



*John Knight's*

*The Sanctuary*

*Kyra*





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*Grace*



## Dedication



“The Sanctuary” is dedicated to my incredible and absolutely stunning wife Debra for her love, support, and companionship over the last 27 years and for her dedication and commitment to God’s plan for our lives—*I love you!*

To my brother Rod, and my sisters April and Mary.

To our awesome volunteers over the years, whose hard work, love, dedication and humility has made Big Oak Wolf Sanctuary a place of peace and tranquility for well over 100 wolves and wolf dogs:

Danielle Terrell	Daniel Breslin	Sarah Hart
Sheryl Ulmer	Linda Hand	Maya Hosabettu
Owen Wilson	Deborah Costa	Briana Pizzano
Bert Wilson	Kathy Jones	Angelica Tagliarini
Wendy Wolfe	Randy Falck	John Hricz
John McKee	Bill Callaghan	Jamison Hodges
Stan Kinmoth	Adriana Garcia	Karina “Baylen” May

To all of our generous donors over the years, whose support provided the means to build the sanctuary and whose confidence in us energized us in our efforts!

To the hundreds of thousands of incredible, selfless people working tirelessly to help both animals and people in need and doing so with inadequate resources and no desire for acknowledgement!

And most of all, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose love, mercy, grace and providence sustained me through the longest, most difficult stretch of my life and who literally dragged me forward when I no longer had the strength to continue!



## *In Memory of Sampson*



SAMPSON was one of the most incredible animals Debra and I have ever encountered. Along with his packmate Spirit, he was the reason Big Oak Wolf Sanctuary came to life and became a safe haven for over 120 abused wolves and wolf dogs.

Sampson was an unusually large wolf, yet he was gentle and extremely loving. He also had a huge heart and a tendency to nurture the other animals. There was something about him that made you rethink your priorities in life and question your motives in every area—*something that made you feel as if Jesus was looking at you through his eyes*. He had a “depth of soul” and an unmistakable wisdom and there will never be another one quite like him.

Sampson left for Heaven a couple of years ago and Debra and I are very much looking forward to seeing him again! We love you sweet boy, we’ll see you soon!



## *In Memory of Spirit*



SPIRIT was a unique and mischievous girl who could read people like a book and had a knack for humiliating the prideful. When a “self-appointed” wolf expert would come out to volunteer, she always made sure they left her enclosure without their pants and Sampson was always a willing participant in the disrobing ceremony!

Like her packmate Sampson, Spirit was huge! She was also a very happy girl who loved to give and receive attention. But there was also a sadness about her, one like you’d see in a child who needed more time with a busy parent, who just didn’t have time to play with the kids and feed the family too.

Spirit left for Heaven about a year after Sampson and we are looking forward to seeing her again as well! We love you sweet girl and we’ll see you soon!



## *In Special Memory of Randy Falck*



Randy Falck was one of Big Oak Wolf Sanctuary's early donors and he really loved the wolves here. Randy was a big-hearted man who had an accident in his early years that left him partially paralyzed. But that didn't stop him from fulfilling his purpose or from helping others. Randy's contributions were what confirmed to Debra and me that we were doing what God wanted us to do and he's the reason we decided proceed with our mission through the many difficulties we experienced early on here.

We were always excited when Randy was coming, and the wolves seemed to really enjoy him as well. It was also enlightening, as each visit the wolves would display a gentleness with him we didn't see with others—*their sensitivity to Randy's disability was obvious!*

Unfortunately, Randy passed away a few years ago, but we know where he is and we're looking forward to seeing him again, in perfect health!



*In Special Memory of Bill Callaghan*



Bill Callaghan was a donor and a volunteer here at the sanctuary, who also became my friend. Some of my best memories were of the conversations I had here with Bill—*I always enjoyed hearing his opinions on issues and being a beneficiary of his wisdom!*

After a few years here, Bill moved to North Carolina, but continued to donate monthly. One day, he called and asked me to send him something in writing, promising to maintain our standards here and to never exhibit the wolves to the public. I didn't realize it at the time, but Bill was sick and was planning to leave us something in his will. A few months later, Bill went to be with the Lord and left Big Oak Wolf Sanctuary a very nice gift that would help us enormously! I wish he were still here, but I know he's with Sampson, Spirit and the many others that have left us. We are looking forward to seeing Bill again and I have no doubt that he will greet us at the pearly gates with our four-legged friends by his side.





