

My first encounter with Jack Miller was terrifying. I discovered him with my best friend, Tremper Longman III, after convocation as first-year seminary students. He was surrounded by a gaggle of enraptured students. I grabbed Tremper and told him we had to flee because I knew Jack was dangerous and crazy. After four decades, Jack still troubles and terrifies me as he invites me to live with the wild, bold love of Jesus. Michael Graham brilliantly unfolds the beauty and brokenness of Jack's life with tenderness and scholarly care. I know Jack far better now, but far more importantly, I know the Jesus whom Jack followed with even greater joy. If you didn't know Jack Miller, you are about to meet one of the most amazing people of the twentieth century.

—**Dan B. Allender**, Professor of Counseling Psychology and  
Founding President, The Seattle School of Theology and  
Psychology

*Cheer Up!* is honest, comprehensive, and wonderful! Jack Miller was my friend, and I loved him. My life was changed by knowing Jack—not because of Jack but because he understood the essence of the Christian faith and always pointed me to Jesus. I rise up and call Michael Graham blessed for writing this book, as I do Jack Miller about whom Michael writes. But I mostly rise up and am overwhelmed by the great Savior whom both of them love. And you will rise up and call *me* blessed for having commended this book to you. Read it, be “cheered up,” and give it to everyone you know!

—**Steve Brown**, Broadcaster, Teacher, Preacher, Author

Michael Graham has engaged in an epic journey of research into the historical events and personal experiences of Jack Miller to capture an era of the church, the spirit of the man himself, and the grace of God that made this jar of clay such a vessel of influence for the advancement of the glories of the gospel.

—**Bryan Chapell**, Senior Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church,  
Peoria, Illinois

My wife and I were deeply impacted in a life-changing way by Jack Miller during a Sonship week in 1995. Our strong commitment to the doctrines of grace became a deep experience of the gospel of grace that transformed our marriage and ministry. I personally experienced that transforming grace again in a fresh way as I read *Cheer Up!* Michael Graham has written a profound biography that brings to life the power of the Spirit in the life of a sinner saved by grace who never stopped preaching the gospel to himself. Graham weaves the tapestry of Jack's life together in a way that illuminates the Reformed theological landscape over forty-five years while also showing Miller's significant impact on many leaders and institutions, including the seminary where I have served in various positions for over twenty years. I highly recommend *Cheer Up!* It elaborates Jack's commitment to the inseparable connection of renewal and discipleship with missions and evangelism in a way that makes *Cheer Up!* a valuable resource for personal growth and ministry renewal.

—**Mark Dalbey**, President, Associate Professor of Applied  
Theology, Covenant Theological Seminary

Jack's godly personal love will never be forgotten, but he is also important historically. John Calvin taught us to know God and ourselves, with each knowledge complementing the other. What good is truth without personal application—and the other way around, too? When in the Lutheran world preaching became abstract and impersonal, the Pietists came along. They told us that preachers should spend more time in preparing their sermon applications and that prayer and counsel in small groups were just as important as going to church. Pietism could become "radical," though, and minimize the Word. Regrettably, that's all that many history books remember about it.

Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in a reaction against liberalism in the Presbyterian Church, at a time when religious social interests were crowding out careful attention to the Word. So maintaining God's truth was highest on the seminary's

agenda. Its practical theology professor was inaugurated by being told, “Be sure to remember that practical theology is practical theology.” Understandably, personal application had become suspect. But Jack had learned the hard way the necessity of grasping the personal love of Jesus—otherwise, how could vital ministry ever be done? He learned that in Europe and in harder places for the gospel than at home. With Jack at our side, we’re blessed by being back with Calvin, knowing ourselves and how much we need our Jesus. Westminster’s focus on truth will always be foundational, but we grew and grew personally in our faith as Jack helped us to see Jesus in our hearts. Praise the Lord!

—**D. Clair Davis**, Professor Emeritus of Church History,  
Westminster Theological Seminary

Jack Miller was one of the most unusual personalities I have ever met. He took me into his church as an intern, he and Rose Marie brought me into their living room to discuss life-changing ideas with fellow students, he performed our wedding—in short, he was a tremendous mentor. This biography tells his story, “warts and all,” and it is my hope that it will remind God’s people of the leaders he has provided for us and our need to emulate them, without either lionizing them or belittling their contributions.

—**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster  
Theological Seminary

The writings of Jack Miller have had a profound impact on both my personal spiritual walk and my ministry as a pastor. He’s shaped me as a father. Going far beyond strategies for church growth and effective preaching, Jack Miller got at the heart of our calling as believers—to walk as beloved sons and daughters of the King. This book tells the story of Jack’s life and ministry, and it’s a wonderful read for anyone desiring to dwell in the secret place of the Most High.

—**J.D. Greear**, Pastor, The Summit Church, Durham, North  
Carolina; 62nd President, Southern Baptist Convention

Michael Graham's *Cheer Up! The Life and Ministry of Jack Miller* is a vivid and accurate portrait of a professor / pastor / evangelist / repentant sinner whose heart was captivated by God's grace in Christ and by the powerful presence of his Spirit. I think of Jack as the humblest, boldest follower of Jesus whom I have ever met. His transparency about himself, and his utter confidence in Jesus, challenged cautious, self-protective Christians (including seminary students like me) to risk admitting (instead of hiding) our weaknesses and to actually "live by faith" in God. I'm glad that, through Pastor Graham's research—especially his interviews with those close to Jack—many others can now meet this extraordinary, controversial trophy and ambassador of divine grace.

—**Dennis E. Johnson**, Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology,  
Westminster Seminary California

Jack Miller . . . taught me how to preach grace. Whatever the subject and whatever the text, people were being changed by being brought into connection with the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. He taught me to preach grace no matter what the text. . . . There would never have been a Redeemer Church in New York City without the impact of Jack and Rose Marie Miller on our lives and hearts.

—**Timothy Keller**, Founding Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church,  
Manhattan; Chairman and Cofounder, Redeemer City to City

From fellow missionaries, whom he deeply influenced, I came to appreciate and admire Jack Miller. Hurray—thanks to Michael Graham's book *Cheer Up!* those of us who didn't know him personally can now get to know him and how God used him. Thank God for enabling Michael Graham to enable us to more deeply know, appreciate, and be strengthened by the Millers and the lives of the Lord's servants whom Jack disciplined. Finally we get to know more of the depth of this man I haven't yet met but am looking forward to meeting in our Father's house—and even more so, after taking in Jack's story!

