

CHAPTER 4

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

(Irma's story)

One would think that a cold floor in a dark room would not be very comforting but for Irma it was a great refuge. Each night after everyone was asleep, she would tiptoe into the bathroom and lock the door. Sleeping on the floor mat covered with a bath towel was safer than the threat of her uncle coming to her bed in the wee hours of the morning.

He was a large man who wore heavy black army boots and reeked of cheap cologne. His large groping hands matched his large bulging eyes. He had served a few tours overseas and came to live in their home for a few months until he got settled as a civilian. On that terrible night Irma woke up to find his fat body on top of her small frame. She was frozen under his weight. She gasped for air as he groped at her with his hands and mouth. She was drowning in the smell of alcohol unable to scream. He tried to rape her but was too drunk. Terror gripped her with a force stronger than his lust. He threatened to kill her if she uttered a word to anyone. The following day she was nauseated and in shock but devised a plan to keep him from her bed. That night after everyone was asleep, she slipped into the bathroom and locked the door. She could not remember how many nights she had slept on the bathroom floor, but remembered the day he moved out of her home. Irma stayed in bed that night and cried herself to sleep with tears of relief. She decided no one would ever hurt her like that again. She became somber, angry and hardened.

Locking herself in the bathroom was her way of coping as a very frightened 11-year-old. Stress is a muscle spasm of the mind and Irma was severely stressed. She could not eat or sleep and her eyesight became seriously impaired. She walked around in a blur, was stressed to the point of exhaustion and confused about her parents. Why did they allow him to live in our home? Why did he pick her out of all her sisters? At night she had trouble sleeping or would sleepwalk. During the day she was constantly looking over her shoulder. She isolated herself and depression was her constant companion. Irma vacillated between being a victim and being a hunter. She either went into hiding or was on vigilant alert for danger. No peace, no rest, no sense of security. At age 13 she joined a neighborhood gang in an effort to protect herself at school and on the street. She projected a tough exterior while internally she was terrified.

At age 16 Irma was sick and while in a high fever broke the vow of silence about the attempted rape. Her mother was horrified but her concern was not for Irma but for her uncle. She did not want her husband to know about the incident for fear that he would kill her brother. Irma was devastated by her mom's lack of compassion or comfort. The message Irma got by her mom's response was that her brother was more important than her daughter. So, the secret went on.

Irma's father was a hardworking man with many mouths to feed. He often worked two jobs and ruled his house with an iron fist. Irma knew that he loved her but she could never please him. She could never get it right, say it right or make it come out right. He was demanding, critical and exploded with anger at the least provocation. Perhaps her mother was right and she was protecting her father from his own rage but she got lost in all of it and never did connect with either of them. Irma decided that authority figures would never hear her or help her so she stopped asking. At age 17 she survived another attempted rape. She was assaulted at a friend's home. This time she kicked and screamed. She was rescued when someone heard her fist pounding on the wall, came in and knocked her assailant out cold. Irma became defiant and lived in a constant ping pong game between fighting to survive and wanting to die.

Irma experienced real trauma, pain and loss but she made a bitterroot judgment against her parents and hated men. She lived as a victim because of her expectation that no one would ever put her first, love her, help her or protect her. Twenty-one years after that first trauma Irma had an encounter with God that changed everything. Bankrupt for comfort, peace and love she was suddenly faced with the truth of the gospel and realized that someone did love her. Loved her enough to die for her, to take her sorrows and her tears, her pain and weaknesses. Irma asked Jesus to help her and heal her. This time someone heard her, this time someone came to her rescue and helped her. Irma's healing process took time and many prayer and deliverance sessions but it started with that one decision.

In her first healing prayer session she closed her eyes and saw herself on the floor in that cold dark bathroom. Suddenly the door opened and a great light flooded the room. Jesus was standing on the other side of the threshold extending his hand to her. She took His hand and stepped across the threshold. As she stepped out, He said to her "If you ever find yourself in that dark room again it will be because you chose to go back to it. I want you to stay in the light with Me."

The dark room and cold floor represented Irma's desperate efforts of self-preservation. It took many more prayer sessions to process through all that had happened. She had altered her life in order to cope with the trauma of her childhood and that also needed to be made right. The Holy Spirit was patient and took her slowly and calmly through each event and each decision and their consequences until she was healed and free. The deep internalized emotional pain had manifested in infirmity and as her soul was healed her weak body was also healed and strengthened.

During a later prayer session, Irma saw a beautiful very narrow gold gate. The Lord said to her "This is the final threshold and you will cross it alone. No one will carry you or hold your hand as you step over into eternal life. You will cross it alone and you will meet my Father on the other side. I am your hope of glory. Stay close to Me and you will make it safely across the final threshold."

When we are in emotional pain it is that we have a need that has not been met. We have a right to expect our needs to be met by God. People will fail us because of their own wounding. But Jesus will always meet us with comfort and unconditional love. If you have been hiding in darkness, I invite you to take that crucial step and cross the threshold. Jesus will take your hand and walk you into His marvelous light. He has promised to give you the Holy Spirit who will give you all the grace you need to stay in the light and make it through this life and through the final narrow gate.

"My soul has escaped as a bird from the trap of the hunter. The trap is broken and I have escaped. My help is in the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:7-8)