*Saul*





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*Angel*





*Micah*



# Foreword

While watching TBN one day, I noticed that one of the programing highlights at the end of the show I was watching featured three, short, “two-second” TV series clips all grouped together. The first one showed Pastor Joseph Prince from New Creation Church in Singapore, the second showed Pastor Joel Osteen from Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas and the third was of a “sit down” interview with William Paul Young, the author of “The Shack” and host of the TBN show, “Restoring the Shack.” I immediately thought, *“Oh wow, these guys are the three people in Christian Ministry I follow the most and the only three TBN Television shows I record—I must be on the right track with this book!”*

As someone who grew up from the early 60’s to the late 70’s, all I really knew about God was that He wasn’t too happy with me. I came from the “fire and brimstone” atmosphere of “repent or burn” and for the first fifty years of my life, I can’t remember ever taking a step or even drawing a breath without a crippling sense of fear and condemnation.

I must have sung “Amazing Grace” and “Just as I Am” 10,000 times in the “dungeons of condemnation” we called churches then, but I honestly can’t remember ever really hearing the words, in spite of the fact that I was singing them. The continuous message of condemnation I was getting from both “parent and pulpit” was on the opposite end of the gospel spectrum and I had been so stuffed with it, there was no room left for anything else. The sheer volume of these daily messages of fear and condemnation, *combined with the force and intensity with which they were delivered*, was such that nothing else could penetrate—the condemnation message had been too densely packed!

I first heard Pastor Joel Osteen about 12 years ago, but as positive of a message as it was, and as much as I wanted to believe it, I just wasn’t buying it, or more accurately, I just wasn’t able to receive it. In fact, I was even skeptical of Joel and thought that he might just be “in it for the money” as they say, because his depiction of God was contrary to the one I knew!

You see, regardless of what Pastor Osteen said, I knew God was mad at me and that He wasn’t going to bless me until I finally “got it right,” something I’d been unable to do for forty years. The thick roots of fear and condemnation had been growing in me for decades—*numerous massive, gnarly looking roots that so densely packed my soul that they bulged outward, “up above the ground,” preventing the seeds of Joel’s message of Hope from ever taking root.*

After all, I was listening to several other “popular” pastors on Christian television as well,



whose contrary messages just confirmed what I already knew; that God was going to withhold His blessings and send me back out for another year-long hike in the wilderness unless I “fixed myself” once and for all—*so much for “Just as I Am” and “Amazing Grace!”*

But then one day, a few years ago while watching TBN, I stumbled across Pastor Joseph Prince’s show and heard something radically different than what I’d been taught my entire life. Despite having accepted Christ nearly five decades earlier at the age of ten, for the first time in my life, I was finally hearing the true gospel of Grace preached—*it immediately resonated!*

I began watching Pastor Prince regularly and recording his episodes, and after a while, I could feel his grace message beginning to take root. As the roots of grace grew in my soul, they gradually overtook the roots of condemnation, first slowly starving them to death and then absorbing what was left of them for nourishment. I could see that God’s Grace through Jesus Christ had literally swallowed the crippling sense of fear and condemnation in my life, causing me to quite literally see condemnation as Grace’s “food.”

With a soul now fertile with God’s grace, a new sense of freedom in Christ, and a profoundly different view of God, I began carefully protecting what I had been given. I avoided any type of condemning message from people or the pulpit that prompted people to focus on themselves and their short-comings and listened only to those who highlighted who Christ is to us and who we are in Him. Over the next couple of years, Pastor Prince’s grace message continued to grow inside of me and my life reflected such!

It had been several years since I had watched Joel Osteen on TBN when I noticed that his show was coming up. Since I knew he had a more positive message, and for some reason I didn’t feel the skepticism towards him and his messages I used to feel, I decided to go ahead and watch it.

