

The Fifth Decade

1950-1960

Age 40-50

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:2

In 1950 the Korean War had begun and many young men were going off to war and families were being separated. Joe and his family were on the move too, not being split apart, but in a sense they were being sent to a foreign atmosphere. Joe and Mary had decided it was time to move from the city into a more rural setting. On the surface it may not appear like a drastic change, but to the young Huff family this move was significant. It was a move away from the city and also the beginning of going away from many of the bad memories and habits that had been adding up over the first forty years of Joe’s life. State Road 421 would be the new address of Joe, Mary, Billy, Betty and Carol Huff.

This move entailed many changes in addition to just the physical move from city life to a more rural life. Although the relatively new family was still living in a rented home, it was now a home away from the urban life Joe had experienced. Because of the move, city transportation was no longer available. In the past Joe had always used the bus to get to and from Kernel’s Optical and the family had walked to their church on Downy Avenue, but the move to State Road 421 would cause the young couple to have to purchase a car. The car was important so Joe could get back and forth to work, but also very important to pro-

vide a way to continue to raise the family in the church. Their rural location made it no longer possible to walk to worship, but the new car and the commitment of Joe and Mary allowed them to continue their growth and discipline of a faith-based family.

Joe had not owned a car since the one his father had left him at his death and that vehicle had long sense been retired from service. Joe's first family car was a Model "A" Ford, not much different than his first. This was an old car for that time, but nonetheless a new page in the life of Joe. Now he was not only a family man, but also began having more and more responsibilities and financial obligations that had to be met.

In the past Joe would most likely have run to the bottle or some other escape to get away from those issues, but now as God's continuing forgiveness kept coming into his life more and more, Joe's steadfast dedication to his family and fulfilling his responsibilities overrode any feelings of his needing to escape. In fact it was about this time that Joe relates how God made it clear the drinking couldn't just be cut down as he had already done, but needed to be purged completely from his life.

Joe had quit going to bars and spending money, but he would still come home after work and drink an occasional beer. Because of Joe's personal struggle with alcohol, God rid him of the desire for it. Listening to Joe's words one gets the realization of how powerful and direct our Holy Father can be. In Joe's early life his earthly father, Guy, had taken him to the shed and punished him for actions he felt were inappropriate. Joe was afraid of Guy and the punishment seemed not to work well, because it was not accompanied by any show of love.

Not so, with God's discipline of Joe and his drinking. God knew what was best for Joe and his family so when Joe didn't stop the use of alcohol, God stepped into the picture in a very real way and took care of the problem. Joe couldn't solve the dilemma, but God could and did. In Joe's own words he tells us how God took away a demon that had been following him for most of the years of his life and did so as quickly as sun can appear after a spring storm.

It seems strange that the Lord has his ways of taking things away that we don't need. I would go home of an evening and I would drink beer and it was fine until a time came that I drank one and it made me sick, deathly sick. I had to go to bed. I couldn't even hold my head up. So I thought, perhaps that I needed to change and buy another brand which I did, but the same thing happened. I thought well perhaps maybe I shouldn't drink bottled beer, maybe I should drink canned beer. So I bought that and then the same thing happened. So I bought a different brand again and the same thing happened. I thought to myself, "Well this is foolishness. If it's going to make me sick I'm not going to drink it." So I quit, not realizing that it was the Lord's work not mine.

At this time in history, the early 1950's, a new innovation came along, the credit card. Joe and his family didn't have a credit card, but they had managed to build up some debt that was beginning to take its toll. Joe, even though in a stable work environment, was not bringing home much money and with the additional cost of the car, gasoline and the bigger home in the country, the meager dollars earned just did not go as far. To compensate for extra dollars needed, the couple decided that perhaps Mary could go to work for a short time to supplement the income until some of the debts were paid off and Joe could get a raise. In their thinking this would be an arrangement that would only last a few weeks. Mary would work nights and be with the children in the days while Joe would play "Mr. Mom" at night.

