetizing meals for Tim. But she was in inner turmoil and no matter how feverishly she scrubbed the refrigerator she couldn’t be distracted from thinking about her new friends.

“These people seem to know what I am thinking. They seem to understand the desire I have to know what God’s will is for my life,” she said out loud. Lindsey was distressed. The hope that welled up in her heart was dashed when she remembered that Tim had no such desire.

Lindsey



ONE DAY AFTER WORK, while putting groceries away, she remembered her promise to read Mark 10. Quickly throwing the frozen peas in the freezer, she grabbed her Bible and sank down on the couch. Lindsey re-read the story of the rich young ruler. Then she continued reading through verse 31. Looking up, she thought about the words of Yahshua. He told his disciples that it was hard for a rich man to be saved, but with God all things were possible. "Am I a 'rich man'?" she thought to herself. Getting up and walking to the window over looking the park, she started reading out loud, "Then Peter began to say to Him, 'See, we have left all, and have followed you.' And Yahshua answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no man that has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or farms, for my sake, and the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundred times now in this life: houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and farms, with persecutions; and in the age to come eternal life.'"

Lindsey had read those passages before and had never understood them. No one had ever been able to explain what they meant to her, or had just echoed Tim's sentiments: "Jesus only wants you to be willing to give up everything for Him."

"No wonder," Lindsey thought. "Outside of living like the early disciples, how could you obey this? Give up your home and live on the street? Find a nice mission to live in? What good would that do, and how is that a witness of His life? Jesus didn't live off welfare."

"No, look outside the box of Christianity," Sarah's words came back to Lindsey, "Because Yahshua said this to a people who were living together, sharing all their possessions and homes, and farms and sisters and brothers. This was the requirement to become a disciple. How could it be any different today? The gospel then is the *same* gospel as today."

She looked around her apartment. Her eyes fell on familiar and loved objects like her grandmother's silver set, her computer, her music and book collection... "Am I attached to these things?" Her fingers glided over the smooth surface of the expensive oak table that Tim had bought her for her birthday.

Lindsey felt like she couldn't swallow, and walked into the kitchen for a glass of water. She felt a certainty pressing in on her heart she couldn't deny. Giving up the physical possessions wasn't the problem. She knew she could walk away from her personal belongings, savings, and even the car that was almost paid for. But, Lindsey knew her greatest possession was Tim. "I need to give up everything that would keep me from following Yahshua." The revelation was staggering and Lindsey could feel a physical tightness in her chest, "Staying with Tim would keep me from following Yahshua." The apartment felt like it was closing in on her and Lindsey decided to go out for a walk.



SEVERAL MORE WEEKS PASSED. Lindsey continued to visit the community when she could, even though Tim would be cool to her for a few days afterward. She read the freepapers they gave her and she looked up the scriptures. Hoping Tim's curiosity would be aroused, Lindsey left them laying around. She wanted to hold onto the hope she had that he too really did desire to know God's will for their lives. But each time they talked the strain on their relationship grew. One evening she attempted to talk to him once more about the stirrings in her heart. Tim got off the couch and walked over and stood in front of her. Looking directly in her eyes he told her in no uncertain terms, "Our life is fine just the way it is. We don't have to be a part of some community to be happy. I like my life. I like my things and what I do for a living... and I'm sure God is *fine* with it too." Lindsey knew if he had thought he

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could, he would have insisted she stop visiting the community.

The next evening Tim seemed to be in a more gentle mood. He told Lindsey he had to attend a business conference in another city and would be gone for the weekend. "I wish you would come with me. There will be plenty of social time in the evenings after the meetings," Tim casually remarked. Lindsey didn't answer. "There's a pool and a bar at the hotel, and I heard there's supposed to be a live band for dancing entertainment."

Lindsey pretended to be nonchalant as she walked into the living room to the window overlooking the park. "Oh, I don't know."

"You don't want to come, do you?"



Tim asked coming up behind her. "You used to like an occasional drink and a night out dancing. It would be good for our relationship,

Lindsey. We could get away and have some time together."

"I really don't care about drinking and dancing, Tim." Lindsey sighed. Tim's gentle mood changed.

"Yeah, well you have changed a lot ever since you met those people in the park. Do your new friends not condone a little *worldly pleasure*?" he switched on the TV. "Don't come; I don't care. Stay home and read your Bible," he said as he slumped down into his easy chair. Lindsey felt bad for making Tim feel miserable,

but there was nothing she could say; she felt miserable, too.