I was stunned to find that I was able to fully receive his anointed message of Hope, no longer felt any skepticism whatsoever about him, and felt the truth in his every word, deep in my spirit—*just as Pastor Prince’s messages of grace had done a few years earlier, the seeds from Joel’s message of hope were taking root!*

A few days later, I realized that hope is a seed that can only take root and grow in soil that’s been fertilized with grace. The more I heard Joseph Prince’s messages of grace, the better I was able to receive Joel Osteen’s messages of hope. What was surprising was the more I heard Joel Osteen’s message of hope, the more powerfully Joseph Prince’s messages of grace manifested itself in my life.

Later however, God showed me that my understanding of hope and my understanding of grace was somewhat compartmentalized, like each was in their own separate jar to be used for different challenges. Although both were having powerful, positive influences in my life, I found myself viewing them as if they operated independently of one another, never really bringing



them together for the full synergistic effect.

My wife Debra and I had seen the movie “The Shack” based on William Paul Young’s book, “The Shack” and later began watching his TBN series, “Restoring the Shack.” In the series, Paul talks a lot about “relationship” and expounds on the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But whether or not he realizes it, his messages really pull hope and grace together into a relationship for his viewers as well, thus providing an added element of anointing to them. In other words, whether intentional or not, and whether we realize it or not, Paul’s anointed message illustrates the power of hope and grace “in relationship with one another” —*one that’s immeasurably more powerful than the two when viewed as operating independently of one another!*

HMMM, I WONDER IF THIS IS THE REASON GOD BROUGHT JOSEPH AND JOEL TOGETHER INTO A “RELATIONSHIP” FOR THE “HOPE AND GRACE” MINISTRY???

Today, I know that the hope and confidence I have in God is a result of having been given a powerful revelation of His grace and His love. But the final, “critically essential” revelation of God’s Grace didn’t come from where one might expect. In fact, mine came from the last place I would have expected, and it took a very long time for me to get there—*50 years!*

Sometimes the journey from condemnation to Grace can be long and difficult; sometimes even brutal! But, just because it was for me, doesn’t mean it has to be for you. Nonetheless, my path and journey are laid out over the course of this book, which also reveals the aforementioned “critically essential” revelation of God’s Grace I received *and from where.*

In this day and age of pride, self-importance, and splendor; the obsessive pursuit of pleasure, and unprecedented addictions, *all of which reveal a deep sense of fear and condemnation*, it’s clear that there’s an ever-expanding void in the hearts of mankind and anyone who stumbles across a short news segment can see this. But there really is a place in this world you can find freedom from all of the pain, heartbreak, and despair; a place where the need to be perfect and to be perceived so by others no longer exists. It’s called “The Sanctuary” and I believe this story can lead you there.