Some men of this era may have thought it an imposition or unfair to come home after a hard day of work and then care for three small children, but Joe basked in the opportunity to spend time with his kids. His love and devotion to his family was evident in the joy he showed by being given the opportunity to nurture his children. In today's society, families realize the importance and have totally accepted fathers taking on more of the nurturing role; Joe was just way ahead of his time. As God

was nurturing and caring for Joe preparing him for his life of service, Joe was doing the same for his three small children.

The house on State Road 421 was a very modest one by most standards, but to Joe and his family the additional cost of rent bought them a significant improvement in living conditions from what they had in the city. The house was not what one would consider being out in the country but it was definitely more rural than any other location the family had lived in before. In modern terms, the Huffs now lived in the suburbs although in 1950, there weren't the miles of strip malls, billboards and restaurants that define the suburban landscape of the 21st century. Away from the hustle and bustle of the city that had defined the forty years of Joe's life thus far, he now had the blessing of experiencing life at a slower pace and had fewer distractions to deal with once he had completed his work for the day.

The house, which was protected by white-tiled siding, did not sit far off the road and a small covered porch provided a welcoming feel to any visitor who might come calling. A short drive extended along the right side of the house from the road where there was a side entrance into the kitchen in the back of the main level. If entering the front of the home from the porch, one found a small, but cozy living room with a smaller adjoining family room that faced to the rear of the property. The fourth room on the main floor was the main bedroom in the front right corner. The first level was very functional despite the fact that no room was larger than 10 ft by 12 ft. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this humble abode was the stairway located in the kitchen. Two small bedrooms were upstairs, one in the front where Billy slept along with a sixteen year old family member of Mary's who was living there and one in the rear which served as the bedroom for the two girls, Betty and Carol. The window in the upstairs front bedroom could be opened out onto the roof of the porch, which the girls used as a favorite place to play.

With no other rooms in the house to describe, it is appro-

priate to point out that despite the improved living conditions, the Huff family found themselves in a home that did not have a bathroom nor did it have any internal running water. A small building out to the right of the house served as the restroom and a large metal washtub still provided the only means for bathing and doing wash.

Betty and Carol were both very young at this time, which made the task of going to the outhouse at night very unpleasant if not downright scary and near impossible in the winter. Joe handled this dilemma with an unselfish act that showed his children how much he loved them. A round porcelain pot was normally used as the temporary bathroom inside the house. For Joe, the picture of his little girls having to rise from bed and make their way downstairs in the cold, dark middle of night just didn't seem right. So, he would carry the pot upstairs at bedtime and position it close to their room so they could go to the bathroom and quickly return to the warmth and safety of their beds.

Of course, this made the task of emptying the pot in the morning much more perilous and uncomfortable for Joe. In fact, on one occasion, as he was bringing the pot downstairs he stumbled causing all the contents to spill out over the floor and unfortunately on him too. An event like this would try the patience of even the most even-tempered individual, but to Joe it was merely a chance to stop and have a good, hearty laugh at himself. He didn't lash out at the girls for "causing" his situation and he didn't launch into a string of foul language; he just laughed and took everything in stride, because he was serving the ones he loved.

His part time role as "Mr. Mom" which included providing for his girls' dance lessons and taking his son to accordion lessons, along with the peace that came from their surroundings at this time allowed Joe to start to understand just how far God's forgiveness of his past had brought him. He was beginning to see the pieces of the puzzle come together and through the eyes of his wife and children, Joe was realizing that God was giving him all the desires of his heart.

His children bore a striking similarity to him and his siblings. His oldest was a boy, just as Joe was the oldest in his family. His middle child, Betty, as a baby reminded him of the few pictures the family treasured of Edna. Finally, his youngest daughter, Carol brought to mind his sister Charlotte. Joe watched his young family growing up and beginning to create their own memories and relationships.

