

“I used to hide in my closet when my father came home drunk and angry,” Steve spoke as if he knew what was on her heart. “I would beg God to make it better, but nothing happened. Then I started asking God why and he never answered. When I was thirteen, just after I hit my growth spurt and started to get as big as him, Dad started in on Mom one night and I couldn’t take it anymore. I lit into him, but of course I was just a gangly kid and he was much stronger than me. So he soon had me down on the ground.”

Heather heard Steve’s heavy sigh, felt his pain at the memory.

“In that moment, as I lay on the floor and he kept going at me, I had a revelation. Call it a boyish fantasy if you want, but I knew that Jesus was with me. He was crying with me and he was sheltering me, not from the blows to my body but from the blows to my spirit. At that moment I quit asking God to change my circumstances or to tell me why it was happening. Instead, I asked him to give me strength so that I could survive and bring him glory.”

Steve sighed softly and took a step closer to Heather. “I felt real peace for the first time in my life. I felt God’s arms around me and I knew he had heard and answered my prayer. My father stopped suddenly and walked away. Through all the things that happened after that – my sister running away, my dad, mom and grandma dying, even losing the Championship Game – I’ve never totally lost that peace though it has been seriously challenged.”

Heather knew her tears were as much for herself as they were for the big man standing behind her.

“It’s waxed and waned,” Steve’s voice was a rumble that touched her soul, “but it’s always there. The knowledge that I gained that night has also stayed with me. Even when I don’t feel God, I know he’s there, sheltering me from the blows to my spirit because it belongs to him. Even when I had no hope for a better life, I still had the peace that passes understanding because I knew that God was with me in the darkness.

“I know he won’t leave me, that he suffers with me. I know that he has a plan for whatever pain I do have to go through, a plan that will bring him glory if I keep my focus on him instead of on myself and my pain.”