

**Stones
of
Remembrance**

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Preface

In 1970, a well-known Christian speaker and pastor led a conference where he suggested everyone “get a small book or journal. In that book, just jot down what the Lord did on a particular day in answer to prayer, in a thought that was just between you and God, in a circumstance that He ordered in your life at the time, anything that gives Him the glory. When times get tough, when you are going through a trial, when you feel depressed or discouraged or think He doesn’t hear your prayers, look back in that book and remember those things He has accomplished. Those are your *Stones of Remembrance* to keep you centered on the authority of God and what He not only has done, but what He will do in your life.”

In Joshua 4: 20–24 (ESV), Joshua set up twelve stones from the Jordan according to God’s instructions and said to the people, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know...the hand of the Lord is mighty.”

Through the good and bad times, the joys and the sorrows, God has been with us. He is faithful and will never let us down. Times continue to change. Many of the children of today will not know what it was like before their own time. The seven Christian women in our group, from different states, backgrounds, careers and churches have shared many experiences. We each write in different styles. Each story is true. God has been with us through the ups and downs of our lives. These

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Stones of Remembrance, moments shared with God are precious to us all.

Each story is meant to glorify God and pay honor to Him. We serve a mighty God and know He is faithful.

May what we have shared be an inspiration to you.

Dedication

To God who has given us our life and all we have.

We thank God for our families and friends.

We thank Him for His many blessings.

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Through It All—Jesus

Faye Rider

This is my story of one stone that changed all things for my life, and for eternity. Remember this is just one stone. There were many before this one, and many after, but this one has affected our family and our church family until this day.

We have all stepped back, and when we remember this time in our lives, we can see God's hand upon this stone. God's love and His complete care from beginning, through to the day of His coming, will never be forgotten.

As our story begins, my husband and I have five sweet babies. I don't care how old my children are; they will always remain our babies. We moved into our house after Houston came back from his second and last trip to Vietnam. Our children were Dean eleven, Theresa ten, Kathy eight, Tammy four, Elizabeth two. In 1969, Houston chose to get out of the USMC and return to civilian life. He just couldn't leave his family again.

We were trying to start our own business. In the meantime, Houston went to work for a Body Repair Shop, in the town of Jacksonville, North Carolina. We lived out in the country. We lived there about three years when this Stone came about. Life was hard, but God is good. We were happy doing things as a family, even working together in our little shop that Houston built next to our house. In the evening hours, he would work on cars to try to get his business started. It was very different

than the military life, but we were glad to be able to have our children close. All was right with our world; at least it seemed so.

We had a small pasture out back of our house, a barn for the horses; a dog named Sandy—an Irish setter—, geese, and chickens. It was a little farm that our children truly loved. And it included a shop for Daddy Houston to work in with his son and daughters, and friends that came from church family and others in the neighborhood. We were part of a little community on the southwest part of town. Things seemed to be moving along. There was a country store across the road, a church across the street, and a very close knit little community that we loved.

Our life was about to be changed forever in 1972. Up to this point, we had never even considered anything might change. We struggled, but hard work wasn't something we worried about. We were just so glad to all be together, and we were thrilled that Daddy Houston would never have to leave again for Vietnam or anywhere.

When Houston was on his first tour to Vietnam, I had a friend invite me to church. She opened up a whole new life in Christ to me. That's how I made it through the two trips to Vietnam. My relationship with Jesus brought me through the hard times. During those times with Houston away, life was difficult, both times, he was injured. No way could I, with four children in 1969, have made it without Jesus. There was just NO WAY.

The concern was that my sweet loving husband, and father to his babies, would be all he could be for us, but he hadn't given his heart to Jesus.

Oh, he would go to church on special occasions, like Christmas, Easter, etc., but he was not getting close to making a decision for our Lord. Everyone loved Houston from our church. In the community, he was involved in helping others. He thrived on serving others. I guess you could say he was

self-sufficient and content. I was concerned. Each Sunday the children and I would get up ready for church. As we did each Sunday, we tried to convince Daddy Houston to come with us.

Our son, Dean, who was eleven years old, would always ask him, "Daddy, please come with us." At night when he would say his prayers, he asked the Lord to help his daddy come to church with us. This had been going on for about three years. Of course our girls also chimed in, "Yes daddy, come, please."