—**Greg Livingstone**, Founder, Frontiers

Spurgeon called tears wept in intercession “liquid prayers.” As I read *Cheer Up!* I believe I prayed quite a few “liquid prayers.” Michael, with compelling literary force you have portrayed the incisive mind, the expansive insight, the ferocious faith, the relentless repentance, the adoring delight in Jesus, the consuming love for Scripture, and the tireless gospel proclamation that marked Jack Miller. I wept in repentance as I watched over Jack’s shoulder once again. You helped me to follow his ministry of dependence on the Holy Spirit for grace, and the holy fear I felt when I was his student came rushing back. His winsome life of love and service, when I sat under his preaching and teaching, unmasked my spiritual mediocrity. Your account of his life unmasked me once again.

Servants of Jesus who welcome truly being made like their Master tend to fascinate the less faithful follower of Jesus with their words and their way—a compelling fascination that is fused to a piercing and convicting godly fear. For both the Savior and one’s own sin simply must be faced in the presence of one like Dr. Miller. Such was the case when I was attending New Life Church, and such was the case as I began and finished this book.

I am so thankful to have read this book. Reading it hurt like heaven! Which, to my foolish perception, could seem worse than hell—because heaven wants me to change and hell hopes I never do. The earnest, Christ-centered mirth of the new heaven and the new earth marked the man C. John Miller. It marks this book as well. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!

—**Joe Novenson**, Pastor of Senior Adults, Lookout Mountain  
Presbyterian Church, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee

God used Jack Miller to change so many people’s lives, including mine. Michael Graham has done an excellent job of capturing what made Jack so special to so many people: Jack believed himself to be someone who was in desperate need of the good news of the gospel and also believed that God was delighted to shower grace on desperate sinners. This emphasis on God’s love for broken people

spilled over into the way Jack loved others, including those who were still far from knowing Christ. Ultimately, it became the driving force for founding Serge—knowing Christ in order to make Christ known. More than anything else, this dynamic of God’s grace renewing our hearts and sending us out to live missionally in a broken world has been Jack’s legacy at Serge. It is still the heartbeat of our organization to this day. I’m thankful that Michael has made this story available to a wider audience.

—**Bob Osborne**, Executive Director, Serge (formerly World Harvest Mission)

When people see my wheelchair and ask about my smile, or when they wonder how I’m able to couple a strict orthodoxy with an infectious joy in Jesus, I often parrot a principle I learned years ago from Jack Miller, who said, “Cheer up! The spirit of Jesus is at work in your weakness.” Jack helped me to see that you could be a stalwart Calvinist and, at the same time, praise the Lord like a happy Pentecostal . . . even in the middle of pain and quadriplegia. Sound like a strange mix? In this remarkable book by Michael Graham, you’ll see how joyful zeal and sturdy doctrine should always reside together. I give this wonderful work on the life and teachings of Jack Miller a double thumbs-up!

—**Joni Eareckson Tada**, Founder, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

An important chronicle of a twentieth-century Christian leader whose spiritual influence far exceeds his name recognition. Michael Graham has given us a solid overview of Jack Miller’s personal story and institutional impact.

—**Trevin Wax**, Senior Vice President for Theology and Communications, LifeWay Christian Resources; Visiting Professor, Wheaton College; Author, *Rethink Your Self, This Is Our Time*, and *Gospel-Centered Teaching*

# CHEER UP!

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF  
JACK MILLER

MICHAEL A. GRAHAM

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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Citations in the book are for published material only. Uncited quotations are taken from unpublished writings and audio recordings, as well as extensive in-person and email interviews by the author. A full bibliography is available on the Jack Miller Project website ([www.thejackmillerproject.com](http://www.thejackmillerproject.com)), and access to archival material may be requested through the website.

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To my wife,  
Victoria T. Graham,  
and my four children,  
Mary Helen, Michael, Molly, and James.  
You have accompanied me on this gospel journey of sonship  
that began in 1991.

And to Rose Marie Miller  
and the Miller family  
for freely sharing the story of your husband and father with me.



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## FOREWORD

WE WERE A storytelling family; because, I think, of my dad's pioneer background, our lives were filled with stories of wagon trains, hunting (or being hunted by) mountain lions, and shipwrecks. I was surprised to learn in first grade that not everyone knew about the fearsome one-eyed Cyclops that the Greek warrior Odysseus battled. Dinnertime was story time, and Dad was the lead storyteller. We'd listen intently to Dad, but when he'd take a bite to eat, we'd all rush into the conversation. When Dad finished chewing, he'd say, "You're interrupting me"; we'd fall silent, and the story would begin again.

Dad was an astute observer of the times. On our annual camping vacation in the redwoods, we stopped at Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco in 1966, the year before the famous Summer of Love. This was the year that hippies there were living their vision of love and peace. We spent an afternoon chatting with hippies and just looking. As we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge while traveling north on the coastal highway, Dad said, "From what I know of the human heart, there will be a murder in their community within six months." By the time we got to Eureka, in northern California, there had been a murder among the hippies.

But Dad didn't just critique hippies; he loved them. Partially because of the influence of what he'd seen at L'Abri in Switzerland with Francis Schaefer, he opened up his heart and our home to

numerous burned-out hippies and broken people in the early '70s. My future wife Jill was one of them. Jill had grown up in the church, but her heart had become distant, so she'd withdrawn. She didn't want to have anything to do with preachers. She'd become friends with my sister Barbara, who was going through her own rebellion.

When Jill expressed concern to Barb about struggles that her boyfriend was having, Barb suggested that our dad might be able to help him. Jill agreed, but she wasn't about to go into this preacher's house, so she dropped her boyfriend off—and, as she did so, she warned him, "He loves to talk." Waiting outside in her Mustang, Jill grew increasingly impatient. This preacher was taking forever. After an hour, Jill stormed out of the car, ready to extract her boyfriend. When she knocked on the door, Dad greeted her warmly and invited her in. When she was seated, Dad turned to her and asked her, "How are you doing?" Jill burst into tears and said, "I'm not good." In that moment, Jill became a believer. It was that simple.

