

FOREWORD BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

You can
trust God
to write
your *Story*

*Embracing
the Mysteries
of Providence*

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth
& Robert Wolgemuth


CHAPTER 3

Graced

Our Story

A providence is shaping our ends;
a plan is developing in our lives;
a supremely wise and loving Being
is making all things work together for good.

F. B. MEYER

ur story is really a tale of two families, beginning with two couples: Samuel and Grace Wolgemuth and Arthur and Nancy DeMoss.

Both couples called Pennsylvania home for a time.

Both loved Christ, His Word, and His people.

Both shared a passion for the whole world to know “the old, old story of Jesus and His love.”¹

And both couples left a remarkable legacy of faith and faithfulness for their families and for the generations that would follow them.

In 1948, Sam and Grace gave birth to their fourth child,

Robert David. Twins would follow seven years later, completing this family of eight.

Ten years after Robert made his entrance into the world—exactly nine months and four days after their wedding—Art and Nancy DeMoss welcomed a daughter, who they named after her mother. Within the first five years of their marriage, God would bless them with six children, with a seventh born several years later.

Both couples wholly surrendered their lives and plans to Christ, resolved to follow Him wherever He led. And both talked openly and often with their children about the Scripture, Christ, and the gospel. Though these families didn't know each other at the time, in His inscrutable wisdom and plan, the Lord would one day intertwine their stories.

Looking now in the rearview mirror, we can see the unmistakable Providence of God—how He used our families and our experiences to shape our young hearts, steer the course of our lives, and prepare us for a lifetime of service . . . and an eternity of joy.

We marvel as we reflect on His intimate involvement in every chapter, every scene, every detail of our story.

ROBERT'S STORY (*as told by Nancy*)

Back in the 1940s, Robert's dad sold farm equipment for the Frick Company, headquartered in the small town of Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. In his midthirties, with little formal theological training, Samuel agreed to become the pastor of a dwindling Brethren in Christ congregation. This meant preaching on weekends and Wednesday nights and being on call, as any small-town minister understands, whenever a parishioner had a need.

At his side, always, was Robert's tall, elegant mother, Grace Dourte Wolgemuth, a licensed practical nurse. In fact, Samuel

always introduced his wife as “Grace, by my side.” Samuel leaned heavily on his wife’s gentle way with people, and those who knew her wondered at her gifts of hospitality and homemaking.

In later years, “Lady Grace” would be loved around the globe as she accompanied Samuel on many of his travels as president of Youth for Christ, International. When Robert spoke at his mother’s funeral in 2010, he began, “Her parents named her Grace. How did they know?”



Though not particularly outgoing, young Robert was a likable kid. He loved climbing trees on their property in Waynesboro, as well as (depending on the time of year) riding his bike or sledding on Frick Avenue, which sloped downhill from their home.

Each Sunday, Robert and his siblings would sit dutifully in church, lined up on a wooden pew near the front of the sanctuary, while their father preached. Sam Wolgemuth was not a dynamic communicator, but his sincere passion for the gospel came through clearly. The way he began each sermon is indelibly etched in Robert’s memory.

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Walking across the low platform at the front of the sanctuary, Samuel would place his large black Bible and notes on the pulpit, then step to the side and take a knee. Sometimes he would invite the congregation to join him by kneeling at their pews. Then he would call on the Lord to give him wisdom as he opened the Word.

Prayer was not just a public performance for this preacher

dad. Robert recalls many mornings of lying in bed in his first-floor bedroom and hearing the muffled tones of his father praying downstairs in the basement family room. Though unable to make out the exact words, this son knew that nothing mattered more to his dad than seeking and receiving the favor of God.

His dad's model of humility and prayer had a profound impact on Robert's life.



When Robert was just four years old, his family went to see *Mr. Texas*, a semiautobiographical film starring Christian country singer/songwriter/actor Redd Harper. As Robert watched it, the Spirit of God moved in his young heart. Before they left that evening, he knelt next to his mother, both of them in tears, and committed his life to Christ—the beginning of a whole new life with eternal implications.

Months later, Sam and Grace and their (then) four children, ages four through eleven, boarded a ship bound for Japan. They were embarking on a new adventure, a two-year assignment with Youth for Christ. Robert remembers his parents' selling or giving away virtually everything they owned prior to leaving their home in Pennsylvania in order to say yes to God's call. This was another formative moment that would mark him with a lifelong conviction that Christ is worthy of our wholehearted devotion and that loving, following, and serving Him is our highest duty and joy.