Houston would give each one a kiss goodbye and then he would say, "I will start dinner while you're gone." Houston was a good cook, so I guess we all just assumed it to be the way it would be. Life seemed so good for me, except for that particular concern of him not going to church with us, or giving his heart to Jesus. I was so content in Jesus I wanted it for him also. I knew the peace that only Jesus could give. I'm sure I preached, prodded, talked to him about it all the time. It became a joke with us, for the last thing I would say as we left for church, seeing him sitting in his PJs, drinking his coffee, in his recliner was, "I guess this means you are not going with us?"

He would just grin and we would leave. During church, I would sometimes cry and even go to the altar to pray for my sweet, loving husband.

So the reason for sharing this *Stone of Remembrance* with everyone who may read this is revealed. My prayer is that it may help to reveal how wonderful and caring our Father in heaven truly is. He does answer prayer. Sometimes, it is not what we thought or expected it would be. Prayers are answered and they are always answered in God's timing and in His will.

As I start this day of February 8, 1972, a Wednesday, I'm cooking supper. Houston isn't home from work yet. He rides home each day with a co-worker who lives not far from us. Kids are doing homework, some playing in the living room. I needed bread, milk, and something to finish supper. I can't remember what, so I asked Dean, my oldest child, to go across

the street to Moready's Country Store for me, something he's done many times before. He says, "Yes, momma." I give him the money and then I go to watch him cross the street, from our big picture window, that faced the store across the street.

I am saying "street," but it actually is a two lane country highway and our house sits in a sort of triangle. The main road is two lanes and is called Highway 53. Another small two-lane road comes into Highway 53. Traffic is sometimes heavy, other times not.

As I think back now, and have many times, I ask myself, "Why did I send him? Could I take it back? Could I have finished dinner without whatever I thought I needed?"

As I watched him from the window he was fine, and returned in a hurry with what I needed. I gave him enough money to get some gum or candy, which he forgot, for him and the girls. He wanted to go back. I managed to finish cooking whatever it was, and then I went back to the window to watch him again go across the road.

This time it was different. This time horror took over.

A log truck had come out the side road, to turn onto the main road. Dean watched and waited until the truck turned right, but I guess not thinking of the other side, he ran out behind the log truck. As he did, a pickup truck heading down the road hit my son. As I write this, my heart hurts so much. I was helpless. Why did I think watching from the window would help him? I screamed and ran out the door. I told the other children to stay put. "Do not come out the door, stay put."

I ran across that road. I don't even know if the traffic was moving. It was as if the whole world had stopped.

When I reached the store across the road I find that Houston had just gotten out of the co-worker's car. He was waiting to cross the road to come home from work. I found Houston picking up our son. I heard screaming. Someone was screaming for help. Then I realized the person screaming was me.

So much happened so quickly. Dean was unconscious. A neighbor who was at the store said, "Get in my car. We will get him to the hospital now!"

Houston turned to me. He said, "Get your mom for the kids, then come to the hospital."

I obeyed. I was in shock, and I think Houston was also, but we were just doing as we were told at this time. Traffic is still stopped in all three directions. I ran across the road, called my mom to come, I didn't even tell her why. She had a neighbor bring her right away. It wasn't long because she only lived about two miles away.

Then that same neighbor put me in the car and we took off for the Hospital. As soon as I entered the emergency entrance, I heard my Dean screaming at the top of his lungs for me. He was screaming, "Momma, I want my Momma!"

Houston was walking back and forth and grabbed me as soon as I came through the doors. I was yelling and saying, "Please let me go to my son." The nurses were trying to calm me down. They assured me I could go back as soon as the doctors stabilized Dean. I kept trying to convince them if I could just go sit in the room, I would not get in the way. But I could tell Dean I was there. I begged them to let me stay and promised not to be any trouble. Even Houston said it would calm Dean down. "Please let me go be by my son."

They would not, and since Dean continued to call for me, they moved us to another place, on another hall, away from the emergency room. I know now, but I didn't know then what they were doing. I have told myself many times since then; they will never keep me from one of my kids or my family ever again.

We were put in a little room. By now our pastor and some friends came, and were directed to where we were waiting. They are all quietly praying. A silence falls over us all. Houston left the room for a little minute, not long. I just sat there praying for our little boy.

Our pastor talked with Houston briefly before Houston went outside. Then our pastor came over to me, began to pray, and said to me, "Faye, whatever happens today, Houston will either turn to Jesus or turn to hate and bitterness."

