

DAVID MORGAN

## SALVATION IN THE DIRT

I have been an educator for 25 years. During that time I have witnessed many young people leaving the church. The reasons are simple: they have made mistakes during their journey, and rather than being lifted up, dusted off, and encouraged to continue the journey, they have found reproach, reproof, and admonition. As a result, cloaked in the shame they feel from the mistake that has been made to define them, they have run from the very place they should be running to—their church family.

Many years ago, I had a student I will call Martha. Martha was a bright, bouncy, free-spirited little girl who loved to laugh. As she grew older, her family moved. Somewhere along the way, little Martha lost her bright and bouncy personality. She became shy and withdrawn. Under a legalistic family and congregation, Martha found herself struggling to escape. She found a place of escape in a bottle of vodka, cocaine, and promiscuous relationships. Before long she became pregnant out of wedlock. Over time, she descended into a darker and darker place, finding solace in her poetry and vices.

I had last seen her when she was twelve years old. Now, as I was packing my office for moving to another responsibility, she stopped by to say hello. She still had the beautiful smile and the quick laugh, but the eyes didn't bounce anymore. She shared with me all she had gone through and gave me a poem she had written.

LYING IN WAIT . . . AS THEY CONTEMPLATE MY FATE  
WONDERING WHAT TO USE NEXT FOR THEIR BAIT  
diabolically wicked they hide and they cower  
always in the corners drawing off my power.  
i'm letting them come. inviting them in  
allowing them to drown me under their sin  
why do i do this? why can't i just learn?  
i struggle to be strong but they always return

David Morgan has an M.A. in Leadership from Andrews University and is the principal at Blue Mountain Academy in Hamburg, Pennsylvania. This past school year, Dave took the lessons of "Leadership Lived" and allowed three boys to live in his home who would have otherwise not been allowed to continue attending Blue Mountain Academy. Through his mentorship, all three completed the school year successfully and one graduated.

leaving me vulnerable and in such disarray  
 no hope of anything better, always full of dismay  
 so now here i am not able to stand  
 lying and waiting for their next command  
 so out of control i feel so alone  
 they show me the cards and i should have known  
 there is nothing left, my life here is done  
 they've entered my body and now we are one.

Words cannot describe the way I felt. Devastation filled my heart as I listened to her story. We talked for hours and soon the picture began to come into focus. A young lady, taken from a small one-room school, thrust into an environment that overwhelmed her, being told at every turn to “be better” and finally, a need to escape. A young tender flower that had been treated without grace, love, or redemption; now a broken, pathetic shell of the potential she once held.

My mind was taken to the scene in John 8:1-11. The Creator, stooping down to write in the dirt. Ignoring the detractors, the Creator of the universe offering a young woman salvation in the dirt. I knew God had caused my path and Martha’s to cross again, and I knew I needed to do something for her and for the young people across Pennsylvania. I had to stand up and challenge my peers to stop and reflect on Jesus and how He dealt with these situations. I asked Martha if I could tell her story, and she readily agreed. I then asked her if I might modify one of her poems. She agreed, and this is what I wrote:

LYING IN WAIT . . . THEY CONTEMPLATE MY FATE  
 WONDERING WHAT TO USE NEXT FOR THEIR BAIT  
 But I have no fear because my friend is Jesus Christ,  
 And He is first rate.

Diabolically wicked they hide and they cower  
 Always in the corners, trying to draw off my power.  
 But I don’t hesitate to call on the One,  
 And I stay strong with the Father’s only Son.

I’m shutting them out. Inviting Him in  
 Not allowing them to drown me under their sin.  
 Why do I do this? How did I learn?  
 Listen close, so you don’t get burned.

I struggled myself to try to be strong  
 But they always crowded back, quickly returned  
 Leaving me vulnerable and in such disarray  
 No hope of anything better, always full of dismay.

But then I met Jesus, compassion in His eyes  
 Asking me sincerely to take off my disguise.  
 I said, “I can’t, I’m not able to stand  
 Lying and waiting for their next command

So out of control I feel so alone  
They show me the cards and I should have known  
there is nothing left my life here is done  
they've entered my body and now we are one."

He held out His hand, and looked in my eyes  
I wasn't really sure, but He started to cry.  
"Daughter" is what he said, "Your accusers are dead,  
Your victory over them came when I bowed my head,  
And with my last breath, I was dead."

"Three days later, I rose from the grave,  
And now you are mine, no longer their slave.  
So take My hand, and let's go for a walk,  
I love you so much, let's enjoy our talk."

And so I took His hand, and now my life is changed  
No longer do they scare me, I'm no longer deranged.  
I have Jesus, a friend I can trust,  
A friend who loves me, and now we are one.

While perhaps not as lyrical and poetic as the words she once penned, the lesson to her and to others is that there is hope, and there is grace. Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Ellen G. White (1898/1964) describes the woman's response:

Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins. This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. With self-sacrificing love and devotion she repaid His forgiving mercy. (p. 462)

May you, in your leadership journey, not shy away from those opportunities to reflect the grace of Jesus Christ, to impact those you serve with his love. God will use you in a mighty way.

## References

White, E. G. (1898/1964). *The desire of ages*. Mountain View, CA. Pacific Press.