*Micah and Hope*



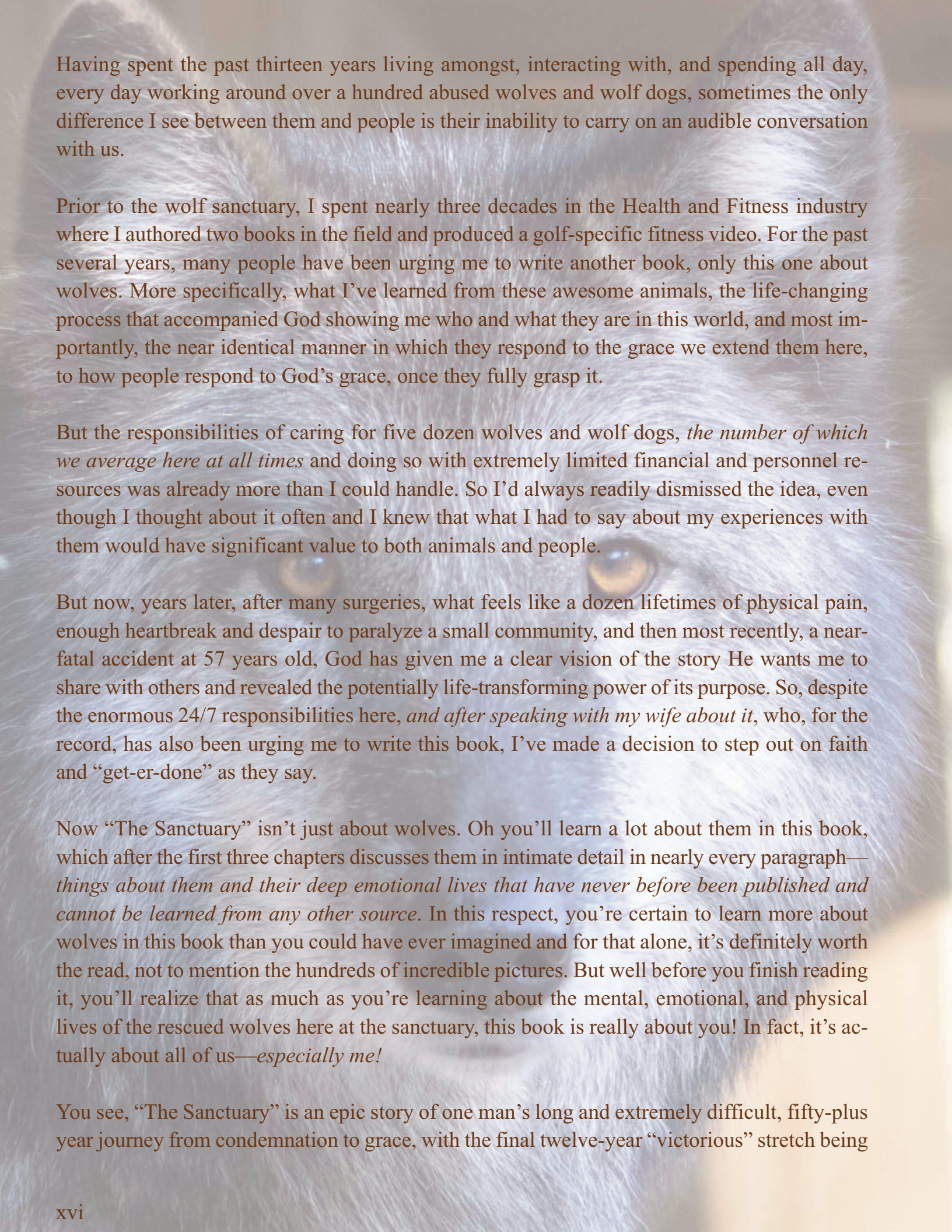
# Preface

Wolves! Powerful... Majestic... Beautiful!

Wolves are not only one of God's most captivating creatures, but in all the animal kingdom, their behavior and family dynamic are those from which we humans quite possibly could learn the most. With brains that are 30% larger than those of dogs, their intelligence and significantly broader emotional capacities make them more like a cross between a lion and a human than a dog—at least *that's what the last 50,000 hours I've spent with them have shown me.*







Having spent the past thirteen years living amongst, interacting with, and spending all day, every day working around over a hundred abused wolves and wolf dogs, sometimes the only difference I see between them and people is their inability to carry on an audible conversation with us.

Prior to the wolf sanctuary, I spent nearly three decades in the Health and Fitness industry where I authored two books in the field and produced a golf-specific fitness video. For the past several years, many people have been urging me to write another book, only this one about wolves. More specifically, what I've learned from these awesome animals, the life-changing process that accompanied God showing me who and what they are in this world, and most importantly, the near identical manner in which they respond to the grace we extend them here, to how people respond to God's grace, once they fully grasp it.

But the responsibilities of caring for five dozen wolves and wolf dogs, *the number of which we average here at all times* and doing so with extremely limited financial and personnel resources was already more than I could handle. So I'd always readily dismissed the idea, even though I thought about it often and I knew that what I had to say about my experiences with them would have significant value to both animals and people.

But now, years later, after many surgeries, what feels like a dozen lifetimes of physical pain, enough heartbreak and despair to paralyze a small community, and then most recently, a near-fatal accident at 57 years old, God has given me a clear vision of the story He wants me to share with others and revealed the potentially life-transforming power of its purpose. So, despite the enormous 24/7 responsibilities here, *and after speaking with my wife about it*, who, for the record, has also been urging me to write this book, I've made a decision to step out on faith and "get-er-done" as they say.