When the family returned from their time overseas, they settled in Wheaton, Illinois, for Robert's dad to take on the role of Youth for Christ's Overseas Director.

Sam and Grace were eager for their children to develop a strong work ethic from an early age. From third through ninth

grade (until he got a better-paying job at one dollar per hour), Robert had a paper route that got him up before daylight six mornings a week. Sitting on the cold garage floor, he would roll up a hundred copies of the *Chicago Tribune*, then carry them in a basket mounted on the front of his heavy-duty Schwinn bike, carefully aiming them at the front porches of his customers' homes.

After high school Robert attended Taylor University, a Christian liberal arts college in north-central Indiana, as had his parents before him (and as have thirty-two Wolgemuths to date). Hopelessly entrepreneurial, Robert helped pay his way through school by selling custom-made dress shirts, corsages, and diamonds imported from Asia from his dorm room.

A highlight of his college years was climbing back on a Schwinn—a sleeker model than the paper-route edition—the summer before his senior year and riding nearly four thousand miles, from San Francisco to New York City (no interstates!). He rode with thirty-nine other students, a group that called themselves “The Wandering Wheels.” Some of those men continue to be among Robert’s closest friends.

Robert’s interest in science had led him to start out as a pre-med student. But during his third year, he sensed a call to ministry and changed his major, graduating in 1969 with a degree in biblical literature. Then, for the next nine years, he served with Youth for Christ, first as a high school club director, then on the staff of *Campus Life* magazine.

His work at the magazine was the beginning of a career in Christian publishing, which has included key management roles at two different publishers, starting a publishing company with his business partner, authoring more than twenty books, and in 1992 starting a literary agency that today represents more than two hundred Christian authors.

One of the greatest joys of Robert's life is teaching God's Word—something he did weekly in adult Sunday school classes for more than thirty years.

Over and over again, since the first time I heard Robert's name around the year 2000, ministry leaders, colleagues in the publishing industry, and many among his family and friends have told me how greatly they respect this man and how grateful they are for the imprint he has left on their lives.

NANCY'S STORY (*as told by Robert*)

Nancy Leigh (called by both names as a child to distinguish her from her mother, also named Nancy) always loved school. Actually, what she really loved was learning. While other kids were on the swing set or kicking a ball around, Nancy could usually be found sitting on the sidelines or in her room reading a book.

Her first conscious memory is of the afternoon of May 14, 1963, when, at age four she turned to Christ to save her. That day she gave all that she knew of herself to all that she knew of Him. And there was no turning back.

From those early years as a child of God, Nancy sensed the Lord's hand on her life and the call to serve Him, though she had no idea what that might look like down the road. In our living room sits a framed letter Nancy wrote to her parents when she was seven years old. (Though a champion speller even at that age, she misspelled "missionary" as "missonary" each of the seven times it appeared in the original letter!):

Dear Mommy and Daddy,

On Saturday I knew that God had touched my heart and wanted me to be a missionary for him, and it was just as if he had stood before me.

Right then I started to think what and how a mission-

any would speak to people. I could just tell everybody this wonderful news. I am so happy about it. And I just know that God has spoken to me and told me to be a missionary for him. And I think that being a missionary is the best job for me.

And I am so happy that God wants me to be a missionary for him.

I hope that God is going to help me be a missionary. It's just as God saying to me: Go, Nancy, go Nancy. You can do it. You can do it. Be a missionary for me. Go, Nancy, go Nancy.

Love,
Nancy Leigh

P.S. Go into all the world and preach the gospel. I'm going to do it for Jesus and Jesus only shall I do it for.

Nancy's heart for the world was expanded through a number of opportunities during her childhood to join her parents on ministry trips to other countries. Her businessman dad had a tireless heart for ministry and a great burden for people everywhere to hear the gospel. He longed for his family to share this zeal. So he and his wife would take their children with them on "ministry vacations," where they could participate in various evangelistic and ministry endeavors, see firsthand the lostness of people without Christ, and witness the power of God to save and transform lives. Those trips had a significant and lasting impact on the life of their firstborn daughter.

Nancy Leigh didn't wait until she was grown up to begin fulfilling her call to serve the Lord. At age eight she was asked to fill in for her third-grade Sunday school teacher and then to teach children in Vacation Bible School. She was hooked. This young woman who loved sitting under the preaching of the Word almost more than anything else discovered that she also loved studying the Word on her own and teaching it to others, a passion that is undiminished to this day.