The apartment was too quiet after Tim had left for the weekend. Lindsey didn't want to watch TV *or* read her Bible. She wanted to see her friends. She decided to take Sarah up on her invitation to spend the weekend with them.



LINDSEY TOOK A LONG WALK with Sarah on Sunday before leaving to go back to her apartment. Tim would be home that evening. Sarah knew Lindsey was seriously considering her life and her relationship with Tim and was in turmoil.

"Have you ever read John 12:24-26?" Sarah asked as they walked along the path by the river.

"I'm not sure," Lindsey replied thoughtfully, "What does it say?"

"*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.*"

"Yes, I have read that passage," Lindsey answered stopping by the water's edge and turning towards Sarah, "Am I that grain of wheat?"

"We all were... We were alone at one time. But when we surrendered and died, we went into the good soil of the Body of Messiah." Sarah answered. "The next verse says, *If anyone serves Me, let Him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant be.*' If we surrender our lives we are with Him in His Body — serving Him." Sarah gently continued.

"I am alone." Lindsey answered. Then suddenly bursting into tears, Lindsey dropped to the ground on the soft grass. Sarah knelt down next to her.

"I *am* alone. I am with all of you, but I am still alone. I love Tim, but when I'm with him I'm still alone. We don't



have the same desires.” Lindsey wept. “I need to go into the soil and die, don’t I, Sarah? I need to give up Tim and become a disciple. I need to be where Yahshua is.” Lindsey hopefully looked up at Sarah.

“Our Father can save you, Lindsey, if you are willing to do His will.”

“I want to do His will,” Lindsey answered, wiping her tears on her sleeve.

On the way home Lindsey prayed to have the courage to go into the ground and die. It was actually a relief to realize the ground was not in Christianity and she couldn’t have ever received the Holy Spirit. “Maybe that’s why I have never had the power to love or overcome my selfishness,” Lindsey thought. “Although I haven’t been satisfied with my life, I have loved it... and the world.” Flipping off the radio, Lindsey thought, “I have known that verse ever since I was a child, *‘Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.’*” Lindsey thought about her independence and her pride. She knew she had never been saved and couldn’t go on any longer.

The time had come to have a serious conversation with Tim. Their relationship had become even more distant as Tim remained adamant about not visiting. Their lives had grown far apart.

Finally, one night after supper, Lindsey decided to talk to Tim. “You know, I am planning on moving into the community.”

Tim looked up from the table. There was a look of tiredness and sadness in his eyes.

“I had hoped your infatuation with these people would pass.” He said pushing himself away from the table. “You have been bouncing around from church to church ever since I have known you, but this is consuming you. I was hoping you would see through them and your

relationship with these people would tire. Why is knowing them changing you so much? I want our life to be normal again.”

“You have always known I was looking for... some purpose... some reason to believe. Yahshua is real, and I know I want to belong to Him. Their life is real. I have spent hours with them, Tim. I see how people’s lives have really changed. I want to finally be able to learn to love like Yahshua loves.” Lindsey looked at Tim, “I love you, Tim... I am so torn. But, I can’t deny what is dawning in my heart. I need to be saved and surrender my entire life.”

“Yes, but why do you have to do something so radical, Lindsey?” Tim was almost shouting. “You don’t have to give up everything to change. Christians only have to be *willing* to do His will. Maybe you can still find a church somewhere that you could be happy with. Pick one and I’ll start going with you on Sunday mornings. I’ll start reading my Bible...” He leaned over the back of his chair and shouted, “You don’t have to be so different! I don’t want to lose you. I love you.”

Striving to control himself, Tim paused and moved around his chair to stand in front of her, “Marry me, Lindsey, and we’ll have the baby you have always wanted.” Tim’s voice shook with emotion as he yelled, “I’ll give you anything you want. Name it, Lindsey, I’ll give it to you. Don’t leave me. Do you understand? I can make you happy!”

Lindsey’s voice surprised her as she shouted, “Tim, you can’t give me eternal life!”

The room was suddenly filled with silence as neither one moved. Lindsey suddenly began sobbing.

Tim’s voice was more controlled. “Why do you have to do this? Why? Do these people mean more to you than me? No, don’t answer that.” Tim hesitated and looked away from her face, “I already know the answer.” ☹

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Lindsey

# ARE the Twelve Tribes CHRISTIAN?

*When we began in the early 1970s, we thought we were part of Christianity. It soon became clear that we were different.*

**A**s a member of the Twelve Tribes for 13 years, I have been asked this question many times. It may surprise you to hear me admit it – but I have answered both “yes” and “no.” And before you wonder if I’m just dishonest, I’ll go a step further and say that my answer really depends on who is asking.