What happened with Jill came at a time—the early '70s—when the Spirit was breathing new life into the church. While Dad had been on a sabbatical in Spain earlier that same year (1970), God had breathed new life into him as he read Geerhardus Vos's book *The Pauline Eschatology*. Dad came to a new and profound awareness that we live in the age of the Spirit. A constant theme of Dad's preaching that fall was that, since the Spirit has been poured out on us, we can be daring just like the first church in Acts. The Spirit makes dry bones come alive (see Ezek. 37) and pours out rivers of living water (see John 7:37–39). Dad saw vividly that the Spirit makes Christ continually present in our hearts and lives.

I remember sitting in the pew of Mechanicsville Chapel that fall, listening to Dad preach and thinking, *You can't be that excited about Jesus and not have God do something big*. And sure enough, that's what happened. Because of Dad's newfound confidence in the Spirit, he began to take prayer more seriously. Studying the books of Luke and Acts helped him to see the deep connection between prayer and the Spirit's work. For most of the 1980s, Dad hosted a

weekly four-hour prayer meeting in his living room in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. This change in him was as profound as his conversion from atheism had been.

A whole kaleidoscope of new habits and ways of loving people emerged from that time. Jill became just one of countless broken people who were living in our home or just “hanging out.” Our home, and later New Life Church, became multicultural—not because Dad set out to make them that way, but simply because he was multi-love. There was Larry, whose mind was burned out by drugs; Babs, who struggled with physical and mental disability; Charlie, who battled alcohol and drug addiction; and Lois, who hung out with a biker gang. What was Dad’s secret to connecting with people? Jill reflected, “He enjoyed me for who I was.”

Dad had always been bold, but now he became even bolder. He was instrumental in the conversion of my sister Barb (see chapter 5), her future husband Angelo Juliani (see chapter 5), and his other future son-in-law, Bob Heppie (see chapter 3). Remarkably, he led three of his children’s spouses to faith. He didn’t just “witness” to them; he loved all three into the kingdom.

Interestingly enough, even though Dad’s gift was evangelism, his greatest gift was preaching the gospel to those who were already inside the church. He read Romans through the lens of Luke, which made the gospel come alive. Dad was the tax collector in the temple crying out, “Be merciful to me, a sinner”; he was the blind beggar by the side of the road yelling for Jesus. In his preaching, Dad invited the rest of us to join him. So that simple idea, that the gospel is for beggars and that the entrance to the kingdom is down low, permeated his life and preaching. It is behind the single critique he had of his beloved Reformed heritage: “We have created this wonderful castle of grace, but someone forgot to put in a door.”

I agree with Michael Graham that my dad is the unsung pioneer behind the “gospel movement” that has been so influential in the Reformed (and wider) church since 1990. Much of his own influence on that movement was indirect and came through people

*Foreword*

he had inspired, such as the author Jerry Bridges and the pastor and author Tim Keller, but much of it was direct and came through his Sonship course. And while those who are familiar with the Shepherd controversy at Westminster Seminary may be tempted to think that it was a side note in Dad's life, it was actually quite pivotal; because by the early 1980s it had refocused Dad on the doctrine of justification by faith. Rediscovering the present application of justification by faith became the principle cornerstone of the Sonship course.

My father was a great man. He gifted me with his love of the gospel, the church, and the Word, but his singular gift of the reminder that the gospel is for sinners, "of whom I am chief," was his legacy to many of us. I miss him.

We are all indebted to Michael Graham for this labor of love, and for the enormous amount of research he put into this study of Jack, which will bless the church for years to come.

Paul E. Miller



## A WORD FROM DANIEL L. AKIN

I HAD NEVER heard of C. John “Jack” Miller until just a few years ago. That was my great loss. To be fair, that lack of knowledge was understandable. Jack was a Presbyterian whose ministry base was in Philadelphia. I am a Southern Baptist who has ministered mostly in the south and southwest. But, in God’s gracious providence, our Lord led Michael Graham to come to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in order to pursue his PhD. God’s providential hand continued to work when Michael enrolled in a seminar that I was teaching. It was there that I first heard of Jack Miller and saw Michael’s love, admiration, and respect for this incredible man. I became intrigued about the possibility of Michael’s writing a biographical dissertation on Jack, and he immediately “lit up” at the prospect. The seed was thus planted, and the fruit of that dream you now hold in your hand.

Jack Miller was a remarkable man in so many ways. I deeply regret that I never had the privilege of meeting him. He was a scholar, pastor, preacher, mentor, theologian, evangelist, missionary, and visionary. As you read through this scintillating work, you will be amazed at all that the Lord Jesus accomplished in Jack’s life. You will marvel at the lives he touched and the ministries that originated and took inspiration from his influence. Jack was not a perfect man—as this biography makes clear. Of course, none of us is perfect save our King Jesus. However, Jack was a man of God who

had been overwhelmed by the Lord's grace and goodness. It was out of this reservoir that he so faithfully and passionately served our Savior until his translation into his presence. My small part in this project was a labor of love. I am so delighted to see its publication. God will be honored. Jesus will be pleased. And, if he is aware of all this, I suspect a humble smile will probably crease the face of Jack Miller, a twentieth-century pioneer of grace.

Read. Enjoy! Cheer up!!! We have a greater and more wonderful Savior than any of us could ever imagine.

Daniel L. Akin

## INTRODUCTION

### CHEER UP! WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ALL YOUR JOY?

WHEN DRIVING NORTH from San Francisco to Gold Beach, one clings to the coastal highway as it sharply twists and turns along the shore of the Pacific Ocean. As the motorist veers inland, the scenery changes dramatically. The highway ascends over the Siskiyou Pass and through the mighty redwoods onto southern Oregon's historic Highway 101 before meandering back to the coast. Beautiful views of Haystack Rock, the shoreline, and the rugged sea cliffs compensate for the slow, arduous drive to the small pioneer settlement where C. John "Jack" Miller was born.

