

Front Cover

*When The Lord Reached Down For
Me!*



The Life Story of Samuel Vance

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Foreword

The testimony of my father is more than a thrilling story. It's a great picture of the grace, mercy and love of God. Growing up, I had heard my father's testimony hundreds, if not thousands of times. Each time God spoke to my heart I can remember almost every Saturday, and many other days, going soul winning with him, and almost always, he would share his testimony as if he had just accepted Christ that day.

As I read through my father's testimony, tears can't help but come to my eyes. I never will understand how God's love can be so great. Everyone that has ever been saved has a unique testimony, but this testimony is very special to me.

Every Christian that reads this should thank God for where He brought them from or where they could have been. If you are not a Christian, please read this with an open heart and realize Jesus Christ can do the same for you.

Sam's boy, Dale Vance
John 3:30

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In awe, I sit here gazing at God's magnificent creation—surrounded on all sides by mountains, at the foot of which flows a clear, sparkling body of water. I'm staying in a cabin that belongs to a wonderful friend God brought into my life. My soul rejoices as I reflect on the goodness of God and His mercy in bringing me to this point in my life. I wouldn't be here—in fact, wouldn't be living—if it hadn't been for someone praying and a faithful witness of my Lord Jesus Christ presenting the gospel to me.

I was bom into the family of God by the blood of the Lamb, through the Word, by the power of (he Holy Spirit on August 25, 1975. I cannot begin to tell you what great things God has done for me in the 26 years that I've been in His family.

My name is Samuel Graham Vance, born in a coal mining camp to Marion Dale Vance and Oma Wise Rasnake Vance on May 18, 1941 at Bishop, McDowell County, West Virginia. I have five brothers and four sisters. My dad worked all of his adult life in a West Virginia coal mine; my mother was a homemaker and also had a few jobs outside

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the home. I can never remember our home being happy and very little, if any, Bible teachings. I went to a church up the road that never preached the true gospel. They taught that baptism was necessary for salvation. I went to their Bible school and some revival meetings, but not very often because our home was always in turmoil. I do remember a lady coming to our grade school in Newhall, West Virginia, and teaching us Bible stories. I thought she was the next best thing to God Himself. She taught us to sing "This Little Light of Mine." Sadly, this is about the extent of my upbringing in the Lord.

But, I had plenty of teaching and training in the ways of Satan. He was the prince of our home with drunkenness, immorality, and constant cursing, arguing and fighting. My mother tried to hold things together such as food to eat, clothes to wear, and a home in which to live. My dad worked hard, but sometimes the drunkenness went on into the workweek. I remember drinking booze as early as the age of 6. My dad made homebrew and wine. Liquor was given to me by an uncle when I was 8 or

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9 years old. It almost killed me, but that didn't change the direction I began to take.

I left home at the age of 16 to stay with my sister, Jean, and her husband, Arnold, in Toledo, Ohio, and to go to Macumber High School, a vocational school. All the kids in my family left at an early age to get away from home, thinking anything would be better than what we had. I worked nights and weekends at a riding stable-trail leading and hayrides—to help pay for my

schooling. By this time, I was already a seasoned drinker. Although I went to school and worked, I drank beer with the young crowd and with the older crowd. I thought I could handle the booze and that it would never get the best of me.

I graduated from high school in June 1959 and landed a decent job in an automotive machine shop. I began to have the things I thought were necessary to make me happy in life—cars, girls, booze and partying. But, nothing seemed to ever satisfy me. There was still a void in my life.

It was near this time, in 1960, actually, that my dad left our home and went to Wilmington,

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Delaware. I returned home and then left for Wilmington, thinking I could convince him to come back home. But, it was over for Mom and Dad and they divorced in 1961 and our family home disintegrated. I loved both parents dearly and my heart broke. Later, they each remarried.

After this, I ended up in the Washington, DC area, in Alexandria, Virginia. In February 1961, I got a job and started down the same old road I had traveled before. Booze was now a big part of my life.

It was there, in the summer of 1961, that I was introduced to Delma Ann Bowyer, a young lady from Beckley, West Virginia. We dated for a little over a year and were married on October 1, 1962. I thought, "Surely this is all I need: a beautiful wife and a good job. Now everything is complete."