Now "The Sanctuary" isn't just about wolves. Oh you'll learn a lot about them in this book, which after the first three chapters discusses them in intimate detail in nearly every paragraph—*things about them and their deep emotional lives that have never before been published and cannot be learned from any other source*. In this respect, you're certain to learn more about wolves in this book than you could have ever imagined and for that alone, it's definitely worth the read, not to mention the hundreds of incredible pictures. But well before you finish reading it, you'll realize that as much as you're learning about the mental, emotional, and physical lives of the rescued wolves here at the sanctuary, this book is really about you! In fact, it's actually about all of us—*especially me!*

You see, "The Sanctuary" is an epic story of one man's long and extremely difficult, fifty-plus year journey from condemnation to grace, with the final twelve-year "victorious" stretch being



brought about through more than 50,000 hours living amongst these most awesome of God's creatures and seeing their miraculous transformations as a result of the grace we continuously extend them.

Over the course of this decade-plus-long *wilderness experience*, one in which for years now I've referred to as my incarceration with *animals, oak trees, and the Holy Spirit*, God gave me a deep insight into who and what these majestic animals are in this world, their near-identical responses to mental and emotional pain, loss and trauma to those of ours, and the life-transforming power grace has on them, just as His grace has on us, *once we genuinely grasp it*.

The author of "The Shack" Paul Young says, "*We are all uniquely damaged and we are all uniquely healed.*" The unique, individual damage these almost human animals suffer at the hands of man and their paths to healing are powerful, heart-warming stories, capable of sparking a sense of wonder and awe in even the most insensitive of people.

BUT THE REAL VALUE IN THEIR STORIES IS IN HOW THE WOLVES RELATE TO US, THE COMPARISONS IN OUR—*PEOPLE AND WOLVES*—UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL TYPES OF DAMAGE, OUR PERSONAL PATHS TO HEALING, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF US, OUR PROVIDENCE AND HOW WE FEEL ABOUT THEM, COMPARED TO OUR PERCEPTIONS OF GOD, HIS PROVIDENCE, AND HOW HE FEELS ABOUT US.

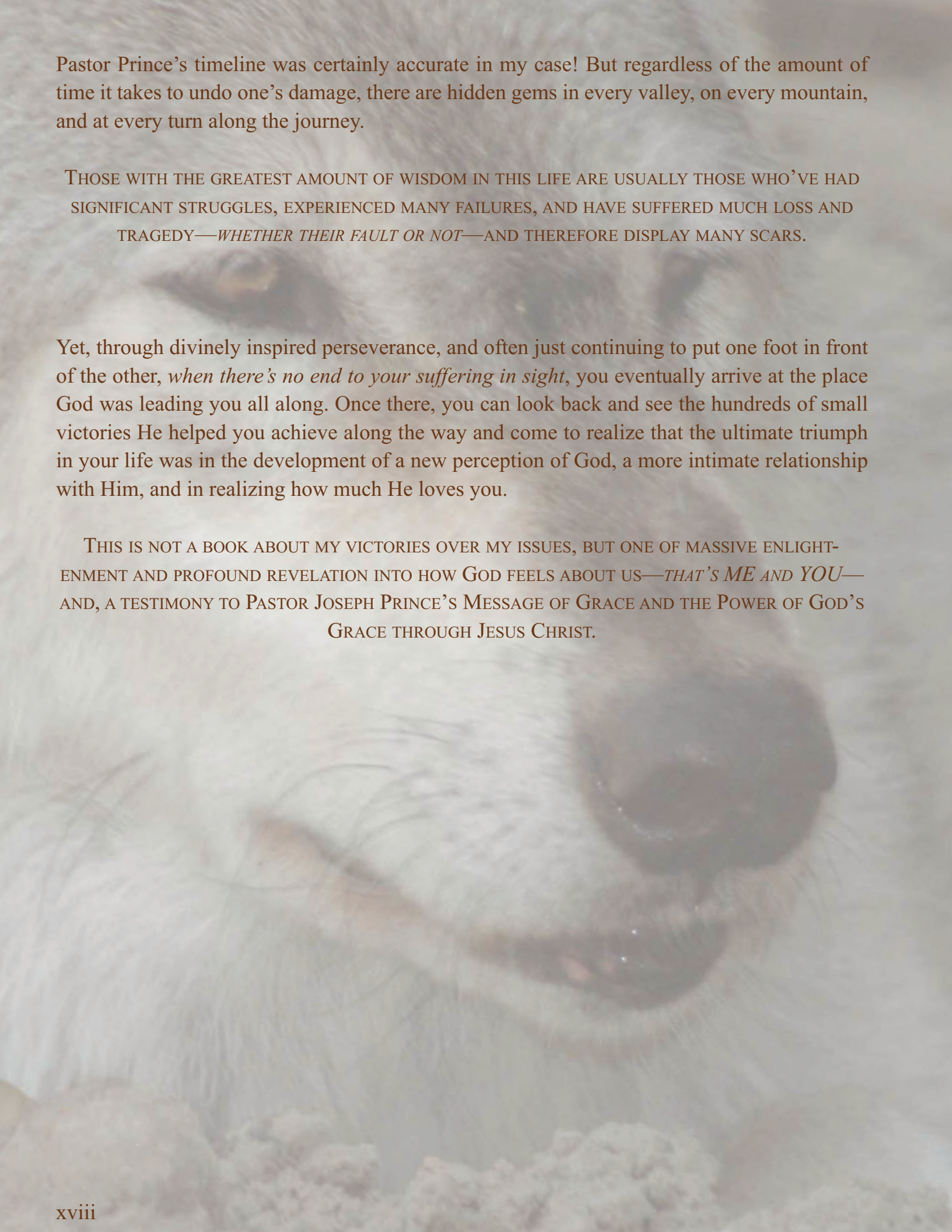
Now, early on there's a lot about my childhood and abuse—*things that many in this day and age may refer to as "whining" and/or blaming your past for your failures*. However, understanding the impact this most formative part of my childhood had on me is foundational to understanding the wolves' perceptions of people and situations following their abusive pasts, their individual paths to healing, and their ongoing development of intimacy with us here at the sanctuary. And why is that important?