Jack's own travels from Gold Beach to San Francisco along these perilous and panoramic coastal highways illustrate the brokenness and the beauty of this young man's journey to faith in Christ and what the sovereign Lord would do through his life and ministry afterward. In every generation, the triune God has been pleased to work through leaders like Jack Miller, who, having discovered the gospel themselves, become God's means of helping others to rediscover the glory of his omnipotent grace. Jack did not *pioneer* grace in the sense of discovering it for the first time in history, but through his teaching and preaching ministry, his writings, and his evangelistic and missionary work, he brought the joy of God's omnipotent grace to the most influential leaders in the church today—Timothy Keller, Jerry Bridges, John Piper, Joni

Eareckson Tada, Dan Allender, and Larry Crabb, among others. In this way, he was truly a pioneer of grace.

Timothy Keller said, “Jack Miller . . . taught me how to preach grace. Whatever the subject and whatever the text, people were being changed by being brought into connection with the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. He taught me how to preach grace no matter what the text.” Likewise, in his book *Him We Proclaim*, Dennis E. Johnson cited Jack Miller and Timothy Keller as prime examples from “contemporary post-Christian and postmodern culture” of preaching that is “Christ centered” and has the effect on the unchurched of “shattering their stereotypes of Christianity and bringing them face to face with Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

### Cheer Up!

Over the course of his life, teaching, and ministry, Jack challenged Christians to address a key question found in Galatians: “What has happened to all your joy?” (Gal. 4:15 NIV). He explained this question by saying that “I relate to it because many times I have lost my joy. . . . I have forgotten the power of grace, the joy of sonship.” In that spirit of gospel joy, Jack memorably declared, “Cheer up! You are far worse than you think” and “Cheer up! God’s grace is greater than you’ve ever dared hope”—connecting pervasive depravity to irresistible grace.<sup>2</sup> “The best news you ever heard,” he said, “is that original sin is true. If original sin (the curse) is true, then the grace is true. The love of God is shallow unless there is depth to which it reaches.”

Several other “cheer up” statements are equally important to an understanding of Jack Miller: “Cheer up! God’s Spirit works in your weakness,” “Cheer up! God’s Kingdom is more wonderful than you have ever imagined,” and “Cheer up! Come on, let’s die together! It’s a great way to come to life.” Together, these statements are a fitting way to understand the whole of Jack’s life, teaching, and ministry.

This book fittingly begins with grace. Chapter 1, “Cheer Up! God’s Grace Is Greater Than You Ever Dared Hope,” introduces readers to Jack Miller’s early life through 1949. During this time, Jack discovered that “faith alone” means “faith all the way,” in the sovereign preeminent Christ, for the glory of God’s omnipotent grace.

Chapter 2, “Cheer Up! You Are Far Worse Than You Think,” covers events that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, as a teacher, church planter, pastor, and scholar, Jack developed a critical theological and cultural apparatus that uniquely qualified him to serve on the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 form the heart of this biography. Chapter 3, “Cheer Up! God’s Spirit Works in Your Weakness,” focuses on the joy that Jack experienced as God’s Spirit worked through his weakness and, as a result of that work, magnified the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ all the more. Chapter 4, “Cheer Up! Justification Is by Faith Alone, Even in the Twentieth Century,” shows the theological development that took place within Jack during the controversy that raged from 1974 to 1981 over Norman Shepherd’s teaching at WTS regarding the role of works within justification. Chapter 5, “Cheer Up! God’s Kingdom Is More Wonderful Than You Ever Imagined,” focuses on Jack’s rapid expansion of his ministry activities and covers several new mission fields that he opened in the 1980s.

Chapter 6, “Cheer Up! Come On, Let’s Die Together; It’s a Great Way to Come to Life,” ends on the highest note as Jack Miller, a dying man, preached God’s amazing grace to dying men.

### **Why a Critical Biography?**

Jack once pastored a church that had a painting of Jesus hanging directly behind the pulpit. When he preached, the congregation saw his face in Jesus’s halo. Jack disliked the painting and wanted it

removed. Older congregants, who were fond of the painting, resisted. When the church was repainted and the picture taken down, Jack was the last person who was seen with the painting before it disappeared, never to be found again. Though about a small incident, this story illustrates a fact of Jack's life: glorifying Christ, not himself, was his ultimate desire.

Those whom I interviewed in the course of writing this book asserted that Jack would have laughed at the idea of a study on his life and ministry. Thankfully, Jack Miller himself clears the way for a critical biography such as this. He himself enjoyed reading biographies and once wrote, "More than once God has used a stirring example from the life of a more normal Christian leader to arouse me to the truth about my indifference to His glory."<sup>3</sup> He also realized that much of discipling is "taught before it is caught," so he often shared personal illustrations of his own weaknesses, failings, and sin in order to help those whom he taught to catch discipleship. "What God wants you to do," he explained, "is to learn faster than me. That is why he has given older Christians to the younger, so you won't have to repeat every mistake."

Christians are often disenchanting with conventional expressions of the church and long for authenticity. However, such authenticity can be a double-edged sword. Preachers have turned pulpits into confessionals in an attempt to imitate Jack's openness in the area of repentance without understanding his vision for its use in evangelism (see chapter 2). Jack was a literature professor and biblical scholar who took words seriously. When he confessed specific and critical sins in his own life and ministry, he was very intentionally leading other sinners to join him in repenting. We should thus neither romanticize repentance nor be shocked and appalled by it.

As Jack's friend Steve Brown has noted, "It is dangerous to have a hero who is still alive. But, frankly, it's dangerous to have a hero who is dead, too. . . . 'Puff' biographies of 'famous' Christians . . . have done Christians a great disservice."<sup>4</sup> As you read this book, remember that it is a critical biography—and Jack was his

own biggest critic. While Jack's sin patterns do not define him, they grew out of real areas of sin that Jack took seriously and often wept over. By taking Jack and his self-criticisms seriously, as he and Rose Marie intended, you will allow this book to accomplish its purpose.

