

All Things Are Possible

If anyone had told me 35 years ago that by 2013, I would be the director of a ministry that reached out to men and women struggling with sexual and relational issues, I would have been suspicious of a severe head injury somewhere in their past. In 1978, I had one goal and one goal only – SOAP OPERA STARDOM! Not mere stardom, but a meteoric rise to the top of the daytime television industry.

In 1978, I was 20 years old, fresh out of drama school, and there was a world waiting to be conquered. I was determined that nothing was going to stand in the way of my goals and nothing would stop my climb to the top, not even reality. My career goals were an obsession that gripped every waking moment of my life.

Looking back on that period in my life, I believe my career compulsions were deeply rooted in a desire to run away from myself. To look at the circumstances, who wouldn't want to run? By the time I was sixteen, I was in psychiatric counseling for 4 years, had struggled with homosexual tendencies from my earliest memory, and was lost in the world of pornography and compulsive sexual behavior. In my mind, my only salvation would come from finding a way to live a different life, even if it was only make-believe.

During the latter part of my teenage years, homosexuality and pornography had taken over my thought life. Although I had vowed I would never “act out” my sexuality, my mind was constantly filled with thoughts of sex and sexual images. It was only a matter of time before hormones took over, and I walked into a gay bar looking for someone to fill the void in my life.

When I reached my early twenties, my personal life was a shambles, but my career goals started to come to pass. I was offered a walk-on role on the CBS soap, ***Guiding Light***. Soon afterward, I was offered a similar role on NBC's ***Another World***. The jobs were a long-standing dream come true, and I hoped other jobs would soon follow. I was in for a rude awakening!

After my appearance on ***Another World***, I was unemployed for two years. During this time, I gave myself over to alcohol, drugs and meaningless sexual encounters with other men. I felt like I was on a search for someone who would love me and fill the ache that I felt inside. The more I looked, the emptier I became. Instead of leaving me fulfilled, each encounter left me feeling used and empty. The reality of my circumstances forced me to confront the fact that even though I could spend my life playing other characters, I still had to go home at night (or the next morning) and face myself in the mirror.

My life started to disappear into an alcoholic haze, until one day when I turned on the TV, and found Jim and Tammy Bakker on the PTL Club. I had never been seriously interested in religion or God, but once I

found the show, I tuned in every day. The “Jesus thing” they talked about really intrigued me. They spoke about Jesus as though he were a real person, like he was the best friend they ever had.

A few months after my initial encounter with PTL, I had an encounter with the God that Jim and Tammy had been talking about. It happened one night while I was putting tremendous effort into getting drunk. I had had a bad day at work and didn’t feel like going out to a bar, so I bought a bottle of wine and went home.

After drinking steadily for almost an hour, I was very frustrated because I could not get drunk. It seemed the more I drank, the more clear-headed I became. As I sat feeling sorry for myself, my thoughts were interrupted by, what seemed to be, a movie screen being lowered from the ceiling.

As I focused my mind on the image, I could see that it was a pig rolling around in the mud. The animal had a huge smile on its face and seemed to thoroughly enjoy its filthy surroundings. As I sat staring at the scene, from somewhere deep inside me, I heard a voice say, ***“This is what I think about what you have done to your life.”*** I’m not sure how I knew at that moment, but I knew I had heard the voice of God.

The revelation of God Almighty left me completely undone! My first reaction was one of fear, as I was sure God was going to strike me dead for my sins. I never felt so vulnerable in my entire life. It was as though all of the veneer I hid behind had been stripped away, and I was left facing the darkness of my own heart. In my mind, I cried out, ***“WHAT DO I DO NOW?”***

The words had no sooner passed through my mind than I began to sense that I needed someone to pray for me. I remembered that PTL had a prayer line. I called directory assistance for the number and within a few minutes, someone was sharing the Gospel with me, and I was praying the sinner’s prayer. When we finished, the counselor proclaimed I was “born-again”, and she certainly seemed to be excited. I was excited too, but for another reason. I was excited that the earth hadn’t opened up and swallowed me whole when I prayed.

It would be wonderful to end the story here, and tell you that the rest of my salvation experience took me from glory to glory from that day forward, but that would serve no purpose. My accepting Christ seemed like it put me on a path to hell that I would never survive.

Instead of finding an easy road to freedom in Christ, my battle with pornography and homosexuality intensified until I thought I would physically burst. I tried praying and asking God to intervene, but my prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears. I wondered if God really was who Jim and Tammy said he was.

In the midst of this battle, my thought life took a tremendous turn for the worse. Perverse sexual images and desires paraded across my brain 24 hours a day. After a few days of being bombarded, I gave up and went back to a gay bar. Soon after, I was walking in the same cycle I was in before my divine encounter. I would go home with the first guy that asked me, I would put all of my hope for fulfillment on him, and by the time the sun came up the next morning, I would find myself devastated, alone, used and thrown away.

After spending six months walking through this pattern, I became tired and severely depressed. With no other solution in sight, I decided to visit a church that PTL had recommended a few months previous. I was very cynical about the “church experience” and was sure that I would be ushered to the nearest exit if my past ever became known. Still, I had nothing else left to lose, so I went every Sunday and begged God to change my life.

One night, there was a knock on my front door. I opened it to find two church people standing on my doorstep. I had no idea why they were there except to probably tell me not to come back. My first reaction was to be rude and turn them away, but instead of following that instinct, I found myself inviting them in.

After a few minutes of conversation, the talk suddenly turned to spiritual issues. My guests began talking about the life of Jesus, and how much he loved me. They went on to explain how his death on the cross made it possible for me to be free from sin. At the end of the visit, they led me in the sinner’s prayer, and I re-dedicated my life to Christ. Immediately after the prayer, it felt as though a huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders.