To his credit, Joe was doing his part to help the equation too. Any person who goes through the exercise of tracing his or her family roots can see the effects of past generations on the current one. The links to Joe's past were tainted with poverty, tragedy and loneliness but he was now taking it upon himself to chart a new course for his family. He was forging a new direction that would have a lasting impact for generations to follow.

A major scientific breakthrough occurred in 1953 with the discovery of DNA. Ironically, genetics played a part in a significant occurrence in Joe's life in the very same year. It was like any other day of work. Joe was meticulously going about his duties in the back of the downtown optical building. As he was working, Joe heard his name called from the hallway between the front of the store and the back room where he was located. The male voice called out informing Joe that there was a young lady in the front of the store asking for him. A young lady, Joe must have thought? The idea of a young lady coming to his place of employment unannounced and interrupting his work must have tossed his mind into a spontaneous flurry of activity. Maybe twenty years ago this would have made sense. But Joe was forty-three years old with a wife and three young children. Something was out of place for this to be happening at this point in his life. With part curiosity and part anxiety, Joe put down the set of glasses he was working on and made his way to the front of the building, a place where he rarely had occasion to show himself. As he emerged through the doorframe and into the waiting area he saw her standing there. The image of the young woman immediately sparked a feeling inside him that he couldn't under-

stand nor describe. Her features seemed familiar although he was certain they had never met. She was a few inches shorter than Joe with straight, black hair and high cheekbones. She was a very attractive woman who Joe was about to discover was eighteen years old.

“Are you George Huff?” she asked.

Joe responded affirmatively, still racing through the Rolodex in his mind in an attempt to place whom this person was and how she knew him and where he worked. Then after what must have seemed like an eternity, the odd feeling that was inside of him was instantly explained.

“I’m your daughter,” she said.

It all made sense now although Joe must have been coming up with more questions than answers as a result of this startling development. Of course he knew of her and had a brief glimpse of her through the window of a bus being held in the arms of her mother as they traveled past him in the city. But that was an entirely different picture than the scene now playing out before him. While not all of the details of that day are known, what is certain is the fact that Joe and his estranged daughter made an instant connection to one another. From that moment on they would remain a part of each other’s lives.

What an amazing lesson this was for Joe at this point in his life and an enduring lesson for anyone today. While this phase of Joe’s life was defined by God’s forgiveness of the sins of his past, it is also a striking reminder that the consequences of sin are real despite God’s grace. There was no DNA test required in the lobby of Kernel Optical that day. The young adult woman who had so dramatically re-entered Joe’s life was the undeniable physical representation of the careless forays of his past. He was now forced to confront his earlier years and he did so with all the honesty and integrity that exemplified who Joe was as a person. He accepted this woman and did not turn his back on her or deny that he was responsible for bringing her into the world. Over the course of the next several years before she moved out

West, Joe took an active role in her life. He was there walking her down the aisle at her wedding. He shared her joy as she gave birth to his first two grandchildren. The two also spent many times reminiscing about the years of her life that they had spent away from one another.

The time Joe spent with his young adult daughter did not compromise the responsibilities to his nuclear family. Joe tried to be a model father to his three young children in every way. He cherished his time with them. He was fun-loving, playful and wonderfully ornery. Most surprising of all, was his gentleness as a father. The barrel-chested, square-jawed boxer who made a name for himself as a tough, gritty fighter was to his children a very approachable, sweet and caring man. As evidence of his caring nature, he continued whenever possible to look for ways to better their lives. Another move taking Joe one step further away from his past was soon to occur.

In 1954 Joe and his family made this move. This time it was to a very rural setting in eastern Boone County, Indiana. They moved to a small farm on a gravel road. It was a small house without many amenities. The most significant difference from this move and all the others, however, was that this house was purchased and not rented. It sat on nine acres of land with a barn, garage and huge, mature trees surrounding the house. Joe's search to distance himself from the city and the unpleasant memories of his youth had now been fully realized with his transition from the "Drugstore Cowboy" to the "Gentleman Farmer."