My heart began to hurt even more. I'm thinking, "What is he saying? Does he know something we don't know?" Then a nurse appears. Houston returned to the room and the nurse says that they are making arrangements to fly Dean by helicopter to Wilmington Hospital. This news was encouraging to me. I felt, we're getting some help. Onslow Memorial at that time was a small hospital, and it sounded better to me to transfer my boy. Then, after what seemed like hours, the doctors came in to talk to us. I am thinking he has the helicopter ready and is going to give us the particulars of what we are to do, was glad to finally have answers. My mind is racing and I am thinking, "Who's going to drive us to Wilmington? It's sixty miles away."

Then a bomb was dropped on us. Houston and I held on to each other. The doctor's words rang thru the whole room. WE LOST HIM! Oh my, what can I do; which way do I run to leave these words. I heard screaming again. It was me! "NO! NO! NO!" I just crumbled up into pieces. Houston is holding me, or else I would have run out the door. NO, it couldn't be true, Dean was calling me. They wouldn't let me see or hold him, and now he is gone. "Dear Jesus, how can we get through this? What do we do, and which way do we turn?"

No amount of words from anyone can help in times like this. I knew my faith was strong. The Lord was always with me. But now I'm so hurt, and crying.

Then I remember the word of the Lord, "I will never leave you or forsake you. I will be with you always."

It became quiet in the room. Someone brought a car around to the entrance to take us home. Houston hadn't said anything. The calm quietness was scary for me. I remembered our pastor's

words. Houston would choose one of two ways. He would turn to the Lord or bitterness and hate for this situation. I'm praying under my breath, "Lord please help my husband right now, he needs you so much!"

As we go toward the doors to leave, Houston has one arm on me, and as we go out the glass doors, with his other hand he hits the door so hard that I think the glass will shatter or worse he has broken his hand.

The ride home was nothing but silence. We both were together in each other's arms in the back seat.

I'm beginning to think, "How can I tell the girls and my momma what has happened?" The girls loved their brother so much; He was a great brother to them; my momma, a precious grandmother, who adored all her grandbabies, would be devastated. "Dear Lord, again I need strength I do not have."

It was close to 9:30 p.m. as we pulled into the yard. It was full of cars; my house was full of folks from our church, and neighbors. Our girls were playing with toys and my momma was washing dishes. All were waiting.

Our pastor took over and helped my momma through this. Houston and I together tried to tell the girls. It was harder on the two older ones, but we made it through. The rest of the night was a blur at times. Our friends put our children in bed. We went in and kissed them goodnight. I sat in the living room. Although there were people still there, I couldn't even talk to them. Everyone was just there, except Houston.

I asked someone if they had seen him, and then began to look for him. As I approached the back door he came in from outside and in his hand was his gun, a pistol. He took hold of my hand and we went to the living room. Someone put a record on the stereo. Loretta Lynn was singing "How Great Thou Art." It was a blessing to hear that, like a closing for the day of pain, that our God is a great and mighty God, who holds all things in His hands.

As the song finished my husband said, "Let's go get some rest." He took me by the hand and we went to our room. I don't remember saying anything to all the folks still in the house. By this time it is probably close to 11:00 PM.

We went to our room, and our best friends, who were at our house about every day, came with us. They made pallets on the floor, and stayed with us all night. I didn't understand that then, but later I realized they were feeling our hurt, our pain, and just wanted to be there in case they were needed during the rest of the night.

The next morning, I realized my little sweet boy just died.

One of the sweet, elderly ladies from our church slept on the sofa all night. She got up and prepared breakfast for us, the children, and my momma, who had slept with the girls in their rooms.

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining, and the miracles were about to start happening.

Houston kept me close to him. Wherever I went, there he was. Ten people were at my table that morning, and Houston began to tell of the night before. As he told of this tragedy he said he was so mad he had gotten his gun and gone out to the back pasture. I suppose that is where he was when I was looking for him.

He went out to the pasture and screamed at God. "WHY? And if you are God then show me why I shouldn't go and kill the person who hit my son. God, I need to know what I am to do." He said he was screaming and crying at the same time. Then the sky lit up so bright. There were no stars that night, but the sky was indescribable, the way it turned a beautiful white glow, all over the pasture. He said to God, "Yes Lord." He came inside and as a confirmation for him Loretta Lynn was singing "How Great Thou Art."