Some people come from a Christian perspective. They believe in the Bible, believe in God, believe we are all sinners in need of salvation, and believe that Jesus paid for our sins. With their question, they simply want to know, “Do you believe these things, too?” And for them, the answer is, an unashamed and enthusiastic, “Yes.”

Some people come from other perspectives. They may have grown up under Christian hypocrisy, having their idealism and trust hurt by insensitive zealots acting in the name of God. They may be Jews or Muslims, whose relatives were killed or victimized by violence condoned by Christian leaders past or present. Or they may be agnostics, holding tightly to their intellectual integrity, unable to swallow some of the hard-to-stomach doctrines about human

suffering and eternity. With their question, they ask, “Do you align yourselves with this unjust, hypocritical organization that I loathe?” For them, the answer is an emphatic, “No.” For the sake of that person’s soul, we don’t want them to reject our Savior or His message because of other groups who claim to know Him,<sup>1</sup> but misrepresent Him.

**W**hen we began back in the early 1970s, we thought we were a part of Christianity. We sang her songs, we read her books, and identified with her creeds and heritage. We even went to church on Sunday and sat in the pews. It soon became clear to us, that we were different. Although we read the same Bible and believed much the same, it wasn’t enough for us to just go to church on Sunday. We loved each other too much, and we wanted to be with each other every day. So we bought houses, opened cafés, and began our life together. We read the passages in Acts 2 and 4 about the early church, and took identity with them, much to our encouragement. For a time, we tried to be good Christians. Yet, there were constant struggles between us and the churches. Our zealous approach to obeying the Scriptures caused friction with

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:4; John 9:41

the ruffled pastors, and their concerns turned more and more antagonistic and quenching.

When we showed up for church one night to find the doors locked, it was a turning point. The sign on the door read, "Tonight's service canceled for the Superbowl." We left that night disillusioned and never returned. Our decision was not motivated by offense or bitterness, but a final realization of an idea that had been growing over the years: Christianity had become leavened with worldliness. We stopped going to church, and decided to be the church.

At the time, we understood little about our purpose. Through the years, the same Spirit of love that brought us together has continued to reveal the truths of the Scriptures to us. It has both confirmed our original decision and made us more aware of what it really means to be His disciples. We came to understand that the life of the Holy Spirit is one of overcoming and walking in fellowship, in a much deeper way than we had understood those same words when we sat in the pews. And as we strove to obey our Lord's commandments, we found that it was impossible to obey Him while living in the world, going to church one day a week. You had to live together in a common life, as the early church did, sharing all things in common.

The simplest command, "*Encourage one another daily, lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,*"<sup>2</sup> only made sense in the context of a daily common life. And other commands and descriptions just didn't work with the clergy-run worship services that were a standard feature of Christian churches. "*We are His house, if we hold fast our outspokenness firm until the end,*"<sup>3</sup> and "*If all prophesy, and an unbeliever enters, he is convicted by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed and he will fall on his face and worship God and declare that God*

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 3:13

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 3:6 (Most translations say "confidence" but the Greek word being translated actually means *outspokenness*, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.)

*is certainly among you.*"<sup>4</sup> It was important to us that every single member was outspoken and participated in our gatherings.

**I**t became more and more clear to us that we were different from Christianity. We did not want to judge, but neither could we compromise. Nor could we pretend to have fellowship and unity with a divided church. The more we examined our own lives and exposed the sin that could lead to divisions between us, the more we could no longer tolerate the long-standing divisions and denominations within Christianity. The Spirit that was leading us brought about unity and love and outspokenness in every member. Such an effervescent life rattled the cages of the Christian clergy who were used to running the show.

We asked ourselves two important questions about Christianity: 1) Is it theoretically possible that the entire church could fall away if they ignored the apostles' warnings throughout the New Testament? And 2) Did it?

Our Master was a carpenter by trade, but He never told stories about wood and nails. They were more about farming, or making wine — things that every common man could understand.

*"No one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and*

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:25



*the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”*<sup>5</sup> In His days, new wine, already partially fermented, was poured into a flexible new skin. As the process continued of sugar turning to alcohol, the skin swelled under the pressure. After time,

the skin hardened and became rigid and inflexible in its swelled state, and the wine was left to age. If you tried to put again some new wine, with its living bubblyness, into the rigid shell of an old wine-skin, the new wine would soon burst its container. It is just like putting a new patch on an old garment. You cannot mix the old and the new.