## **An Unexpected Biography**

My wife, Vicki, and I first heard of Jack Miller in 1991. We were experiencing severe marital difficulties and asked our pastor for marriage counseling. He recommended a mentoring course known as Sonship. Begun by Jack Miller in 1982, it was a leadership training program that paired missions and renewal with evangelism and discipleship. Our pastor and his wife had significantly benefited from the course—but at that point, Vicki and I needed counseling rather than the mentoring that Sonship provided. We completed the first three lessons with a Sonship mentor but then dropped out—though the course had already begun to rescue my marriage as it simultaneously disciplined and evangelized me. Four years later, when our marriage was stabilized, Vicki and I called our mentor again and completed the course. The sovereign Lord used the gospel teaching in Sonship to convert me and save our marriage.

Over the next several years, we considered whether we were being called to the mission field as we evangelized and disciplined other individuals and couples using materials from World Harvest Mission, an organization that had been founded by Jack Miller in 1983 and is now known as Serge. In 1998, we moved our family to St. Louis, Missouri, so that I could attend Covenant Theological Seminary. By that time, the Sonship movement was generating both controversy and revival as it swept the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Harsh critiques of Sonship from Jay Adams and others spurred me to further examine Jack Miller as well as the Bible's teaching on the doctrine of adoption. In 2001, we received a call to Mount Juliet, Tennessee, to replant Hickory Grove Presbyterian Church, and we have lived there since.

In 2012, I began formal research and writing at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on the doctrine of adoption and its relationship to union with Christ, justification, and sanctification. While attending PhD seminars, I was surprised that the faculty at Southeastern had assigned a significant number of books written by authors who had been influenced directly or indirectly by the late Jack Miller, including Harvie Conn, Timothy Keller, David Powlison, and Dennis Johnson. I had not expected that in a Southern Baptist doctoral context.

During a seminar on leadership that was taught by Dr. Danny Akin, the president of Southeastern, I commented, “The most important yet unknown leader referenced in this PhD program is a man named Jack Miller”—in response to which Dr. Akin asked, “Who is Jack Miller?” I briefly outlined Jack’s life and ministry, noting some important leaders whom Jack had influenced. Dr. Akin immediately replied, “You need to write his biography as a record for the church while so many people Jack influenced are still alive.”

Providentially, Dr. Akin took over the supervision of my research and wisely guided the project to its conclusion. On the condition that I not write a hagiography of Jack, the Miller family granted access to his archival material and made themselves available for interviews, in addition to Rose Marie, Paul, and Barbara participating as volunteer outside readers. Along with about thirty others, they reviewed each chapter for accuracy to and consistency with the statements of those I had interviewed. Consequently, after having researched and written from 2012 to 2014 on the relationship of adoption to sonship and union with Christ, in 2015 I committed the cardinal sin for a PhD student and changed my research proposal—instead of writing on the doctrine of adoption as I had planned, I decided to write *Cheer Up! A Biography of the Life, Teaching, and Ministry of Jack Miller*.

While attending the annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2017, I met John Hughes—academic project manager for P&R Publishing. Hughes, a former



student at WTS, took personal interest in reading a dissertation about his former professor. Later, Hughes introduced Jack's biography to other P&R leaders, who have since worked diligently to transform an academic dissertation into the publication you are now reading.

### **The Music of the Gospel**

The gospel of grace was deep, deep music for Jack. "There should be no need to apologize for . . . lifting up the conquering power of Christ through grace. Here we have on our hands a message about omnipotence moving from eternity into time. And omnipotence—well, we should expect it to do big things. So, do we exaggerate when we say with faith . . . that the gospel has the power to change anyone? I have seen many, many people of all sorts brought to faith just because of the glad elevation of Christ's saving omnipotence." Overwhelmingly, the most lasting impression that Jack had etched on the minds and hearts of people who were interviewed for this study was his delight in the mystery of God's abundant grace. That readers of this book would be left with this same lasting impression is my prayer and hope.



## CHEER UP! GOD'S GRACE IS FAR GREATER THAN YOU EVER DARED HOPE

*Early Life and the Joy of the Gospel*

JACK'S EARLY FAMILY life in southwest Oregon forged a pioneering spirit in him that would become an overarching theme that defined his ministry. Both sets of his grandparents, optimistic about their futures, endured great challenges and suffered significant tragedy while pioneering west along the Oregon Trail and over the Northwest Crossing. His parents, too, were brave and resourceful people.

Jack's father, Elmer, the oldest child of Edward and Susie Miller, was born near the Lower Pistol River in Oregon on June 22, 1885. Elmer's father had a gambling habit, and the losses that it incurred created instability in the Miller family as it grew. In 1894, their financial conditions forced the family to move to the Upper Pistol River to a ranch that Susie's parents owned, which was affectionately known as Grasshopper Hill. In 1903, after many losses, Edward's gambling habit finally resulted in his winning a ranch that was located in the more socially vibrant pioneering settlement of Agness. When his parents moved to the new ranch, eighteen-year-old Elmer purchased Grasshopper Hill from his father for ten dollars.

Having learned to hunt at age eight and being intimately familiar with the Siskiyou Mountains, Elmer gained prominence as a

predatory game hunter in the state of Oregon. From 1905 to 1910, he caught the attention of both regional newspapers and national magazines as a game hunter, hunting guide, and breeder of champion hunting dogs. In 1910, he was recognized as the most famous citizen in his county.

On July 2, 1893, Jack's mother, Iva Avada Murry, was born in Grants Pass, Oregon. She was the second daughter of Thomas Murry and Sarah "Ellen" Miller—who, when they had married in 1879, had been a mismatch from the start. Thomas was thirty years older than Ellen, and he wasted time drinking in town. Over time, Ellen felt trapped between two dangerous choices: stay with a husband and father who was becoming increasingly abusive or risk exposing herself and her two girls to the dangers of the Wild West. Finally, when Iva was four years old, Ellen and her daughters escaped the drunken wrath of her husband.

For the majority of the time between 1897 to 1910, Iva lived with her mother in the back of a wagon. It was a fatherless and homeless life that involved crisscrossing five thousand miles—taking her as far south as the Sierra Nevada desert and as far north as Seattle. While stopping in southwest Oregon to visit her sister, Ellen agreed to marry Oliver Doolittle and settled there in 1909. Iva, who objected to her mother's choice of husband, joined her older sister in Redding, California, to help with raising the sister's two children and finally to attend school herself. When her sister's husband tried to take advantage of Iva, however, driving her to hit him over the head with a bucket, she returned to settle with her mother and stepfather on the Lower Pistol River.