He said to the folks at the table, "I had a meeting with the Lord last night, and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that

God spoke to me from Heaven. How do I know?” he said, “because a peace like I’ve never felt before or seen came over me, and I knew the Lord had passed my way. I was disrespectful to Him, but he loved me anyway. He’s like that. He loves us where ever we are at in life. His love is eternal.”

Then Houston turned to me and said, “Babe, I want you to get dressed. We have a visit to make today.”

So I did, and we got into the car. I wasn’t sure where we were going. As we drove down the road, after about two miles, we pulled into a driveway. There sat the truck of the man who had hit my Dean. I then realized where we were.

Houston grabbed my hand and said, “Babe, these folks are hurting and in much pain. I’m sure because I know I would be, so we’re going to visit them and let them know we care.”

We went to the door and the man who opened it looked as if he had been up for days with no sleep. You could physically see the pain in his eyes.

Houston asked if we could visit for a little bit and he invited us in to his house. His wife was at the kitchen table and came into the living room. We sat very quietly for a minute. Houston told him who we were and why we were there, that he knew that this man was hurting and that it wasn’t his fault.

He wanted to assure him that our son would not hold him responsible, that our son (Dean) loved everyone. He asked the man to please trust the Lord through this; otherwise no one could ever get over this without the Lord. Houston shared his story of the night before and how God had revealed His mighty love to him. The Lord wanted Houston to come and give these words to him. As all this was going on the man’s wife and I were crying quietly. My tears couldn’t stop, and I saw the hurt in her eyes. Only the Lord could bring about this kind of love in people.

That’s just one of many miracles. This happened on Thursday morning. All day was a day-of-peace in Jesus. Folks were helping

with our girls and we went about getting things together for a funeral. These events took us through Friday afternoon.

Since we had no way of preparing financially for a funeral the next miracle was then revealed. The funeral home in our hometown was Jones Funeral Home. After hearing our story they searched the books at the courthouse and found a plot at the cemetery that belonged to no one. They put our name on it. The Lord had provided another miracle. They found ways to provide for the casket and all the arrangements. Someone came forth, I don't know who, and took care of any other expenses.

God made a way, when there was no way in sight. That's our Lord for you!

It was raining very softly on Saturday, the day of the funeral. By the time we were at the gravesite, the rain was coming down hard. Someone said to me that the Lord is feeling your pain and hurt and he is covering you with His tears.

It was a hard day, but also a day of reflections and remembrance of all that had happened in just a short time.

Children from Dean's fifth grade class were there and they each made Houston and me cards expressing how much they loved Dean, and what a friend he had been to them. I still treasure those cards from long ago.

We had company until late Saturday night, just visiting as most folks do in a small community like ours, and our church family. Finally, we were able to get some rest late Saturday night.

Sunday morning my husband was up early, got coffee going, and called me. He said, "Get the girls up, let's get breakfast and get dressed. We're going to church."

"Thank you Lord," I whispered. Dean's prayers and mine were answered this morning. So off we go. I'm wondering what's ahead for this day. My tear stained eyes are swollen. I look horrible, but I feel so blessed. As we pull into the church parking lot, people are looking at us in unbelief. I felt like they wondered why we would choose to be at church.

We had a sweet service that day. Our pastor preached through tears at times as he felt our pain. He was a great support from the beginning of the tragedy.

After the service, at the altar call, Houston went forward, gave his testimony of how God visited him, and how he surrendered all he had and was to Jesus. The altar was filling up. People were weeping all over the church. That morning fifteen people, and Houston, gave their hearts to Jesus, or rededicated their lives to the Lord. Another miracle, and there have been many miracles, touches of our Lord, since that week forty-one years ago.

Do I trust our Lord completely? YES! YES! YES!

Have there been other trials, hurts, pain? Yes. Has the Lord stayed right with me? Yes.

We encourage others and tell how these *Stones of Remembrance* have, with the Lord of all Lords, brought us through. He has picked us up and carried us when we couldn't even walk through the trials, the hard times, even in the blessings to recognize where they came from. We are not to live in the past. We are to press forward, but never forget what our Lord has done for us.

We are to bring praise, honor, and worship in today's new trials or joys and say of the Lord, "You are my comforter, my strength. You have never left me, nor forsaken me."

None of this story is to glorify anyone but Jesus!

As we remember the Lord through communion, the Lord's Supper, it is in remembrance of what He did for us on the cross, and the coming forth from the grave, victory over death, and remembering until His return to take us all home.