**T**his is just how we felt. Our daily

common life was not compatible with one-hour-a-week Christianity. Our zeal was perceived as a threat. Our spiritual energy put a strain on the unbending container of liturgical worship. So we had to put our “new wine” into a new container – the community. Only in the setting of a common life, in communities that were set apart from the world, could we receive the new wine of our Master.

Many of our friends still do not understand why we just didn’t stay in

Christianity and try to reform it. “Doesn’t 2000 years of a rich heritage of martyrs, theologians, and saints mean something?” they say. “Sure, there are problems, but can’t you stay in and try to fix them with the rest of us?” This reminds us of what our Master said to the Pharisees: “*No one, after drinking the old wine, wishes for the new, because he says the old is good enough.*”<sup>6</sup>

**T**he Pharisees, like many Christians today, had invested many years of their lives in their religious system. It was “good enough” for them, and they didn’t want the new. The old wine would only bring one to a stupor, and lacked the sweetness of its fresh and vital connection to the Vine.

The old crusty religion wasn’t “good enough” for us. The old system was too brittle and corrupted to simply put a patch on it. As our Master said, “no one” puts a patch on the old. Only a *nobody* would even try. We didn’t want to end up as one more revival movement in the history books. We were not a division from an existing denomination, another split-off from one of the 39,000. No, we saw that we were something new – a brand new wineskin with new wine.

The church should never make it into the history books. The church is a short-term, mission-oriented task force to bring about the Kingdom of God. With all of our hearts, we want to obey our Master Yahshua, and bring His kingdom to earth, as quickly as possible. If we are around long enough to be recorded in the history books, our movement has failed. ☹

<sup>5</sup> Mark 2:22

<sup>6</sup> Luke 5:39



It said, “Praise the Lord,” on his sign advertising his feed store. I knew that would mean he was a zealous person for his religion. That could prove to be either a pleasant or a very unsettling encounter, because I knew he would not like what I believe.

“Oh, you are a believer? Great! What is your church? What is your doctrine?” he forcefully pried.

I liked his country ways, so I hoped I could at least appeal to him as a man who likes horses and goats, that maybe he would hear out some simple, common-sense thoughts in spite of his predisposition because of his denomination.

“Well, I believe one thing and I don’t believe one thing that you are not going to like. First, I don’t believe that everyone, everywhere, no matter how they have tried, how they have endeavored to live by what they knew was right, how they suffered, will automatically go to the Lake of Fire because they do not believe in the one true Savior of the world, whom you call Jesus...”

His face switched from his inquisitive half-smile to a questioning and doubtful frown.

Before he had a chance to express his mind to me, I continued: “And the second thing I do believe, which you will not like, is that when the great apostles like Peter, James, John, Matthew... all of them found themselves alone after the ascension

of their Master into heaven, as it says in the Apostle’s Creed... the very first thing they did was to set up a pattern for all those who would believe after them. Remember, they were filled with the Holy Ghost and started speaking to everyone, speaking in a way everyone there could understand?”

He nodded enthusiastically, obviously emotional about the stories he has heard and read.

“And then... they baptized lots of people...”

“Yes, yes...” he nodded happily.

“And then I believe, as the Bible clearly says, that they set up a pattern for all believers after them... those famous men who wrote the New Testament. You believe in them don’t you — Peter and John? Great men, right?”

“For sure, absolutely,” he replied in his preacher voice, holding a small reserve as he wondered what I could possibly say at this point, which he would not like.

“So, they loved those people they baptized, just as their Master had commanded, ‘Love one another as

I have loved you.’ So, they set the pattern immediately. That night after the baptism, it started... Where did they eat supper? Where did they spend the night? What did they do with their new lives? Go somewhere and find a Bible-believing church? No! It says clearly in the Bible what they did. And I believe... but you will not like it... I believe they gave up all their personal possessions, shared all they had with one another, sold their properties elsewhere, ate all their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, had all things in common... And... that was the pattern that every single church after that was supposed to follow.