However, not much changed. I continued on in a downward spin until I was called into the military in February 1966. I spent 3 years in the U.S. Army, with 1 year in Vietnam. Before I left for the Army, my father-in-law, Owl Bowyer, had

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given me a little New Testament with metal backs that had been through World War I and the Korean War. I was the first to take it to Vietnam (1967-68). Another young man took it to Vietnam later. All who took the little Bible brought it home signed and were saved sometime afterwards or during the time they had it. Owl told me, "Take this New Testament and remember that I will be praying for you and the Word of God will keep you."

Praise the Lord, he knew and loved God. For 13 years, he and my mother-in-law prayed for my wife and me to be saved. I can remember staying with them and hearing them fall on their knees and pray. In the next room, I'd put a pillow over my ears to drown out the prayers, but God heard them! Thank you, Lord!

I returned home from Vietnam in January 1968. My wife spent the last year of my military service with me at an Army base in Arizona. Still, nothing seemed to slow down my self-destruction. After that year, we returned to the Washington, DC area, Delma went back to work at the Department

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of Agriculture and I ended up with a construction company as a master mechanic.

After almost 11 years of marriage, on June 19, 1973, Stacie Juanita, our beautiful daughter was born. As we were leaving the hospital to take her home, a guard there asked if he could see our new baby. I wasn't so sure about that, but finally I pulled back the blanket so he could get a peek, I can still remember his words. He said, "And, some people say there is no God. Who made that precious baby?" Well, you see, I thought I had! Those few words spoken by that guard stuck in my mind as a witness for God.

I thought, "Surely my life will change now; the void in my heart will be filled. I have a wife who loves me, an adorable baby girl, a new house, a new car, a new truck, and both my wife and I have good jobs." But, things didn't change at all. On May 4, 1975, 22 months later, our darling baby boy, Samuel Dale, was born—the perfect American family, some would say. Yet, I continued to self-destruct.

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Then in the summer of 1975, Bob and Debbie, my wife's brother and sister-in-law, came to visit us in Loudon County, Virginia. They talked us into going to the local church, Potomac Baptist Church. Without our knowing it, Debbie had asked them to visit us in our home in the Sugarland Run housing development. Two deacons, Tom Johnson and Doug Perdue, from Potomac Baptist came to our house three times. The first time, I sent them away; the second

time, I told my wife to send them away. But the third time, I let them in. There for the very first time in my life, the gospel was presented to me from an old King James Version Bible. I didn't get saved that night but Debbie had bathed her prayers in tears and they continued to pray for us. Every time I tried to drink to get away from Jesus and the cross, I could hear Tom Johnson saying how much Jesus loved me and I could see Him bleeding and dying for me.

I had reached a point of desperation on August 24, 1975; I had taken my family to my brother Tom's house in Fairfax County, Virginia, where Tom and I were drinking. Delma wanted to

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take our babies (one was 2 years old, the other, 3 months) home. They were tired and needed to be at home. I wanted to continue to party and I didn't care about anybody but myself. We finally went home arguing. The Good Lord got us home because I wasn't in any condition to drive. I had beer at home and continued drinking and listening to country music. I then decided to call a sister in another state. She told me about a drug addict who had been brought to her house by one of her boys. The addict had raped her little girl. I couldn't really fathom all of this, but God began to work on a drunkard's heart. I thought about my precious little 2-year-old daughter. What if one of my old drunken, so-called "friends" came to my house and raped her? I couldn't bear the thought; I would rather be dead. I went upstairs, walked into Stacie's bedroom and with a street light shining on her beautiful little face, I asked God what would happen to her. These words came to me: "As a drunkard, you have no control of her life." I walked out after saying goodbye to her and went into the next room where a little 3-month old boy, Samuel Dale, lay

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and asked God what would happen to him. The answer came, "He will be a drunkard like his dad." In my mind, I then went back as a little boy, remembering how I had followed my dad even to places where I shouldn't have been. You see, I wanted to be like my dad, except for the drinking.

I intended to end my life that night, but God had different plans. Thanks to prayers, witnesses, and tears for my wretched soul. He intervened.