Elmer had been living a secluded life—hunting, trapping, and ranching on the Upper Pistol River just northeast from Iva's parents on the Lower Pistol River—and he wanted to marry and start a large family. Occasionally he welcomed friends and neighbors to the ranch—people who soon introduced him to the new girl in the small pioneer settlement. Elmer's hunting statistics declined temporarily as he spent more time with Iva than on game hunting.

Elmer Miller and Iva Murry married on May 5, 1912. Leo Miller, their eldest son, was born on the Upper Pistol River in 1913. Then Raymond was born in 1916, followed by Ira in 1918. Three girls followed the three boys: Ella Mae in 1921, Frances in 1923, and Irene in 1925.

Unlike his father, Elmer was an excellent provider for his own family. In 1920, before the girls were born, Iva wanted the boys to be closer to the Swinging Bridge School. In order to accommodate his wife's concerns, Elmer bought a 160-acre homestead that was down the Pistol River and was locally known as the Burn. The Miller boys still encountered wild animals along the way to school, however, and when Ella Mae was old enough to walk there as well, Iva's anxiety about wild animals grew. Elmer rented a small house for the children's safety in Gold Beach, Oregon, in the fall of 1926. The following school year, he bought a house and five lots for his wife on Third Street in the same town. The children were easily able to walk to school, and Iva had access to a twelve-bed hospital in the event that a seventh child were added to their prosperous and happy family.

ELMER AND IVA'S optimism peaked with the birth of that seventh and last child. Cecil John "Jack" Miller was born in Gold Beach, Oregon, on December 18, 1928. Married for seventeen years by that time, Elmer and Iva adored each other and delighted in their many children. All the children doted on their baby brother as well. With a bright future ahead, little Jackie crowned a happy, loving, and stable Miller family.

Elmer, who was considered among the greatest game hunters in the West at that time, continued to garner praise as the subject of exposés in newspapers and hunting magazines. The older boys helped their father to maintain Grasshopper Hill ranch and breed his champion hunting dogs. The girls helped their mother at home in Gold Beach and especially enjoyed combing their baby brother's golden curls and watching him learn to walk. In December of 1929,

Elmer retired as Oregon's most celebrated predatory game hunter to accept the newly created position of forest ranger for the United States Forest Service, which he began in January of 1930.

ON DECEMBER 16, 1930, two days before Jack turned two, sudden tragedy devastated the Miller family.

Will Wridge, Elmer's uncle on his mother's side, was visiting from Portland. On December 15, Wridge called and asked Elmer to take him on a bear hunt. With Christmas a few weeks away and Jack's birthday around the corner, Elmer did not want to leave his family. He also generally found it imprudent to hunt without taking another experienced hunter along with him, and his uncle had only limited hunting experience of his own. However, he could find no one either to accompany him and Wridge or to take his uncle hunting for bears in his stead—and Wridge was being persistent. And so, early on the morning of December 16, 1930, against Elmer's better judgment, the acclaimed bear hunter and his uncle left Grasshopper Hill ranch to hunt.

Later that morning, near Pyramid Rock toward the Upper Pistol River, Elmer's dogs cornered a bear. According to Wridge, Elmer moved toward his dogs to pull them away as he yelled for them to stop. Tragically, Wridge thought his nephew was yelling "shoot" rather than "stop." As Elmer was moving downhill toward his dogs and the bear, Wridge fired. His bullet struck Elmer in the hip, ran downward through his leg, and nicked an artery along the way. Wridge left Elmer and ran to get help, only to wander for hours, lost, as his nephew bled to death. The rescue party found Elmer's body sitting on a rock with his pocket watch in one hand and a knuckle clenched between his teeth to try to temper the pain. He had dragged himself two miles to the Low Glades before giving up.

Reporters from as far away as Los Angeles, California, wrote about Elmer's unexpected death, which many considered "the greatest tragedy in [that] part of the country." Some of Elmer's family

and friends, unconvinced about the circumstances surrounding his death, questioned whether the shooting had been accidental. Their questions led to an investigation: Why had Wridge been so insistent that his nephew take him hunting? Why had he left Elmer after shooting him? How had he wandered, lost, for seven hours in an area where he had once lived before finding help? What had happened to Elmer's prize hunting dogs? Why would an expert hunter like Elmer have run in front of someone's line of fire? The investigation, however, turned up nothing actionable, and further inquiries were dropped.

Iva suddenly found herself a single mom with seven children from ages seventeen to two. She sufficiently satisfied herself that Elmer's tragic death had been accidental and turned her attention to the survival of her family. Her eldest son, eighteen-year-old Leo, took paternal responsibility for little Jackie.

The juxtaposition of the Millers' lives before and then after December of 1930 would have been difficult for anyone to fathom, much less a two-year old, as they moved from happiness, security, safety, and stability to instant fatherlessness, upheaval, and poverty. While Elmer's success had insulated his family from economic difficulties, the full weight of the Great Depression now collapsed upon the Millers.

The desperate family was suddenly property rich and cash poor. Remote, illiquid real estate that had once promised them long-term prosperity now worsened their freefall, and the work of maintaining the large Grasshopper Hill ranch and the Burn overwhelmed the older boys. Iva's job of raising seven children paid nothing, and government aid was not available for widows and orphans in southern Oregon. Although the neighborly rules that existed among families and communities dictated that pioneers in Oregon always rallied to the aid of a troubled neighbor, everyone was suffering under the weight of the Great Depression. There was not enough food, supplies, or extra money available to meet the ongoing needs of the large Miller family.

Jack's once idyllic family situation only continued to worsen as time went on. Iva's mother and stepfather, Ellen and Oliver Doolittle, sold the store that they owned in Agness and moved to the Upper Pistol River in an attempt to save both the Grasshopper Hill ranch and the Burn. By the end of 1932, however, they too had lost everything that they owned in their attempts to rescue Iva and the ranch; Ellen's health was also broken. By the time Oliver brought his wife to the Lower Pistol River for medical care, it was too late. Loss added to loss and death added to death when Jack's grandmother died a month before his fourth birthday. Unable to afford a funeral for her mother, Iva buried her in a pauper's grave in the Pioneer Cemetery next to the Presbyterian Church in Gold Beach.

