

MY BIBLE FROM MY FRIENDS

By John F. Hall

One of my friends, John Mark Vinson, suggested that I write a story about my Bible. This is the first time that anyone has asked me to write about a specific thing. I've known John Mark's dad, John R. Vinson III, for over four decades. We were good and loyal friends. I would tell him: "You will be the last to let me down." Like his dad, John Mark is now the



funeral director at Goodwin Funeral Home. Before I take that slow ride in the back of a hearse, I want to complete a few things. I'm getting too frail to accomplish all the things in my "bucket list." John Mark's dad died last year at the age of 78. I'll turn 77 in June. Christ continues to give me grace upon grace upon grace and the inspiration to write stories. I'm having to go back more than 68 years, to those pages in my memory that still are crystal clear, to write a story about my Bible.

The story of why I was given the Bible begins when I was seven years old. My dad was a researcher and he worked for American Standard. The CEO of that corporation decided that researchers were useless employees and he eliminated my dad's job. To add insult to injury, the same week, the rented house that we were living in caught on fire and burned to the ground, we lost everything except for the clothes that we were wearing. My dad had no renter's insurance. He was not given any severance pay. My mom was gone. My dad did not want to put me and my younger sister in a foster home. They were notorious for mistreating foster children. I remember standing on a street corner with a small donated suitcase. Inside the suitcase were two donated sets of clothes and underwear. A city "bus drove by and the exhaust smell will trigger that memory today. I never forgot that feeling of being homeless and destitute with my sister and my dad.

My dad put us in a religious orphanage. We arrived by Greyhound bus at night. My dad asked the bus driver to wait while he checked us in. I remember my dad telling the person in charge that he would send money as soon as he found a job. He took a bus to Texas to find work. They separated the boys from the girls in the orphanage. I only would see my sister at meal times. For three years, my dad never wrote us a letter or sent us a card. We did not know if he was dead or alive. One day, I was sitting on a swing in the back of the orphanage. I made a promise to never forget that I was there. I went back with my son and Paula. The orphanage was demolished and covered with grass.

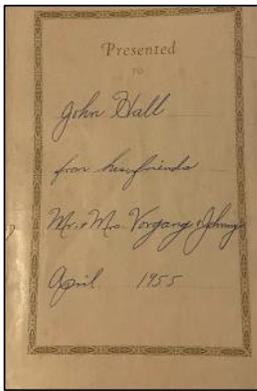
At the beginning of my third year in the orphanage, I was in the playroom that had donated toys. I was playing with a toy when a young couple came into the room with their son. His name is Johnny. He walked over and we started playing with the other toys. This couple and their son came back several times. They obtained permission to take me and my sister to town and buy us an ice cream cone. The mother was only able to have one child and her son wanted a brother. He wanted me to be his brother. The orphanage contacted my dad and told him that this couple wanted to adopt me and my sister, Barbara. My dad said, "No." The couple and their son made a farewell trip to the orphanage to tell me goodbye.

I was not able to meet them. I was in the infirmary burning up with a dangerously high fever. I was delirious. There was a ceiling light in the hallway outside of the infirmary. It seemed to be getting brighter and brighter. I thought I was going to die and the bright light was Christ coming for me. It was a scary thing and my head was hurting so bad, that I was ready to die. The couple asked one of the staff personnel to talk to me and ask if I wanted anything and to let them know. I told the staff member to tell them that I wanted a Bible. I did not expect them to honor my request. I mentioned to John Mark that I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if my dad would have let them adopt me and my sister.



I stayed in the infirmary for almost a week. When I was released, I went to get something out of my Wall locker. My possessions, at that time in my life, consisted of a small donated suitcase, three shirts and pants, underwear and one pair of shoes. When I opened my locker door, there was a small package with my name on it. I opened the package. It contained a Bible. When I opened the Bible, on the first page, I read these words: "To John Hall, from his friends Mr. & Mrs. Vorgang & Johnny, April 1955." I became the richest kid in the orphanage because no other child had their own Bible. That Bible became the power behind my stories, the inspiration from Christ's words that I put in my stories.

I told John Mark that I just realized why my dad declined the couple's offer to adopt me.



