

The Prophecy



Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV

I never saw it coming. But Lord knows I needed that message that came out of nowhere—out of the shadows, actually—all those years ago.

A little after ten p.m. on a Saturday night in July 2002, I stood on a dingy street corner three blocks away from my apartment in downtown Chicago, waiting to catch a bus. And waiting to catch a break.

I stared dully across the four-lane street at several abandoned buildings. This part of Chicago was dark and empty, a connector to the remnants of a former skid row of drugs and prostitutes a few more blocks away. My friend David stood with me, waiting until I got safely on the bus to head to my job as a respiratory therapist.

Normally I would have driven to work, but my car had caught fire on the expressway a few months earlier, so I had no vehicle. I had lost my entire savings putting on a gospel concert the previous year. I was in the early stages of a divorce from my husband Ken, so any extra money went to legal fees.

But worse than all of that, I was in a long-running custody battle with

my college sweetheart, the father of my twelve-year-old son, who had petitioned for full custody five years earlier. The thought of losing my boy was traumatic. Aaron was everything to me—the only good thing I ever really had. And now I could lose him.

Three blocks back, east of here, I had walked out of my high-rise apartment building, with its shiny, all-inclusive corporate living, its trendy restaurants, a pool that Aaron loved, and its conference rooms where I planned to meet with clients and start a business. We had lived here just about a year. Presidential Towers was supposed to represent a new beginning. Instead, I was being evicted. Management had slipped a note under my door giving me thirty days to vacate because I had been late with the rent twice just before the lease renewal.

I had eleven days left to find a new place.

A few steps outside of the building, I had turned around and looked up to get a glimpse of Aaron in the front window of our apartment about halfway up. I could see him grinning as he waved at me. As I waved back, fear wrapped itself around me. Aaron was the only thing left in my messed-up life that could turn out all right. How could the courts take away our future? I knew it wasn't going to look good if the lawyers found out I had no car, no apartment, and no money.

I had been a respiratory therapist for about nine years, working a part-time job on weekdays while Aaron was in school, and also for a medical staffing agency that assigned me to a night shift at a children's hospital on weekends. I never liked working nights, which made it even more difficult to raise a son in Chicago, but it was the best I could do for now. I needed every shift I could get, and weekend nights paid the most.

I had lost so much money and risked just about everything I had on that gospel concert, certain that God wanted me to produce the show. I booked one of the of the greatest gospel artists in the country, but we

barely drew enough people to fill up half the venue.

I thought I had done what God wanted me to do, and yet, I was still scraping by, trying to get enough money to pay some of the people who had worked on the show. I felt betrayed, confused, and angry. Every time I had a moment to myself, I thought about my predicament. These past few weeks, as everything in my life came to a head, I felt like I was walking under a toxic cloud of fear and rage, conscious of little else. My faith had been shaken.

Standing at the bus stop at the corner of Madison and Halsted, deflated and exhausted, I thought about how I should have taken a nap before heading to work. Instead, I had looked at a new apartment whose down payment I couldn't afford.

I caught sight of a tall Black man standing on the opposite side of the street by the abandoned bank. When the light changed, he started across, heading our way. He was about six feet tall, dressed in an oversized tan trench coat and dark-colored pants, and he appeared homeless.

About halfway across the intersection, the man looked directly at me. He didn't break eye contact as he walked straight toward me.

"Don't look at me like that!" he said.

I guess I was looking a bit guarded, but I stayed silent.

"I can see God's light all over you," he continued. "God is pleased with you."

As he came closer, I stepped back, glad to have David with me. Luckily, the man stopped a few feet away. He pointed directly at my face.

"That apartment you just came from seeing is . . ."

He paused for a moment. "It's already yours."

I was stunned and looked at him in surprise. The fear started to leave, replaced by shock. I had read about this in the Bible for so many years. I thought, *Lisa, you're receiving a prophecy*. My lips started trem-

bling and the tears started to fall. David stood wordlessly next to me.

My bus pulled up, but I didn't turn toward it, so it rolled along. I was too busy staring in amazement at the man before me.

"God is going to bless you—God's got you!" he said. "Now, listen to me. When you move into that new place, I want you to buy two fish and always keep a loaf of bread on your shelf."

I nodded, still wondering how this man knew my business. One part of me knew this was a prophecy, but another part was still skeptical. *Who is he? Was he at the apartment building I'd visited earlier?*

The man gave me a little nod, and then he winked and smiled like we were old friends.

"Down the street from your place, you will own a clothing business," he continued. "But first . . ." He paused again. "First, you have to look out for a friend. She is like a sister to you. She needs money. Give her the money she needs when she asks you for it."

I knew who he meant. My best girlfriend had babysat Aaron during the custody battles, and I had lent her money before. Still, the word "money" felt like a needle poking a balloon full of air. All those emotions I had kept bottled up inside me for the past month burst out. I stood in my work scrubs, crying at the bus stop.

"I don't have that much money," I blurted through my tears.

David spoke softly but firmly to me. "Be quiet and listen."

But the man seemed to have nothing more to say to me. When another bus pulled up, I had to get on to avoid being late for work. I fished my lunch money out of my pocket and handed it to David to give to the man before I boarded the bus.

As the door was closing, I turned to look back before I took a seat and heard David ask the man, "Can you tell me something about my life?"

The man smiled and started talking with David. As I watched them from the bus window, I knew something in me had changed. The fear

and anxiety had lifted. That experience helped me understand how God works with and through people.

I thought about my life and how God had always stepped in right on time. He always directed my path, just like the scripture says. I couldn't help but smile a little as I thought about the people—everyday people, famous people, and now, street people—who had come into my life, disappeared, and reappeared later, only to open a door of opportunity or to provide me with assistance at a critical moment. Sometimes they had a word of encouragement or prophetic insight, just like tonight. It had happened so many times in my life, I shouldn't have been surprised by it anymore.

On that bus ride, I thought about all the places I had visited as a child or teen that later became so important in Aaron's life and mine. The lessons I'd learned as a child that provided me with the guidance I needed later, as an adult or as a young parent struggling to make the right decisions. Then, I thought of the circle of relationships and circumstances in my life.

It became clearer to me: God's presence in my life has been undeniable.

These thoughts swirled around in my head like the strong winds off Lake Michigan for which Chicago is so famous. It's easy to remember the blessings received last night, last week, or last year. But it can be humbling to think of the total blessings that have come our way throughout our life.

At that moment, I realized the importance of prayer during difficult times.

I was thankful.