

## Message: We Aren't Alone

**Today, I have a long story to tell ... but it's worth the wait.**

**It's the story of Bill.**

**“Bill had to ‘bleep’ the machine shop conversations he told his wife.**

Centerfolds taped on the wall caught his eye several times a day. Payday usually found Bill and his buddies eyeing the dancer at the club and having a few drinks too many before getting home in the early morning.

**It was different now.** Attending church one Sunday with his wife Joan, Bill had found Christ. But the atmosphere at the shop seemed to pull at him. How could he make an impact for Christ at work instead of being sucked into the temptations?

**The Monday after Bill's conversion was especially tough.** Loren and Bill often chatted at breaks, sometimes about religion. Loren's Dad had been active in church before he had run off with a younger woman and divorced Loren's Mom. Loren hated his Dad ‘and his stinking religion.’ As they put away their tools that afternoon, Loren asked, ‘What's with you today? You seem different.’

**No escape now.** If Bill told the truth, Loren would nail every inconsistency in his life - and there were many. But if he didn't speak now, would he ever?

**Bill's mind flashed to the chameleon his son had bought at the pet store.** On the front lawn it turned green. That's how it avoided enemies –blending in with the background. Clever. But Bill knew it wouldn't work for him.

**The pastor's words from Sunday's sermon echoed in Bill's ears:**

“‘If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him.’ It was now or never. Bill stared at Loren for a long moment, and then quietly said, ‘Okay, I'll tell you.’

**Sure enough, Loren began to argue even before Bill finished.**

Suddenly Loren stopped. ‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating,’ he said. ‘Let's see if it lasts.’

**It almost didn't.** Three weeks later Bill and Joan got into a nasty argument ending when Bill stomped out of the house. He ended up at the club, where he drank until closing, then spent the night in his car. It was almost ten in the morning when he finally woke. Head throbbing, unshaven, he rushed to work mumbling some excuse to his foreman. By noon he had ruined three of the precision parts he was machining.

**If it hadn't been for Forester the incident might have gone unnoticed.** Some people are just obnoxious. Forester's cutting sarcasm coupled with his massive frame intimidated everyone. His voice boomed over the lunchroom small talk: 'Hey, Bill, I saw you last night at the club. You were feeling no pain.' Bill felt sick. He hardly heard the rest.

**Somehow he had to get back to the Lord.** A Bible verse came to him: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Wow! How much God must love him!

**Thoughts began to take shape in words tumbling out to God.** 'Please forgive me, Lord, I'm so sorry!' After that a peace seemed to come.

**Now he had to face Joan.** It wasn't the first time he'd stayed out all night. 'Joan, I blew it. I want God to change me. Please forgive me.' She didn't say much, but he could see her coldness soften. Then she broke into tears and hugged him tightly. 'Oh, I do forgive you and I'm praying for you.' That meant a lot.

**When Bill ran into the foreman the next morning, Carl looked him straight in the eye.** 'If it happens again, Bill, you're gone.' He turned abruptly and disappeared into the office.

**That was over. Yet all day long his stomach churned.** Everyone in the shop knew he was going to church. Whatever credibility he'd had as a Christian was gone. 'How can I witness to Loren now?' Bill thought. 'He'd laugh at anything I say. Why not just quit and start new where nobody knows me?'

**An idea began to grow.** Towards the end of lunch hour the next day, Bill stood up: 'I've got to tell you guys something. You all know I got smashed the night before last. The wife and I got into it and before I knew it, there I was at the club'.

**‘And you probably heard, I became a Christian a few weeks ago.** This binge makes me a lousy example of a Christian! I’m really sorry. You deserve better.’ The buzzer sounded as he finished. The men looked at each other awkwardly, then walked to their machines without a word.

**That had been a crossroads.** It would have been easy - too easy - to say nothing and go back to his old way. But now he had come out in the open for Jesus. He had to live it.

**Loren motioned to him as Bill started up his lathe.** He switched it off. ‘You know I don’t go along with all this religion stuff,’ Loren said. ‘But I think you believe it. What you said took a lot of guts. At least you’re not a hypocrite like my Dad. He never even told us he was sorry.’

**Bill touched Loren’s arm as he turned back to his lathe.** Through the tightness in his throat he mumbled a prayer over the noise of the machines, ‘Jesus, maybe, just maybe, we have a chance, you and me.’

**As Bill entered the lunchroom on Tuesday, Forester was in the middle of another graphic story.** Bill found himself roaring. Then suddenly his laughter died. Would Jesus laugh?

**Blood rushed to Bill’s face, though no one seemed to notice.**

What should he do? Maybe just a chuckle? After all, it was funny. Sort of. Well, not as funny since he was trying to follow Jesus.