SO YOU CAN ACQUIRE A MORE COMPLETE AND BENEFICIAL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S GRACE AS IT APPLIES TO YOU AND COME TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP HE DESIRES TO HAVE WITH PEOPLE.

Joseph Prince, of Joseph Prince Ministries—the pastor of New Creation Church in Singapore and Grace Revolution Church in Dallas, Texas, and the one I listen to the most, once said,

*"Remember the saying, sticks and stone may break my bones, but words can never hurt me? Well, that's completely false! Bones will heal in a matter of months, but when a parent repeatedly speaks condemning words towards their young children, it can take fifty years to undo the damage."*





Pastor Prince's timeline was certainly accurate in my case! But regardless of the amount of time it takes to undo one's damage, there are hidden gems in every valley, on every mountain, and at every turn along the journey.

THOSE WITH THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF WISDOM IN THIS LIFE ARE USUALLY THOSE WHO'VE HAD SIGNIFICANT STRUGGLES, EXPERIENCED MANY FAILURES, AND HAVE SUFFERED MUCH LOSS AND TRAGEDY—*WHETHER THEIR FAULT OR NOT*—AND THEREFORE DISPLAY MANY SCARS.

Yet, through divinely inspired perseverance, and often just continuing to put one foot in front of the other, *when there's no end to your suffering in sight*, you eventually arrive at the place God was leading you all along. Once there, you can look back and see the hundreds of small victories He helped you achieve along the way and come to realize that the ultimate triumph in your life was in the development of a new perception of God, a more intimate relationship with Him, and in realizing how much He loves you.

THIS IS NOT A BOOK ABOUT MY VICTORIES OVER MY ISSUES, BUT ONE OF MASSIVE ENLIGHTENMENT AND PROFOUND REVELATION INTO HOW GOD FEELS ABOUT US—*THAT'S ME AND YOU*—AND, A TESTIMONY TO PASTOR JOSEPH PRINCE'S MESSAGE OF GRACE AND THE POWER OF GOD'S GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.



# Introduction

It's February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, and I've been contemplating the book for a couple of weeks now. As usual, my wife Debra and I were up before day-light preparing for our unusually long work-days.

Debra's day begins with a 1 1/4-hour commute to the medical practice for an 8 to 10-hour day on her feet dealing with patients and ends with the 1 1/4-hour commute home.

