

Out of the Darkness

by Becky Stayton

Chapter One

Angie got out of bed and rummaged around in her room for clothes to wear. She found some old jeans, a dark colored t-shirt with a rock band on it, and a slouchy black sweatshirt with a hood. She felt grumpy and her dark clothing matched her dark thoughts. She just couldn't shake the heaviness she had been feeling.

Angie was annoyed as she walked into the kitchen and plopped down in a chair at the table. Her mom was making eggs and toast and humming cheerfully. Her little sister was in her highchair and had more applesauce on her face, hair and bib than in her mouth. The curtains were open and the sun was streaming in the windows.

Too bright, she thought as she pulled her sweatshirt hood over her head.

One by one, the family gathered at the breakfast table. Her brother, Eric, came in chattering about something. Her father greeted her with, "Good morning, Sunshine!" as he tugged back the hood on her head.

"Yeah, right!" she muttered.

Her father asked her to say the blessing on the food. She said the same thing she always said. *What good did it do? It didn't seem like her prayers did anything but bounce off the ceiling anyway. Hadn't she prayed for a new bicycle forever? And she still had that old clunker that rattled when she rode it?*

As she ate, she kept her head down. She didn't notice the worried looks her parents gave each other across the table. She didn't notice how her grumpy mood put a damper on the conversation around the table. All she noticed was that her egg was too runny, her toast had grown cold and her orange juice was more sour than sweet.

As the family finished breakfast, her father pulled out his Bible. *Oh great. Morning worship*, Angie thought sarcastically. *Good time for a nap.*

Her dad began to read in Psalms.

***Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.***

Benefits? What benefits? Angie thought sourly. I don't see anything good.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases;

Iniquities? What are those? Does that mean sins?

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction...

Hmm. I think redeem means to save or take back from destruction. My life is about to self-destruct. Maybe I'd better listen to what comes next.

Her father broke into her thoughts as he explained the verse. He talked about being grateful to God for all His blessings. He said that God WANTED to bless us. But, in order to bless us and redeem us we needed to ask forgiveness for the things that separated us from Him.

Oh no. I'm not doing that, she thought. I know what this is about. He wants me to forgive my friend, Kelsey, for her mean words and actions. She doesn't deserve my forgiveness. She didn't even say she was sorry.

At the end of family worship, the family held hands and said the Lord's Prayer like they always did. Little Emily's hand was sticky with applesauce and her father's big hand was strong and warm in her other hand. She was grateful for his strength and love for the family. The part of the prayer, ***...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us***, really rang in her ears.

There it is again, she thought. But there's NO WAY. Kelsey can't get away with being mean and have me just act like nothing happened!

As the family took their dishes to the dishwasher, her father broke into her thoughts by saying, "I know this is a day off from school, but there is something I'd like us to do as a family this morning."

Angie let out a deep groan. All her plans of hiding in her room and doing whatever she wanted were torn away.

“Great, just great!” The words escaped out of her mouth before she could stop them. The moment she said the words, she wished she could take them back. The hurt look on her father’s face was enough to make her look away and brush imaginary crumbs off of her sweatshirt.

As the family began to pile into the van, Angie ran to her room to grab her phone and earbuds. It was just a phone to call home and a few other numbers, but it had some games and she could listen to music if she was bored. She made it to the van before anyone knew she was missing.

Discuss:

How was Angie feeling when she first woke up? Why?

How did Angie’s feelings and actions affect her family?

Why do you think Angie’s prayers bounced off of the ceiling?

Chapter Two

Mrs. Peterson was a widow. Her husband had passed away several years ago. As far as Angie knew, Mrs. Peterson didn’t have any children. Dad said they were going to bag up some leaves for her since she was elderly and not able to work outside except to take care of a few raised flower beds.

It was a nice day but there were a lot of leaves on the ground. The dust from the leaves made Angie sneeze. She put in her ear buds and turned the music up loud. She wanted to drown out the angry thoughts in her head, but it didn’t help. She kept thinking over and over about the things Kelsey had said and done.

“Some friend,” she muttered to herself. “That’s not my idea of a friend.”

After a while, Eric motioned her to come inside the house. They were taking a break. Mrs. Peterson met them with a tray of fresh cookies and lemonade. Angie took out the earbuds and listened to the conversation.

Mrs. Peterson was talking about someone named Jeff.

She must have a son after all, thought Angie. She nibbled on her cookie and wondered how much longer they would have to stay there.

Her nosy brother Eric saw a picture of two young men on the mantle and asked if they were her sons. Mrs. Peterson said that one of them was her son, but he had died when he was only 17 years old. The other was her son's friend, Jeff, who had been the driver in the car when her son was killed.

Angie couldn't understand why Mrs. P would still be in contact with this person that had been the reason her son was dead. She listened as Mrs. Peterson explained.

"Of course my heart was broken when my son died. It was the darkest time of my life. He was our only child. I couldn't imagine life without him. I blamed the boy who was driving. I couldn't get past the fact that Jeff was driving too fast and showing off. He had no business going so fast when it was raining and on a winding little road. If it weren't for Jeff, my son would still be alive."

Angie agreed with Mrs. Peterson. *Jeff was to blame and he should pay the price.*

Mrs. Peterson continued, "But, one morning, I was reading in the Bible in First John. It said, **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all**. I had nothing but darkness in my heart after my son died. I couldn't pray, I could barely get out of bed in the morning and put one foot in front of the other."

"Well, this sounds familiar," Angie thought.

Mrs. Peterson said, "Then it said, **if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another...** And in verse 9 it said, **if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

"I realized that holding onto my hurts was not only hurting me but all the others around me. The darkness didn't just affect me. I spread it around to all the people I cared about, too. I decided then and there to ask forgiveness. When I did, I felt such a light feeling. Everything around me looked fresh and clean. I was finally able to live again.

I would wake up in the mornings with joy instead of dread. And God has helped me to forgive Jeff, help him during and after prison, and to be a part of his life.”

Just then the doorbell rang. A man and a little boy came in. Mrs. Peterson hugged them both and introduced Jeff and his little son, Matthew. She said that she watched Matthew some afternoons while Jeff ran errands. Angie noticed the joy on Mrs. Peterson’s face as she found some toys for Matthew.

On the way home, Angie thought about Mrs. Peterson and Jeff. She thought about the joy on Mrs. Peterson’s face and how her face had almost shone. Then she thought about herself and Kelsey. She realized that the darkness she felt was because of the unforgiveness in her own heart. It wasn’t just hurting her friend. It was hurting herself and everyone around her. She was tired of the darkness and knew what she needed to do. Angie couldn’t wait to get home to her prayer closet in her room to have a talk with God. She knew that light was just around the corner.

Discuss:

Do you think it was easy for Mrs. Peterson to forgive Jeff? Was it the right thing to do?

How did Mrs. Peterson’s life change when she was able to forgive?

What do you think Angie is going to do next?

Can you relate to Angie’s experience? Is there anyone you have had to forgive or need to forgive? What happened?

Activity