I walked out into the upstairs hallway of my home and cried out to God Almighty. He led me to the telephone about 2 a.m. on August 25, 1975. I called Delma's dad, Owl. He didn't answer the phone right away so the devil told me to hang up and wait until morning. I couldn't. So, I called Bob and Debbie in Harper, West Virginia. They got on the phone and I asked them how to be saved. They look me down Roman's Road (Romans 3:10, 23) (6:3) (5:8) (Romans 10:9, 10,13). I said a sinner's prayer, repented of my sins, and was gloriously born into the family of God. Bob said that I should tell Delma right then and there that I had been saved, but I didn't want to because we hadn't been

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on the best of terms when she had gone to bed. But I knew something wonderful had happened in my life. I went back upstairs to our bedroom and woke my wife very quietly. In an irritated voice, she said, "What do you want?" I said, "I just wanted to tell you that I got saved." Delma said, "You're drunk, Sam, go to bed!"

She didn't know then that she had a brand-new husband and a brand-new father for our children. I immediately read from a little white Bible mat had been left by one of Delma's brothers. I don't remember much about what I read, but I knew it was good. Since I had been smoking for 19 years, I lit a cigarette. God spoke to my heart and I put it out. I've never smoked since.

I had been jailed three times for drunk driving, had wrecked several times, been to a so-called alcoholic's school, and had even been to a psychologist who told me there was no hope for my drinking. I had a refrigerator full of beer and a wet bar, but thanks to God, "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world." I have never touched another drop since that night.

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That morning I took a couple of showers. I didn't sleep much and by 9 a.m., I was ready to go to the Potomac Baptist Church. When Delma saw me ready for church, she asked, "Did you really get saved?" I said, "I really got saved!" When I got to the church, I told Tom and Doug, the deacons, what had happened. I walked down the aisle that very morning and publicly confessed

the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. I haven't missed going to church but one Sunday in over 26 years. In that case, my brother had died on Saturday and I was returning to my home on Sunday. However, I did see my pastor before the day was over. Since then, I have never had enough of the Word of God, fellowship with God's people, or the presence of Jesus Christ.

Two weeks after being saved and baptized, Tom asked me to be his soul winning partner. I began a ministry that is dear to my heart to this day. I stayed at Potomac Baptist Church about 1 year, growing and soaking up every word of God I could hear preached or taught and I started reading the Bible through. It's sweeter today than ever. David

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said, "It's like honey to the taste." Jeremiah said. "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones." The Word of God convicts you (Romans 10:17), cleans you (John 15:3), claims you (Malachi 3:17), and changes you (II Corinthians 5:17).

Around this time, God began to relocate our family and we knew it was God. I found work in West Virginia and we moved to the Beckley area in 1976. Delma resigned her job of 15 years at the Department of Agriculture and became a full-time wife and mother, loving every minute of it.

Two years later (1977-78), I found myself in Bible College. I didn't finish, but I knew God was working in a mysterious way. We attended Mt. Tabor Baptist Church where I had grown so much in the Word. My work took me to Athens, West Virginia, in June 1979. We became members of Mt. Jackson Baptist Church. I stayed there almost 10 years and served in every position in the church except Pastor. I was blessed to be part of a growing church built under the leadership of Pastor Eugene Harmon. He taught me so much, but most of all, he

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taught me how to love others. He has been there now about 28 years

I submitted to God's call to preach in May 1982. The devil and all the demons of Hell tried to discourage me. I was still working and was Assistant Pastor from 1983 to 1989 there at Mt. Jackson Baptist Church. God surely blessed. I resigned my secular job in May 1988 to be the Assistant Pastor and Youth Leader.

Then God called us to Packs Branch Baptist Church in January 1989. This is a small work outside Beckley where God has truly blessed. When we first arrived at the church, we didn't have water or land that belonged to the people. We would haul two loads of water each month for \$65 each to operate the bathrooms. We seated less than a hundred people, with far fewer faithfully attending.

God blessed and gave us 11 acres of land, city water, a brand-new church building that seats 250, out in the middle of nowhere. As of today, another building is going up for our youth and

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fellowship. Praise His Holy Name, the lovely name of Jesus.

Do you remember where He brought me from? The Vance name in Bishop, West Virginia, wasn't much. People would say, "His daddy is a drunkard; there's not much to that Vance family. They probably won't amount to anything and will end up in jail or die drunkards."

Thank God there is a new name written down in Heaven and it's mine. Praise His Holy Name! (Acts 4:12) "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." "Jesus."

Let me pause here and say something about my lovely wife and children. Delma was saved in the spring of 1977 on Easter Sunday morning. She kept waiting to see if what I had was real.