With this purchase of the home and the mortgage that went with it, Mary's temporary job became a permanent one. The two had decided the life they wanted to live for themselves and for their children was worth the sacrifice of both working to pay the bills. Without someone like Joe with the love and dedication for his kids, this arrangement would probably not have worked. When Mary began working outside the home, the family structure remained firm. In fact, it gave Joe the opportunity to continue to be an influential part of his children's lives and strengthened the family unit instead of weakening it in any way.

The small, two story, white, frame house sat in the front of the property. Three large weeping willow trees adorned the front yard. One sat at the side of the gravel drive just at the right front of the acre or so where the buildings were placed. The garage was large enough for two cars, but had no doors and was more of a carport type structure than a true garage. The barn had once supported a larger farming operation; but for many years had been sparingly used and let deteriorate to a point where much renovation would not have been a wise use of the family's meager earnings. It was, however, still useable and Joe did manage to purchase a cow, some chickens and even a pig once in a while. This was more to help reduce expenses than for any fun and/or relaxation. Each day before going to his job at Kernel's he would tend his animals and each evening he would do the same. The rest of the land, with the exception of a small backyard, was rented out to a local farmer and this money was used to offset the mortgage as well. Some of the crops were also shared and were used to feed the small number of animals that were kept for milk, butter, eggs and meat.

The remaining part of the plot of land near the buildings was used as a garden to grow vegetables. Joe's character and his attention to detail were shown in the tending of his garden as much as it was in his fabrication of glasses at his job as optician. Joe would carefully lay out rows with string, not by sight, but by meticulous measurements. The children would not be allowed to participate in the planting of the seedlings until Joe had carefully laid out the plots and prepared the soil. Once all the preparation was completed, then others could come and be a part of the process. Joe, in preparing his garden, was much like God preparing Joe for His service. Not until God had carefully prepared Joe was he going to be placed into the service of bringing others to God's kingdom. Just as the garden had to be weeded and pruned and carefully tended, Joe still had some weeds to be pulled from his life and old attitudes had to be pruned from his memories before his service could be utilized as God would have it.

The house was modest, with small rooms and stucco walls. When the Huffs moved into the home it was without a bathroom, but it did have running water which was a huge improvement to the house on State Road 421. It also had a furnace, which provided heat in the cold Indiana winters, but of course no air conditioning for the hot, humid summers, especially in late July and August. Instead of central air, the Huffs had three old, red, metal lawn chairs placed under the tallest and widest of the willow trees. There on the hottest days they would sit to stay as cool as possible. In contrast to the city where Joe could never get away from the heat, in the country he could sit beneath the tree and feel the unimpeded breeze blowing across his land. This escape from the heat of the city is another picture of Joe's escape from the clutches of his past.

Smoking was the final vice remaining from Joe's past and was soon to be gone. God had the final weeding to do. The tobacco was a hindrance to the harvest God had in store for Joe's life. This time it was with the help and accountability of Mary that caused Joe to finally kick his smoking habit. God used Mary and others to get tobacco out of Joe's life. Once again Joe's own words need to be used to explain how quickly an obstacle can be removed from a person's life if they are willing to let God lead.

And then on cigarettes. I had the very bad habit as usual, as a lot of people have. I was smoking three packs of king size a day. At noon I would smoke a cigar after lunch and at night I had a collection of pipes that I would go home and smoke. And like it (Bible) says, the Lord works in various ways. One night we were at Mary's folks and her mother says, "George, why don't you quit smoking?" And I said, "I'm going to." So that night on the way home I took out a cigarette, I'd just bought a carton that day, and I'd just opened a fresh pack and I'd only smoked about two out of it and I took another one and I stuck it in my mouth and I lit it. We were riding along and Mary said to me, "Why did you lie to

my mother?" I said, "I didn't lie to your mother." She said, "Yes you did." I said, "Well what did I do?" She said, "You told her you were going to quit smoking." I said, "I just did." So the cigarette I had, I pinched it out the window; stuck it in my pocket. I went home and I laid the pack up, the cigarette on top of it, the carton was lying there. I walked past it day after day after day. I never touched it again. Before, if I would have tried I would have gotten irritable. Many times she told me that I should go ahead and smoke because I was worse than a bear with a sore nose. But this time I had help—the Lord. You see, like I say, he works in various ways. He didn't want me to drink. He didn't want me to smoke, because he had a plan, a plan that I should help others and not be detrimental to them. That I should be an example, not of drinking and smoking, but of doing without those things that I didn't need just to show His glory.