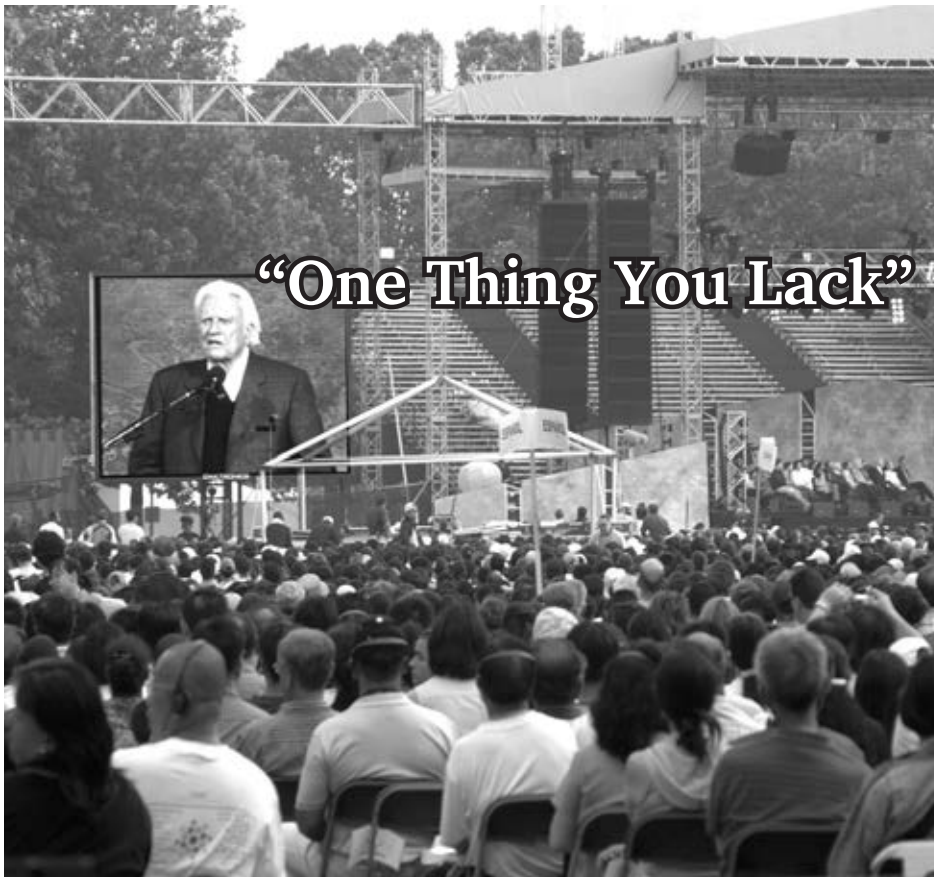
This was the pattern of Peter, James, John, and all the people who had personally met and been healed by the Son of God.” I cringed, anticipating his response... “And I believe that everyone who claims to believe the Bible and is not living like that is disobedient and is doing it wrong!”

His questioning frown became a belligerent smirk. The words that flowed from that point are not worthy to record. Had there been a stake in the feed store within arm’s reach, perhaps I would have been the only heretic to have been burned in the county since the reign of the Catholic friars who founded this area.

These are the two things... one I don’t believe, and one I do. 🐣

There I was, on a steamy summer afternoon at Flushing Meadows Park, in Queens, New York City, June 25, 2005, waiting with great anticipation to hear Billy Graham preach what would prove to be his second-to-last sermon. I was filled with curiosity when he announced his text: Mark 10:17-22.

That was the story of the Rich Young Ruler! I had struggled over this passage as a young Christian, wondering how to apply it to my life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now I would hear the answer from the most famous evangelist of all time. I was so excited!



First, Mr. Graham read the text:

*As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"*

*"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."*

*Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," He said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:17-22)*

Just hearing the story again got me all stirred up inside. But then Mr. Graham started to explain what happened. I

remember his words very clearly, because I was paying very close attention:

"The young man did a lot of things right. He came at the right time. He asked the right question. And Jesus gave him the right answer. But he did the wrong thing."

Then, to my astonishment, Mr. Graham went on to another subject! "Wait a minute!" I screamed inside. "*He did the wrong thing?* Is that all? What *should* he have done?" I strained my ears to hear the answer, but it never came. That was all I was going to hear from Mr. Graham on the subject. He went on to talk about fractured and hurting young people who need a purpose for their lives, and how they should ask Jesus to come into their heart.

"Ok, let me think this through," I thought to myself. "The man asked what

he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor, and then follow Him. And the man didn't do it, and Mr. Graham said the man 'did the wrong thing.' So was Mr. Graham saying he should have sold his possessions?" *No answer.*

What a disappointment!

Of course, I knew the classic answer. I had heard it a thousand times: "You only have to be *willing*."

Jesus had said, "One thing you lack." So what exactly was it that the man lacked?

He wasn't *willing* to do what the "good teacher" said.

And how do we know he wasn't willing?

He didn't *do* it.

What would he have done if he had been willing?

He would have done it.

Are you willing to do what the "good teacher" says?

"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." (Luke 14:33) ☹

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