My Stacie was saved at the age of 6 and serves the Lord faithfully today. She is married to Allan Young and they have three beautiful children—Michael, age 6; Martha (Martie), 4; and

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Isaac, 2. Stacie sings and lifts up the Lord Jesus in song as nobody else can.

Our son, Dale, was saved at the age of 5 and called to preach at age 7. He is married to Rachael and they have one precious little girl, Adalee, who is 18 months old. Both Dale and Rachael graduated from Crown College in Knoxville, Tennessee, where Dr. Clarence Sexton is the President and Pastor of Temple Baptist Church. Dale is a dynamic preacher and we were blessed to have them with us at Packs Branch Baptist Church for 2 years. He was my Assistant and Youth Pastor. On September 2, 2001, Dale became Pastor of New Life Baptist Church in

White Oak, West Virginia. God changed his daddy's direction on August 25, 1975, and that little 3-month-old boy never knew a drunken father. Praise God's Holy Name, both that little boy and his father became preachers instead of drunks!

As you can see, I have a lot to be thankful for. I'm just a rotten sinner saved by the Grace of God. Paul said, "I am what I am by the Grace of God."

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I'd like to relate some things about my family, whom I love dearly and deeply. My dad, as far as I know, died without knowing Jesus Christ. On December 1, 1970, Dad talked to my mother (both were then remarried) for a long time. Later that evening, as we talked, I shall never forget his words to me. He said, "Sam Boy, I have thrown away my whole life and all those that love me, on booze, women and song." His last statement rang in my ears. He continued, "My life is about over, but what about you, Sam Boy? You have a wonderful wife and you are going to do the same thing." My dad died four days later on December 5, 1970, of a massive heart attack.

Now what about you? Are you destroying your life for the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the pride of life? God help you.

My mother came to the Lord shortly after I was saved. She told me she had been saved as a teenage girl but had gotten away from God. I do know that she loved the Lord when she passed on in 1993.

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As far as I know from their own testimonies, my sisters and brothers all profess to be saved, I have four brothers in Heaven with Mom—Dewey, Jack, Tommy, and Dale, Jr. Bill is still with me, my friend and my brother. My sisters, Dolly, Jean, Yvonne, and Barbara are all living, each in different states. I had the privilege of leading Dewey; Bill; Jack and his wife, Ann; Dale Jr.; Barbara, and my dear sister, Jean, to the Lord.

Right after I was saved, I used to sing a childish little song to my very small children on the way to the babysitter. Stacie would say, "Daddy, sing our song." It goes like this;

**"Thank you Lord for saving my soul.
Thank you Lord for making me whole.
Thank you Lord for my pretty wife.
Thank you Lord, she's so much of my life.
Thank you Lord for my little girl.
Thank you Lord, she's so much of my world.
Thank you Lord for my little boy.
Thank you Lord, he's just a bundle of joy.
Thank you Lord for saving my soul.
Thank you Lord for making me whole."**

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This is my testimony to the Word of God and how the Holy Spirit and the Word took an old rotten sinner by bloody Calvary, gave him a blood bath, and made him a saint of God, because of the Son of God, Christ Jesus.

Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

- God loves you (John 3:16).
- You must realize you are a sinner (Romans 3:10,23).
- You must realize you cannot save yourself (Romans 3:23).
- You must realize the penalty of sin (Romans 6:23)
- You must realize Jesus paid the penalty for your sin (Romans 5:8).
- You must confess and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9, 10, 13) (Ephesians 2: 8, 9) (1 Corinthians 5:17).
- You WILL change.
- Say the sinner's prayer:

- "God forgive me, I am a sinner. I believe the word of God, that Jesus Christ paid my sin debt and I ask Jesus to become my Savior. Thank you for saving my soul. I ask this prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."
- The publican said, "Be merciful to me a sinner."
- Salvation is a gift, the greatest gift in the world.
- (II Corinthians 9:15) Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

He took an old sinner from Hell in a home, to Heaven in a home. (Psalms 4Q:2-3a) He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings. He has put a new song in my heart and mouth. Amazing Grace that saved a wretch like me.

Rear Cover



Pastor Samuel Vance

Packs Branch Baptist Church

Rt. 1 Box 28

Mt. Hope, WV 25880

(304)877-3506

(304)877-5902

When my Saviour reached down for me.

He had to reach way down for me,

I was lost and undone,

Without God or His Son,

When He reached down His hand for me.