His dad died in the Pandemic of 1918. There was no vaccine or antibiotics to fight that Spanish flu. My dad was ten years old when his dad died. He did not want to lose me, his nearly ten year old son and his daughter. Last week, after getting an epidural in my L5 in Nashville, Paula and I drove to Smyrna, Tennessee to have lunch with my oldest granddaughter, Andrea. We had our first heart to heart conversation. I told her that the orphanage made me hard, emotionally. She said that she never saw that side of me. When Andrea comes for Easter dinner, we will celebrate her 26th birthday. Paula and I will also celebrate our 57th wedding anniversary. I will have a private conversation with Andrea. I will ask her to promise me, that when I die, that she will take my Bible to John Mark Vinson. He will know what to do will it. Also, to get my old, formal, military uniform out of my walk-in closet. It's in a black plastic cover, and get it to John Mark.

It is true that when we die, we take nothing with us but our memories. I told John Mark that when my time comes, I'm taking my Bible with me. It's tattered and worn out from use since it was given to me 67 years ago. The binding is coming apart and the front page that was signed by Mr. & Mrs. Vorgang came loose. I read that entire Bible one time. I did not want to stand before Christ, on Judgment Day, and give Him some excuse as to why I did not have the time to read all of His inspired Words. I told John Mark to place my Bible in my coffin with my hands holding the Bible. I'm leaving this world holding Christ's words.

Years ago, I was a volunteer at Heritage Christian Academy (HCA). I would go to their Chapel service on Thursday. I would sit near Andrea, Heather, and John-John. When they transferred from HCA, I would sit near Skyler, and Lexie Crisp. I became their surrogate grandfather when their dad, Jason was deployed to Iraq. I also became a grandfather to



Jade Hakes. Her godmother, Trish Cunningham, would bring her to church starting from the time that she was a baby, and until she moved away with her parents to Russellville, Kentucky. She would sit next to me as Trish sang in the choir. I'm just an usher, nothing more, nothing less. Skyler plans to get married in the fall. The Good Lord willing, I hope to go to her wedding. Jade is a high school senior. I have not seen her since the Pandemic started. The Good Lord willing, I will go to her

graduation in May. Lexie is a high school senior. She will graduate from HCA in May. The Good Lord willing. I plan to go to her graduation.

Grandchildren need to know that you care about them. They need to hear the words that even Jesus wanted to hear from His Apostles: "I love you." Andrea gave me the nickname "An-Father." Jade is the only grandchild who calls me "Mr. John." I told her in a text: "That really good writers put people that they love (and care about) in their stories." As part of God's plans for us, he puts people in our lives for His reasons. The Vorgangs came into my life and gave me a Bible. My dad, Charles J. Hall, was called a useless person, and he suffered an unreal amount of trials. In his first job with DuPont, the explosive formula that he was working on, exploded. He was injured and he suffered a nervous breakdown. Yet, in 1969, he was a member of the NASA team that helped put the first man on the moon, Apollo 11. Christ put Audrey Lambert in my life. We never met in person"; and she puts my stories on her web page, that everyone can read.

I'm getting close to ending this story about my Bible. As in most of my stories, I will use lyrics from a song to enhance the theme I want to convey. Wayland Holyfield and Richard C. Leigh wrote the song, "Only Here for a little While." These are some of their lyrics: "I'm gonna hold who needs holdin'. Mend what needs mendin'. Walk what needs walkin', though it means an extra mile. Pray what needs prayin'. Say what needs sayin'. 'Cause we're only here for a little while. Today I stood singin' songs and saying 'Amen.' Saying goodbye to a friend who seemed so young. He spent his life workin' hard to chase a dollar. Putting off until tomorrow things he should have done. Made me start thinkin', what's the hurry, why the runnin'? I don't like what I'm becoming, gonna change my style. Take my time and not take it for granted. 'Cause we're only here for a little while. Let me love like I'll never see tomorrow. Treat each as though it's borrowed, like it's precious as a child. Oh, take my hand. Let us reach out to each other. 'Cause we are only here for a little while...". For ten years or so, I was a volunteer in the HCA lunchroom. I would give some of the students a wrapped peppermint, only after they recited their favorite Bible

verse. I stood with the students at Chapel as we said these words: “I Pledge Allegiance to the Bible, God's holy word. I will make it a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path and I will hide its words in my heart that I might not sin against God.” This is why my Bible is so precious to me.

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

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