On her sixteenth birthday, at the beginning of her freshman year at Philadelphia College of Bible, Nancy received a letter from her beloved dad. He reflected on some of his early memories of his oldest child:

I can hardly believe that you're now in college! I can still remember your first birthday, just fifteen years ago, at the Bible Conference at Winona Lake, Indiana—certainly a good way for one to start out in life!

I remember when you were very little, how you always wanted to go wherever there was a gospel meeting in progress—whether it was a deacons' meeting or a rescue mission or the old ladies' home!

Nancy's dad also affirmed his desire for God to use her life in whatever ways He would choose:

I've become increasingly convinced that God has something very special and very wonderful for you—which I know will become a reality, because you want only to know and to do God's will for your life.

And believe me, I'd infinitely rather see you in the Lord's will than to be rich or famous or anything else! After all, it's really true, that there's

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.²

For her last two years of college, Nancy transferred to the University of Southern California, where she graduated in 1978 with a degree in piano performance. During high school and college, she had remained actively involved in her church, pouring herself into ministering to children and their parents. After graduation, she joined the staff of a large church in Virginia as the Primary

Children's Ministry director. Through these years the Lord was deepening her heart for people and for faithful gospel ministry.



On Friday, August 31, 1979, at her dad's request, Nancy flew home to Philadelphia to celebrate her upcoming twenty-first birthday with her family. Returning to the house from dinner that evening, Nancy recalls her dad saying to a friend who had joined them, "You know, we may never be all together like this again."

The next morning, September 1, Art and Nancy DeMoss drove their firstborn to the airport for her flight back to Virginia. Her dad was dressed in his tennis gear for a doubles match he had scheduled with three men he had disciplined in their walk with Christ.

Two hours later, when Nancy's plane landed, a friend met her with the news that her mother was trying to reach her.

"Daddy is in heaven," her now-widowed mother said when they connected. He had dropped dead of a heart attack on the tennis court—absent from the body, present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Stunned by the news, she quickly boarded another plane to rejoin her family.

Today, reflecting on her father's life and legacy, Nancy says, "He was a living illustration of the principles he taught us." This included giving the first hour of his day—every day—to the Lord in Bible reading and prayer, a habit that left an enduring mark on his daughter's heart.



Over the following years, God graced this gifted, single woman with a vibrant, fruitful career in ministry. In 1980, she left local church ministry and began traveling across America with Life Action Ministries, an organization that seeks to ignite Christ-

centered movements of revival among God's people. Then, beginning in 2000, the Lord opened new opportunities for Nancy to become an author and the founder of Revive Our Hearts, now a worldwide ministry for women under the Life Action umbrella. Nancy's teaching program, which airs each weekday via podcast and on the Internet as well as over a thousand radio outlets, was launched as the successor program to Elisabeth Elliot's *Gateway to Joy* radio program.

In early 2015, Nancy told her closest friends that she was in a "good place." She loved pouring herself wholeheartedly into serving Him and others. She was grateful for the story God had written for her life thus far. And she was not looking for a husband.

OUR STORY

We were both blessed with the example of parents whose marriages, though imperfect, were strong. This was a rich gift of God's grace to each of us.

Though Nancy was a great champion of marriage and much

of her ministry involved serving married women, for many years she had felt a sense of calling to serve the Lord as a single woman. While many might have felt this to be a burden, she truly considered it a blessing.

I (Robert), on the other hand, had no doubt as a young man that someday I would be married. And as I got to know a beautiful, outgoing, and talented

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woman named Bobbie Gardner, I knew pretty quickly that she would be the one. In March of 1970, the two of us were married in Arlington, Virginia. Our daughter Missy was born in September of 1971, and three years later Julie made her appearance.

Bobbie and I shared life together for nearly forty-five years. Of course, there were times of testing. But those were sweet years, blessed with much growth and grace. Then, in His Providence, the Lord called Bobbie to heaven after a courageous thirty-month-long battle with ovarian cancer.

Knowing the aggressive progression of the cancer and that her days on this earth were few, Bobbie had made clear to her family and friends that she was eager for me to remarry. And a few weeks before she died in 2014, in two separate conversations, she told two friends, “I’d like Robert to marry Nancy Leigh DeMoss.”

But she never told me.

Nancy and I had known each other professionally for a number of years. I had represented her as an author’s agent from 2003 to 2005. She and Bobbie knew each other and shared a mutual love for the Lord, for hymns, for ministering to women, and more. Nancy had even interviewed Bobbie and me, along with one of our daughters and our oldest grandchild, for her radio program, where we talked about singing hymns as a family.