Iva's HAPPY MARRIAGE to Elmer had redeemed much of the suffering she had endured as a young girl, but circumstances were now plunging the thirty-seven-year-old widow into another tragic spiral. At the time of Elmer's death, social security for a young widow in Iva's situation equated to remarriage—but having seven children and few available men severely limited her choice of husbands. Soon, friends were introducing Iva to the few eligible men in Pistol River and Gold Beach.

Finally, on January 24, 1933, two years after Elmer's death, Iva remarried. Andy Allen "Al" Lawrence was a fifty-seven-year-old single man living on his parents' ranch on the Lower Pistol River. After the wedding, he moved into the small Miller house on Third Street in Gold Beach. Iva's eighth child, Andy Allen "Junior" Lawrence, was born in 1934.

None of the Miller children cared for their severe stepfather. The two youngest children, Irene and Jack, had the most traumatic relationship with Lawrence—though it was Jack himself who often took the brunt of his anger. In the words of Jack's cousin Ben Gardner, "Al would beat the hell out of Jack." In an incomplete manuscript, "Book on Love," Jack describes his bullying stepfather as a "victimizer who enjoyed the role of taking pleasure in sucking



the joy out of life for me.” He writes in another draft of that manuscript, “This powerful man would hit one of our older sisters or me without warning. . . . Challenge him, or even question him in a way he didn’t like, and you risked a severe beating.”

Soon after Lawrence moved into their home, Jack began to nightly experience a terrifying fear of death. His fears became so strong that they prevented him from sleeping. “I was terrified with the nightly fear that if I fell asleep I would simply disappear into the darkness of death never to return—just as I imagined my dad had done.” Sometimes he jolted out of dreams in which his stepfather would strike him without warning or beat him in his rage.

There was little opportunity for Jack’s older brothers in Gold Beach or Pistol River, and so, as soon as they were old enough, they enlisted in the military to get away from their stepfather. Before leaving, Leo—Jack’s eldest brother and surrogate father—warned Lawrence that if he ever touched Jack again, Leo would kill him.

Jack feared his stepfather’s abuse, but he also feared Lawrence for an even deeper reason. While he was a victim of physical abuse, Jack feared that victimhood would become his basic identity. He would later explain that “to make victimhood your basic self-identification is to disconnect yourself from the world of people and ultimately from God. It turns the world into an orphanage and yourself into an orphan numbed by disappointments, betrayals, and broken dreams.” The temptation Jack felt at the age of ten to feel sorry for himself threatened to consume him in self-pity, until his older sisters noticed their little brother turning into a “first-rate whiner” and confronted him.

Jack dreaded seeing his stepfather and increasingly isolated himself from his family because of the man’s abuse. When he wanted to escape, which he often did, he walked to Gold Beach’s library. By the time he had turned ten years old, he had read all the books that were available there, so Iva brought her fourth-grade son to see their lawyer. The attorney took Jack to his private library, reached up to the shelf, and took down a large book by Tobias

Smollett. Over the next several years, Jack read all the books in the attorney's library as well.

As part of Jack's chores, he fed and milked the family's cow and cleaned the barn twice each day. Initially, the chore took Jack an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. Over time, he came to enjoy the work—and especially the cow's playful affection. Even though Jack cut the work time of each session in half, he continued to spend the full two hours in the barn. Joy, affection, and play abounded freely alongside his work during the time he spent with the cow. As he contemplated his relationship with his stepfather, he realized that his fear had led him to hate his stepfather and to prefer to remain isolated in the barn with the playful cow. Jack had to make a decision: he could keep running from his stepfather, or he could take a stand.

At dinner one evening, Jack sat at the table on the other side of his mother, to ensure that he was out of the reach of his stepfather. Safely walled away, he took courage and tried to talk to the hot-tempered man. Despite the contempt that Lawrence showed for him and his ideas, Jack held his composure and calmly continued to interact with him. Eventually, after enough similar interactions had taken place, Iva and Junior joined Jack in his questioning of Lawrence's attitude and behavior—including his abusive hitting of the children. For the first time in Jack's presence, Lawrence admitted that he was wrong about something. "Till then, I had never heard him admit the slightest flaw in his words or life," Jack wrote later. "I cannot say that I ever loved him the way I loved the rest of my family. But I know I stopped hating him. Eventually I gained compassion for this strange man." Over time, Lawrence's hitting stopped.

Like his mother, Jack bore the deep scars that come from familial brokenness, forced relocations, and devastating loss at an early age. He came to believe that the calamitous death of his biological father, followed by his decade of living with an abusive stepfather, damaged him and would have permanently marred him had it not been for the saving grace of God.

GRACE, HOWEVER, was not something on the minds of many people in southern Oregon at the time. Most of them counted themselves among the virtuous. Oregonians were also pragmatic—more interested in the natural world than in theology and philosophy—a down-to-earth, traditional people who enjoyed hunting and fishing in the mountains and forests of their state. Not long descended from the state's early settlers, they were good neighbors who lived by a moral code that was based on honesty and kindness as well as keeping one's word, doing hard work, and paying the bills. Jack explains, "Some of them went to church, but most did not. But although they were not churchgoers, they had moral standards derived from the teachings of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> When Jack was growing up, the only church in the small coastal community was First Presbyterian Church of Gold Beach, and this was the church that Jack's family attended. Southern Oregonians who did not go to Sunday worship commonly claimed that the big outdoors was their church.

Jack's mother Iva was among the most virtuous people whom he knew. She endured much hardship, and yet Jack never heard her complain or gossip about others. She was kind to neighbors and readily sacrificed for her family. Iva taught her children about the Ten Commandments and emphasized the Lord's second coming as a way to keep them in line when they were erring. Jack later wrote, "None of us wanted to be caught breaking one of the commandments when Jesus reappeared! In fact, I got into the habit of always looking to the east before I did anything wrong."<sup>2</sup> Jack grew up thinking that good people would survive judgment day—though he often wondered if there were much chance of that for him.