In the moment that God lifted that burden, another one crashed down on me. Suddenly, my past flashed before my eyes. I wondered how Jesus could love me after everything I had done in my life. I was gay, there was no hope for me. Why would God want anything to do with me? A deep sadness began to settle over me, while something else inside of me was prodding me to share my sexual struggles with my visitors from church. The moment of truth had arrived!

I took a deep breath and told my visitors that I was gay, and my doubts about God’s ability to love me. To my surprise, they did not run from the room screaming. They were not even shocked. They just listened and committed to praying that God would show me His way.

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The Guiding Light of Another Kind

My freedom did not come without a fight. I continued to go to church regularly but nothing really changed. There seemed to be no relief from the sexual compulsions that gripped me.

One day as I prayed, I stumbled across I Corinthians 10:13 which says, ***“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it.”***

The days ahead were brutal, but that scripture verse became my hope and prayer. Unfortunately, the way out did not come as quickly as I would have liked. When days turned to weeks, I seriously contemplated giving up on Jesus once and for all. I felt like a fool! My body was screaming for physical contact, and I was pinning my hopes on an invisible God. My mind told me that God didn’t care, and my heart was losing hope. God, on the other hand, had simply taken time to set the stage for what He would do next.

One night as I was falling asleep, I felt a peaceful presence surrounding me. As I was dwelling on the peace I felt, my mind was flooded by a vision of the cross. My attention was transfixed by the image, and I felt as though my heart was resting in complete peace. It was as though I had entered eternity. After a few quiet moments, the same small voice I had heard in my previous encounter with the Lord spoke to my heart again and said, "Whenever you get tempted to fall, think about the cross and all I did for you there." Immediately, the cross exploded into blazing light and faded from view.

From that day forward, I was different! The temptation to sin lessened, as I submitted myself to the Word of God. It was as though the Lord had placed within me an unwavering knowledge that I had the power to overcome any sin or obstacle in my life. The need for healing in the area of my sexuality remained, but the sexual compulsions that had ruled my life were broken. I WAS FREE!

As I sought Jesus in my everyday life, I grew rapidly in the ways of the Lord. I eventually left my acting career behind and began to prepare myself for whatever the Lord would call me to. God, however, was not in a hurry to open doors of ministry for me. He was more concerned with healing me. Step by step, I walked through the painful process of breaking off past relationships and dealing with the question of HIV and AIDS in my life. Compared to some, I had been conservative in my sexual encounters, but I had still placed myself at risk many times. When I was finally tested for HIV, and the results came back negative, I could only cry and thank God for sparing my life.

Because of my intense fear of rejection, when it came to my public testimony, I always shared a sanitized version that would leave my hearers convinced that I had grown up next door to a convent. Not being completely truthful was the worst decision I could have made. My self-imposed silence placed me into a bondage that the enemy used as his trump card for the next 12 years.

Still, God was faithful to His promise of restoration. In the years that followed my profession of faith, the Lord healed my sexuality completely. He gave me a beautiful wife, and together we had three children. The Lord also helped me to see that my validation as a man did not come from the fact that He had given me a wife and children. My validation came from the fact that the Son of God died to set me free.

As time passed, I successfully faded into the heterosexual woodwork of the church and did what I could to serve the Lord. Outwardly, my life was more than I could have ever dreamed of. Inwardly, however, there was always the feeling that I was carrying a deep, dark secret that could destroy my life. After 13 years of following the Lord, I realized there was an area of my life where I still wasn't free.

During the course of a secular job that I was working, the Lord got my attention by sending a young man to work for me who turned out to be gay. He was very young and discreet about his lifestyle. The parallels between us were amazing. He was from a small town and had a romantic idea about moving to the "big city" and finding the man of his dreams. My heart broke for him, because he had no idea about the type of life he was walking into.

I was so troubled by some of the things that he shared with me that I felt compelled to share my entire testimony with him. When I finished my story, he shocked me by telling me that he was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit when he was 13 years old.

He went on to tell me that he felt God loved him just the way he was-homosexuality and all. He even spoke in tongues! I was stunned and had no idea what to say in response. The incident plagued my heart for weeks.

A few months after our conversation, I was deeply convicted as I sat watching the ABC show 20/20 with Barbara Walters. The show ran the story of another young man who had grown up in a Christian family and was about to tell his parents (on national television) that he was gay and dying of AIDS.

At the end of the broadcast, it was announced that the young man died from AIDS shortly after the segment had been taped. My heart jumped during the closing credits when the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "People like him die, because people like you keep your mouths shut." In that moment, I promised the Lord that I would never be silent again, and I walked into a new level of freedom.

Two days later, a door opened for me to share my testimony on a Christian television talk show in Florida. Shortly after that, I went to work with a ministry that helped men and women walk away from the same issues I had struggled with.

I gained so much courage in the Lord that I eventually told my parents of my past. Instead of finding rejection, the Lord had gone before me, and my parents assured me that nothing I had done would ever change their love for me. Once I told my parents, the past was truly behind me. There was nothing else to hide, nothing to fear, and nothing to prove to anyone. God had been faithful to fulfill all that He had promised and more.

Matthew 19:26 Ministries was born in 1998 and I have worked with a lot of people over the years who struggle with the same issues that I did. They often ask me what the "secret" to freedom is. The truth is, there is no secret—it is all spelled out in His Word. He created us to have fellowship with Him. He will go to war with anything that stands in the way of that...if we let Him.

"For whom the Son sets free, is free indeed"