Just down the gravel road south of the new home of the Huff family was a structure that would become an integral part of God's plan for Joe's forgiveness on the way to His service. The structure was a small, white church called Fairview Christian. It was an unassuming structure, set out in the middle of a field and Joe and his family were firmly planted in the church. The congregation was easily fit into the little church and they couldn't afford a full-time pastor and had to rely on men who held other jobs through the week and would then serve the small flock on Sunday mornings.

It was after the move to Boone County and the move from Downing Avenue church to Fairview that Joe began to actively work in the church and God began to hoe, fertilize, and water Joe's Christian walk. God would soon harvest Joe and place him into service so he could help fulfill scriptures such as:

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself

the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” Mark 4:26-29

Joe continued through this decade of his life to live and exemplify his steadfast dedication to his job, family and faith. Not only did he serve and protect his immediate family, but he also continued to open his home to members of Mary’s family who had need of a place to live and even sometimes recuperate from injury. It would have been easy for Joe to turn them away, but again that was not in his character. He had seen the devastation his father, Guy, had lived through when he was injured and he couldn’t bear the thought of anyone suffering like his father.

The height of his caring for family was probably when he welcomed Georgia and Arthur to live in a small trailer in the back of his home. Although he and Arthur had problems in the past and there were children born of Georgia and Arthur that could and should have welcomed them into their homes, the couple had a need for a place to live and Joe would not say no. He let them pull the trailer on to his farm and made them feel welcome in their new setting.

Even though other members of the extended family were important to Joe, the relationship between he and his three children was by far the most important. The memories his children have of the years of 1950 through 1960 are very fond to say the least. Unlike the memories of youth Joe had, he made absolutely sure the memories between he and his kids were pleasant and special. When asking his children about what they remember about these times, one quickly sees a smile and twinkle in their eyes as they reflect on the days spent with their dad.

From flying kites in the garden after the vegetables had been harvested to shooting baskets on the old rim nailed directly to the side of the old barn, Joe’s kids speak lovingly and longingly about those most special times. Mentoring and loving his chil-

dren and making sure they did not live through the experiences he lived through caused a chain of pain and heartache to be broken. Billy, Betty and Carol have such pleasant memories of their childhood they have in turn made sure to keep Joe's legacy alive and well in their children and their children's children.

While purposeful in his love and caring for the children, Joe's humor and mischievous nature would often come out. Joe would nurture and care for the kids; showing Billy how to milk and care for the animals, allowing Betty and Carol to help him in the garden. Then in the same evening Joe could be found playing jokes on his kids by showing up outside a window with his face pushed up against the glass. He laughed his most special laugh of glee in seeing his daughters scream at the sudden appearance of his nose plastered against the glass.

As the three siblings grew from young children into teenagers, their lives had the consistency, love and humor Joe's life had been void of all through his formative years. He was determined to and accomplished the difficult task of raising three wonderful children in a loving, caring and fun-filled life.

The things of Joe's past were never far from his thoughts and actions, but he chose those most positive actions and experiences of his past to share with his children. In those summer months Joe would often bring out his accordion or his harmonica and the family would sit out under the willow tree in the front yard and Joe would play and the family would sing Christian hymns. Joe's love of musical instruments and singing were pleasant, but these times shared with his family were a far cry from the days of Joe's youth of summer singing with the members of his gang on the way back from the parks of Indianapolis.

