



Sons of Issachar

for the 21st Century

Dear Family and Friends,

December 7, 2013

Festive Christmas greetings from our nation's capital! Time to deck the halls with boughs of holly, but first I thought you would enjoy hearing a personal testimony from **Evan**, a senior at George Mason University, who has been involved with SOI 21 for the past three and a half years. So, grab a gingerbread latte or a peppermint mocha coffee (gotta love those holiday beverages), and be of good cheer, for our Father is at work!

EDIFICATION FROM EVAN

When I was a freshman, I came to campus hungry for something more—more of God, more impact on the world, and more awareness of my true purpose in life. Although I didn't fully recognize it at the time, I later understood these deep longings were tied to a yearning to live in the purpose for which I, we, have been created.

Despite my passion, I knew I had issues. I felt weak. I regularly wrestled intensely with insecurity and self-condemnation. Although, in my mind, I "knew" the freeing truths about God's love for me, I also knew in my heart that things were not quite the way they ought to be. However, I didn't understand the fullness of my struggle. At the time, I would have denied the extent to which it was even there.

Not too long into the first semester, I met Bill and Josh [Joshua Alcorn] at the SOI 21 prayer table. I had heard great things about them from several friends I knew through different campus ministries, so I imagined that I would enjoy connecting with them. As I spoke with them week after week, I developed a large respect for what I saw them offer as people and as a campus ministry.

As I got to know them more, I not only admired the insight they shared, but I was also touched on a personal level as they began to speak into my life. In particular, I began to sense the spirit of a father through the way Bill reached out to me, and others, and this has touched me in a deeply personal way. I remember one moment where a young woman named Aisha had shared terribly difficult news about her family. Bill responded in a way that I did not expect—both he and Aisha embraced and began to weep for some time, more than a few minutes. This moment was profound for me. And it showed me just one picture of what I later realized was the heart of God the Father toward His people—and toward me.

By the end of the year, I felt closer to Bill and Josh. They were no longer just a neat group of guys that I had heard about; they had become friends. At this point, I regularly visited the prayer table to talk with them, ask questions, pray with them, or just hang out. It was around this time when Bill offered to disciple me. Long story short, as Bill, Josh, and I began meeting each week, I began a journey that began to change my life.

At that point in my life, despite my struggles, I had a lot going for me. Always working hard in school and everything I did, many people would say I would have been more than "okay" to just keep moving through life. But I knew I needed something more. Through the time with Bill and Josh each week, the Holy Spirit began to open my eyes to the tragic pain we suffer as fallen image-bearers and the depravity of our sinful tendencies that often go unnoticed. With a great deal of patience and care, Bill and Josh graciously imparted these types of truths into my life. And these truths fundamentally changed my approach to life, to God, and to relationships. These truths freed me to love and grow as a person.

*For the first several months, in our meeting times, we began studying Larry Crabb's book, *Inside Out*. Despite my initial resistance, Bill and Josh patiently worked with me and taught me in ways that I deeply appreciated. And I knew that God was moving through them. And more, I really enjoyed the time – it was a highlight for me*



every week, and still is. But the true meaningfulness of my relationship with Bill and Josh is beyond even just these great meeting times. They truly treated me like a friend and like a son. They invited me not just into their ministry, but also into their lives. And it was this overall approach they had to relationships that I believe had the deepest impact on my life. It is this approach to relationships that most powerfully testifies to who they are, and who we all are meant to be as God's image-bearers.

Since those first couple of years, Josh has moved on from the ministry, and Bill and I have continued meeting one-on-one. Since then, my journey has continued in much growth and profound change that has freed me in some of the most substantial ways, more than at any other point in my life. Before the three of us were meeting, I knew I was in pain, and I knew I was sinful. But I had no idea the extent to which my pain fueled my so-called passions. You see, I had lived my whole life under a compulsive need to "get it right"—to perform well enough to "earn love" by my own standards. Nearly everything I did had to be perfect, or else it wasn't good enough. And when I seemed to hit the mark, I was left wondering why I couldn't celebrate my achievements. In an effort to be righteous, I aggressively analyzed myself to find flaws, not realizing that it was actually my own sinful strategy to "make life work" without God. And the enemy of course took full advantage of this. In this tyrannizing frustration, I was deceived to think it was a passion for God, which only fueled my pride. Now, as I am more aware of my depravity, I feel closer to God and more aware of His great love for me. This is a recent testimony of a breakthrough that has been entirely connected to the Holy Spirit working in my time and relationship with Bill.

It took me a long time to even accept many of the principles that even suggested these things. In fact, I remember often fighting some of the ideas more than I sought to learn from them at times. And yet still, month by month, year by year, God, in His faithfulness, never gave up on me. He continued to open my eyes to reveal just how good He is in the midst of my difficulties—that He enjoys me.

If God had not placed Bill in my life in such the perfect time and place, I don't know how I would be where I am today. Bill is a true spiritual father to me. No one else has quite had the role that Bill has had in my life. I will always be deeply grateful for him.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Your gifts make it possible for us to minister to students like Evan and many others. Thank you for investing in SOI 21. We couldn't do it without you! We appreciate so much your partnership with us. If you have plans for year-end charitable giving, Lynn and I would like to ask you to prayerfully consider an investment in SOI 21. *Currently SOI 21 needs \$50,000 beyond normal year-end giving, in order to fully fund its 2013 budget. We are also seeking to raise an additional \$2,000 in regular monthly support.* If you would consider making a one-time gift and/or a monthly, quarterly, or yearly pledge to our support, we would be most grateful.

As Christmas draws near, Lynn and I are thankful for the "gift" you are to us. Thank you for your faithful prayers and generous gifts. Lynn, Joshua, Justin, Abby, Grace, and I wish you and your family a most blessed and very

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill & Lynn". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid and personal.

Bill and Lynn Lewis