Mine will be the same 12 to 16-hour day as it is every day, just as it has been for over a decade now. It's a mentally, physically, and emotionally draining routine, the first and last two-hour periods of which are quite dangerous ones—*going in with all 23 wolf and wolf dog packs here and physically interacting with all but a hand full of them, with no one else on the property!*





While I realize that many married couples maintain such rigorous schedules, this is particularly tough on Debra; she has a 37-degree curve in her spine that's pressing down on her organs and causing considerable pain in her hips, in addition to some internal health issues that have troubled her for years.

But with an inoperable left shoulder needing joint replacement, a torn left biceps muscle, two breaks in my right shoulder, a torn right pectoral muscle, a ruptured right biceps muscle and numerous soft tissue injuries resulting from a bad fall just before hurricane Irma, *which also broke six of my ribs, collapsed my right lung and put me in the ICU*, things are a bit tough for me right now as well.

However, in spite of the vast responsibilities here, zero time off ever, and my nagging injuries, I've always felt Debra's situation was harder on her than mine was on me—*her difficulty and needs never leave my mind!* But for me, today will involve a deviation from the normal morning routine here.

As soon as it was light enough outside, I made my way to the east side of the house and looked out the window to see if I could see Damascus in his enclosure. You see, fifteen-year-old Damascus, *one of the several wolves we've rescued over the years who made his way deeper into my heart than the others*, is dying.





Once I helped Debra through the two massive 8' and 10' steel gates to the sanctuary, she headed off to work and it was time for me to begin my morning rounds with the wolves.

My first stop was obviously Damascus, who had developed cataracts and over the past several months, had totally lost his sight. Also, he suffered a stroke a few weeks earlier, which left him with some worsening neurological problems and he was now barely able to walk.

As I made my way into his enclosure, I was greeted by his life-long pack-mate Solomon, who is needier than normal due to the fact that Damascus is no longer able to play with him like he used to do.



Solomon had become particularly fond of me over the years and was not the same wolf who crushed my right hand the day he arrived five years earlier. It was fourteen months from the time he and Damascus arrived before we were able to safely go into their enclosure with them and touch them without a fence separating us. Yet today, no one would be able to tell that there was ever anything other than a loving, trusting, and intimate relationship between these two wolves and us. Damascus and his pack-mate Solomon had come a long way and they were special. Once Damascus is gone, I will miss him dearly, but Solomon will be left all alone, to deal with a pain he has never before had to experience—*loneliness!*

As another season of death and sorrow looms over my soul, that of Damascus' life-long pack mate Solomon, and those of the remaining five dozen wolves and wolf dogs here, who always feel a loss, there's a crippling feeling of despair that always seems to follow the death of one of these majestic animals—a *despair I had come to know like a brother!*