On these same summer evenings as the darkness began to overtake the front yard, the kids would gather around the red metal lawn chair on the cool grass and listen to Joe reminisce about his travel to foreign lands while he was in the Navy. Joe had a way of making the stories come to life and the lands seemed so real it was as if they had all been there and made

them long to actually see these places he so vividly described. Had Joe been able to see inside his young teenaged son's head, he may not have made the Navy and the travels sound so pleasant.

Joe's dedication to his faith and work also continued to grow during this time. Joe was in his second decade with Kernel's and was still doing his job faithfully, taking his standard lunch, coming home, doing his chores while helping his son learn the ropes of farming and helping his daughters in their passage into adolescence. Also during this time all three children were growing in their walk with the Lord. By this stage in their lives Joe and Mary had the children firmly in the church.

Joe had successfully completed his mission of developing his family in a most positive and opposite way he had experienced. This is most noticeable in his son, Billy. Where Joe had no car as a youth, he made sure Billy had one. Where Joe had no boundaries, he made sure Billy had curfews, rules and accountability. Where Joe went to work and had to learn "on the job", he took the time to teach Billy how to work, then sent him out. Joe wanted to be sure his children's lives were the antithesis of his and he had accomplished this noble mission. Now it was time for God to use Joe in his work to help others in their faith.

The optical career that Joe had established provided an interesting parallel to the spiritual labors that would lie ahead for him. He was becoming more and more equipped with some of the tools of his faith and God would begin giving Joe opportunities to use them.

In the present day field of optometry, little attention is given to the making of eyeglasses. In fact, the need for glasses at all is being challenged with the advent of corrective laser eye surgery. It is common to see "One-hour" optical stores which is yet another testament to the highly technological and instant way of life. It's hard to imagine the picture of a man taking his bare hands, a piece of glass and a drum of sand and spending eight hours a day molding and shaping one eyeglass lens at a time. Yet

this image was exactly the picture of nearly every day of Joe's work life at Kernel's in the late 1950s.

The art form known as Tribology, which describes the using of abrasives in shaping of things such as telescopes and eyeglasses has been chronicled all the way back to the annals of early mankind. As is known, glass is made of particles of sand. In much the same way as iron is used to shape itself when heated, sand can be used to grind glass to the proper perspective. Every day for most of his thirty-seven years of employment, Joe would stand over three large drums, each containing different coarseness of wet, colored sand and grind eyeglass lenses by hand. Not until the end of his career did machines start to take the place of the manual tasks required to do his job. In the center of each of the large, metal drums that were slightly rounded in the bottom, was a hard ball that rolled freely. Holding the lens in one hand, Joe would reach into the drum and take a handful of the wet sand then slowly bring it up and over the ball rubbing the sand over the glass, which was positioned on top of the ball. This methodical act of abrasion would eventually get the lens to the proper curvature and thickness for the required prescription.

Joe's job may have seemed tedious and mundane, but God used the time spent bent over the drums in the quiet solitude of the back room to reflect on and deepen his relationship with God. From this time of reflection, God instilled in Joe the desire to share his faith with others.

About this time, Joe began carpooling with a man into the city. The two became friends and during the course of the 45-minute trip one way back and forth to work, they began to deepen their relationship and delve into topics that lesser acquaintances may have deemed too personal. Over the course of time, the two men began talking more and more about things of a spiritual nature. This continued until one day, Joe ultimately shared the message of Jesus and His sacrifice for our sins and his friend made a commitment to accept Christ as his Lord and Savior. Joe's career was the perfect metaphor in describing how he

touched the life of this friend. Joe was able to use the “coarseness” of his past to shape the spiritual lens of God’s forgiveness in such a way that caused his friend to see his own life and need for God’s grace more clearly.

Joe had turned the corner and was sprinting toward the finish of this section of his life, but just the beginning of his years of service. The decade of the sixties would begin with two more losses of loved ones; one permanent and one temporary. Joe’s maturity in his faith however, would enable him to handle these losses in a much different manner than any he had experienced up to this point in his life.