**Maybe he ought to make a crack about their crude language.** They’d be on him in a minute as ‘holier-than-thou.’ Then they’d pick him apart – every weakness, every slip. He’d never hear the end of it.

**In the end, Bill decided to go wash up.** He just couldn’t stay in the group and not laugh. But even that was a stand in a quiet sort of way. He lathered his hands while he mulled it over. He couldn’t reform the guys at work, and he shouldn’t always be correcting them. But he did need to keep himself on track. Maybe they could see Christ in him, at least.

**Thursday afternoon, his resolve was tested again.** He glanced up to see one of the older men, nicknamed “Gap,” slip a company micrometer into a battered lunch box. Gap had worked there longer than anyone. When he grinned, his missing front tooth and wrinkled face reminded Bill of a jack-o’-lantern. Gap would give you the shirt off his back, but

he was stealing the company blind. Every month or so expensive drill bits and tools would disappear. The men even joked about it when the foreman wasn't around.

**But this time Bill had seen him do it.** Gap had caught Bill's gaze. 'You won't tell no one, will you, Billy?'

**Bill was mad.** 'It's one thing for someone else to live in darkness,' Bill decided, 'but he's got no right to make me live there, too.'

**The boss made it easier.** Friday morning, he pulled each of the machinists into his office to ask about the missing tool. 'Know anything about this, Bill?' Bill couldn't – no, he wouldn't – dodge the question. Gap was fired after 17 years with the company.

**Gap made no secret of who had ratted on him.** Bill was treated to a day-long parade of obscenities and ugly sneers. 'You \_\_\_\_ snitch! You messed up Gap's life. Who'll give the old man a job now?'

**At break time, when Bill wasn't around, the men hashed over what he'd said.** 'I didn't go squealing to the boss,' Bill had told Loren. 'But when he asked me point-blank where that micrometer went, I couldn't lie to his face. Ever since I was a kid, I've been lying my way out of things. No more! No matter how hard, I've decided to tell the truth.'

**Though Bill hadn't used Jesus' name much in his witness so far, people were beginning to see Jesus' character in sharper focus.**

**Eventually, the men let up a little.** At least they no longer went out of their way to make life miserable for him – except Forester. Forester was determined to get rid of him. Every part Bill ruined, every mistake, got reported to the foreman in the worst possible light.

**It was love, though, not righteousness, that eventually changed the man.** Forester's little girl Lora, who had been hit by a car several months earlier, was having her fifth surgery to repair a shattered leg.

**As Bill drove home from work one afternoon,** a boy at the stoplight shouted through the open window, 'Flowers! Flowers, sir?'

**Bill turned, then chuckled.** 'Yea,' he said. 'A dozen carnations.'

**As he entered the room,** Bill could see Forester sitting next to Lora’s hospital bed, holding her hand. Forester looked up when Bill coughed. ‘I just stopped by for a minute to say “Hi” to Lora,’ Bill muttered.

**When he handed the bouquet to Lora,** Forester stood awkwardly and shook his hand. ‘I ... I don’t know what to say.’

**After that Forester never walked by Bill’s machine without a wave and a smile.** His eyes even glistened a bit when Bill told him the church had been praying for Lora. And when Bill invited Forester, he came on Sunday with his wife and kids.

**It seemed worth it all the day Forester and his family were baptized.** Just before the ceremony, the minister asked Forester to tell how he had come to Christ. Forester’s booming voice reverberated throughout the church, but this time there was no sarcasm:

**‘It was my friend Bill. He wouldn’t quit. No matter how much I hassled him, he just hung in there.’** Bill felt himself turning red, but Forester continued. ‘I could see he really cared. He’s kind of like a company ‘rep’, you know – God’s man at work.’”<sup>1</sup>

**We know the story of Pentecost.** Jesus made a promise to send us a Companion to help us and guide us through life, God’s Spirit. And, fifty days after the disciples found an empty tomb, Jesus kept his promise.

**We don’t know what Jesus’ followers said in different languages on that day.** But, given that they were real people who lived and worked in a real world with real problems, I believe it was a message about hanging in there, not quitting and not giving up; holding onto Jesus. And that’s where they found faith. That’s what God’s people do when they are at work, at home, in stores, in the car or anywhere they go.

**You are not alone. God is with you.** Embrace that good news and all that it means; no matter what. Share it with others. Your life and theirs will be better for it.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.inspirationalarchive.com/1211/god%E2%80%99s-man-at-bearcat-tool-and-die/>

Let us pray ...

*Holy Spirit, inspire and empower us so we embody your love to all people. Open our hearts, ears, minds, and mouths to be people who praise you in all circumstances, who hear the cry of the needy, and who see the needs of those we encounter. Use us as instruments of your love that we might honor you with our entire being. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**John 14:15-21 (CEB)**

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”