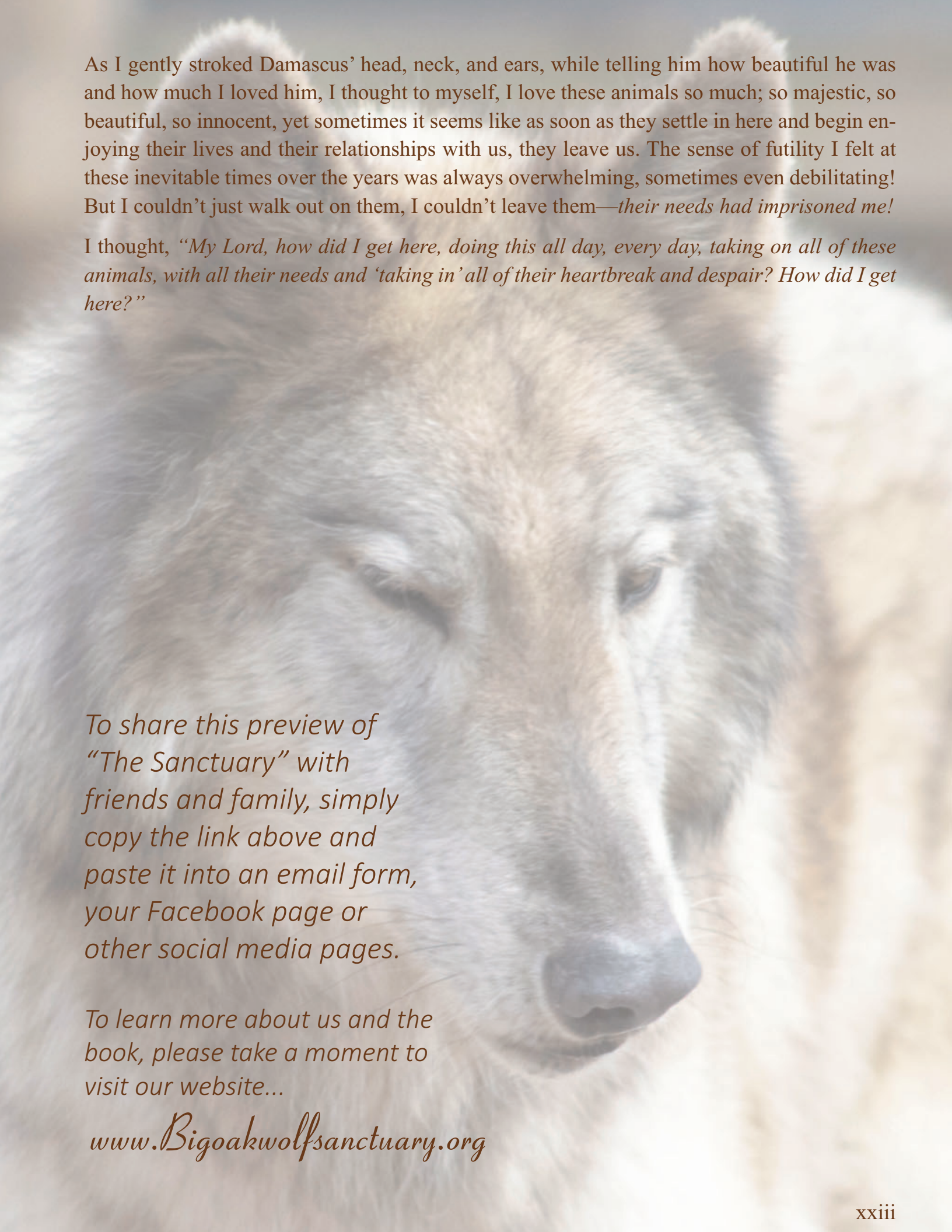
But this time the despair wasn't taking root quite the way it had so many times before. After nearly 13 years of caring for these most awesome of God's creatures, I finally knew for certain that I would see them again in a new environment, one in which the conditions are vastly different from those we had endured together here on this earth.

Romans 8: 19-21 says:

*"FOR THE EARNEST EXPECTATION OF THE CREATURE WAITETH FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD. FOR THE CREATURE WAS MADE SUBJECT TO VANITY, NOT WILLINGLY, BUT BY REASON OF HIM WHO HATH SUBJECTED THE SAME IN HOPE, BECAUSE THE CREATURE ITSELF ALSO SHALL BE DELIVERED FROM THE BONDAGE OF CORRUPTION INTO THE GLORIOUS LIBERTY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD."*

Our beloved Damascus would be leaving for Heaven soon and he would never again experience any pain or suffering. But Solomon and I would still be here and the sorrow I felt was still very real! How did I come to have so much love and compassion for these animals, so much so that I often felt guilty about having more empathy for them than I do most people, not all people but many, the proud ones mostly? But there's a reason for this and I suspect my love for animals began a very long time ago—*about five and a half decades ago to be exact!*





As I gently stroked Damascus' head, neck, and ears, while telling him how beautiful he was and how much I loved him, I thought to myself, I love these animals so much; so majestic, so beautiful, so innocent, yet sometimes it seems like as soon as they settle in here and begin enjoying their lives and their relationships with us, they leave us. The sense of futility I felt at these inevitable times over the years was always overwhelming, sometimes even debilitating! But I couldn't just walk out on them, I couldn't leave them—*their needs had imprisoned me!*

I thought, “*My Lord, how did I get here, doing this all day, every day, taking on all of these animals, with all their needs and ‘taking in’ all of their heartbreak and despair? How did I get here?*”

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