Not long after Bobbie was diagnosed with cancer, Nancy was speaking at a conference in Florida, where we lived, and she took time to visit Bobbie at our home. So Bobbie had seen Nancy’s heart, and she had sensed that Nancy would be a suitable mate for me when she was gone. What a gracious gift that proved to be.

Though I did not know this had been in Bobbie’s thinking, as I maneuvered through those difficult months following Bobbie’s death, I sometimes found my thoughts turning toward Nancy. Eventually she and I began a correspondence that grew

into a deepening friendship and, eventually, a courtship.

We both had a lot to work through in those early days—my grief over losing Bobbie, Nancy’s calling as a single woman, our separate careers and ministries, even the geographical distance between us. But after much prayer, conversation, and seeking counsel from a few trusted friends, we both sensed a green light to begin dating. And two months later, the two women Bobbie had spoken with reached out and told me what Bobbie had said—that this is exactly what she had hoped would happen after her death.

It was becoming clear that the Lord was writing a new chapter in my life as well as Nancy’s.



This was a story I (Nancy) had never envisioned for myself. But the Lord began to “awaken love” in the heart of this fifty-seven-year-old woman. As I earnestly sought His direction, there was a growing sense and finally a settled assurance that He was redirecting my life and entrusting me with a different gift—the gift of marriage. This would be a new avenue to experience and share the Story of His pursuing, redeeming love.

On a picture-perfect Saturday morning in May, Robert showed up at my house holding a large bouquet of roses. After sharing some Scripture and praying, he knelt before the couch where I was sitting and officially proposed marriage. My response was a simple, “Yes . . . with all my heart.”

Then on November 14, 2015, before a congregation of more than five hundred friends (and tens of thousands more who joined online), we exchanged vows and were married. Eighty-year-old Dr. Bill Hogan, whom I had known since childhood, who had been my pastor during my high school and part of my college years, and from whom I received a deep love for expository

Bible preaching, officiated at our wedding. The front of the (twenty-eight-page!) program read:

*A Celebration of Marriage:
A Portrait of God's Redeeming, Covenant-Keeping Love*

Shining a spotlight on that picture, telling that Story, is the point and the passion of our lives—both individually and together.



The first years of our marriage involved lots of adjustments for both of us—more like a seismic shift for Nancy, who had never been married before. We have experienced the joys and challenges of weaving two lives together, learning to love and serve each other well, trusting our loving Father who is writing a script neither of us could have imagined.

Nancy's ministry produced a short video on our courtship and marriage. They called it "Unexpected Grace: Nancy and Robert's Story."³ And that's how we would both describe our whole story—through many surprising twists and turns, from our childhoods all the way up to this season we find ourselves in now.

We never cease to be amazed at the wonder of the grace God has lavished on us day after day,

He has been faithful in each chapter thus far. And we know that He will be faithful in each one yet to come, that His grace will be sufficient for wherever He leads us. Above all, our desire is that our lives will showcase the beauty and the goodness of His Story.

year after year—rescuing, redeeming, forgiving, blessing, renewing, restoring, helping, healing, leading, encouraging, strengthening, sanctifying, transforming, and so much more.



We realize that, in many senses, our story is an unusual one. We have been the recipients of a godly heritage and countless other blessings we did not earn and for which we can take no credit. While our paths have not been pain free, we have been spared—thus far—many hardships that others have had to endure. We are not more spiritual or deserving than they.

But at the end of the day, it is pointless and foolish to compare stories. God is sovereign. His ways are unfathomable and inscrutable. Only He fully knows why He does what He does. But we know that whatever He does is purposeful, good, and for our ultimate joy. That is the heart of this book.

As we (Robert and Nancy) sit here today, we have no idea what our future may hold. Our story is still being written, and He has not given us an inside track on what the next chapters look like. But our trust is in the One who holds our future—the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2 NKJV). That gives us freedom and peace, even when we cannot see what lies ahead.

As we’ve listened to some of the painful stories dear friends have shared with us for this book, we can’t help but wonder what rocky paths we may yet be called to travel. (We know it’s impossible to become like Jesus apart from testing and trials.) We may yet face serious health issues, losing one or the other to death, and/or other crises known only to Him.

But we know He has been faithful in each chapter thus far. And we know that He will be faithful in each one yet to come, that His grace will be sufficient for wherever He leads us.

We don't want to tell Him how to write our story; we trust Him to write our story for us. Our goal is not to make a name, a ministry, or a reputation for ourselves, but to make much of Him and to finish the race He has marked out for us to run.

Above all, our desire is that our lives will showcase the beauty and the goodness of His Story.

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