Years later, as a seminary professor, Jack spoke to his mother about their family's faith. "You know we all grew up thinking we were Christians, went to church, and all that. But I can't recall anyone ever telling me that I was lost and that I needed Jesus to give me a new life."<sup>3</sup>

"Of course, I always believed that," Iva replied. "[Your father and I] took it for granted."<sup>4</sup>

Jack highly respected his mother, and yet he was troubled that she and his father would take Christ and his love for granted. That his parents had never said anything like “Christ died for our sins, and it means everything to me” puzzled Jack.<sup>5</sup> Were others, like himself, presuming to be Christian just because they attended church?

Sadly, Jack also heard little about Christ’s dying for sinners at the church they attended. No one encountered the living Christ there; no one was converted or transformed. The community at Gold Beach considered Sunday morning to be the dullest time of the week. The worship services were boring, and the preaching was moralistic.

In a testament to the ineffectiveness of the Gold Beach church, at one point in the late 1930s, the town’s mayor proposed installing slot machines in the sanctuary to take advantage of the church’s prime location on the historic Highway 101 and capture tourists who were passing through the pioneer village. The congregants of the church admonished the mayor for his blasphemy—yet Jack acknowledged, later in life, that the mayor had accurately taken the pulse of the lifeless church. Something *should* happen at church, Jack went on to note, but, to the congregation in Gold Beach, exactly what seemed unclear. No one, including the preacher, quite knew what to expect.

When a public schoolteacher whom Jack admired announced that he was an atheist, he gave Jack the language to explain what he himself already believed but had lacked the words to communicate. Atheism seemed to explain the fact that God had seemingly been silent in Jack’s life and absent from the First Presbyterian Church of Gold Beach. Jack announced to his family and school that he too was an atheist.

Twelve may seem like a young age for a boy to make such a weighty announcement about an even weightier decision. But, given his long exposure to tragedy and evil, Jack’s announcement of atheism was not the facile declaration of a naïve boy. As Jack explains, “I was clear the church did not have a purpose beyond that of comforting people who need religious solace. In my view ‘church’ was for timid people—not for the tough-minded type[s] like myself

who are ready to face the unpleasant truth that God probably did not exist and that worship was a charade designed to conceal that he was permanently absent from worship and the universe.”

Life circumstances had made Jack angry and rebellious. As he prepared to leave home in his mid-teens, he completely rejected his family’s religion and washed his hands of the church altogether. Good riddance to the God who was not there! He dropped out of school and moved to San Francisco in order to get away from his stepfather and make his own way in life. Jack sums up his spiritual condition at that time: “No one could have started further from God than I did.”<sup>6</sup>

DURING WORLD WAR II, San Francisco became the gateway to the Pacific theater. As white American men were enlisting in the military and being shipped off to war, the Navy ramped up for the war effort by recruiting tens of thousands of African American men from around the country to work at the massive Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco. It also lowered the age limit for doing so and allowed some teenagers to apprentice. Even so, at age fifteen, Jack was underage when he arrived at San Francisco to earn his machinist’s certificate at Hunters Point. Either the Navy or Jack (or both) overlooked or fudged his actual age by a year or more. Although the vast military complex at Hunters Point suffered from notoriously poor and dangerous working conditions, the Navy was still supplying Jack with the means to escape his stepfather. He lived with his sister Ella Mae, completed his last year of high school, earned his machinist certification, and worked at the shipyard.

While this was happening, Ella Mae surrendered her life to Christ; and Jack talked regularly with her about her conversion, the meaning of life, and her new faith. He occasionally went with her when she started attending First Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and he began studying the Bible—initially in order to argue with her and other Christians. Jack both hated for anyone to out-argue him and also thought that these Christians were quoting Scripture without knowing what they were talking about. If they could quote

Romans, then he was determined to know Romans better than they did. While recognizing the irony of his behavior, every morning and afternoon Jack read his Bible on the bus to work, stuffing it in his pocket whenever it drew too much attention. A movie night at the church about modern man's inability to give thanks to God further unsettled him.

Soon, other members of Jack's family became Christians as well. Jack was being exposed to the gospel—and he could not escape the sovereign Christ. And so, in early 1945, he decided that he might as well become a Christian like his sister. "I repented. I thought I believed. I even got down on my knees and wept over my sin. . . . In Oregon you learn how to be . . . tough. . . . The ideal is to be tough and never cry. . . . So I went the whole distance. I did everything. . . . But what was happening were certain modifications in my character taking place which were largely external."

ON MARCH 3, 1945, tragedy struck the Miller family again. Leo had predicted that he would not return from active duty. He died on a mountain ridge in Italy while spotting for artillery—just a few weeks before his scheduled discharge.

Leo had been the closest person to a father whom Jack had known. When Jack received the heartbreaking news at age sixteen that his beloved brother and protector had died in action, he became completely derailed. Despite Ella Mae's protests for him to stay and take classes at San Francisco State College, where he had enrolled for the fall, Jack dropped out and returned to southern Oregon in late August, a few weeks after the war in the Pacific ended.

Although Leo's death sent Jack spiraling, the Lord kept challenging him in unexpected ways. Jack described one such instance: "It was August 1945, and the atomic bomb had just been exploded over Hiroshima. As we commuters boarded our bus, people were shaking their heads and wondering whether this new weapon would destroy the world. A sailor responded quietly: 'No, the world won't ever be destroyed by atomic bombs. Jesus won't let that happen.

He's coming back first.”<sup>7</sup> That sailor's unquestioning confidence silenced any argument or debate from Jack.

Jack had been too young to work on the coastal highways when he had left Oregon in 1943, but when he returned in 1945, he immediately found a job working as a flagman and laborer and shoveling gravel on those familiar serpentine coastal roads that he had traveled to and from San Francisco. Working outdoors rejuvenated Jack physically, but spiritually he remained a wanderer. When he had decided to become a Christian, he had somehow missed something vital—though he did not know what he had overlooked. “I was always traveling through outer physical space in order to cope with the empty inner space.”

Jack thought that witnessing and preaching could resolve his uneasiness. And, certainly, his dedication and apparent growth—the effort to live the Christian life that he described as “a powerful labor”—looked impressive to outside observers. He cleaned up his life in many areas, passionately pursued piety, gave up bad habits and started good ones, and energetically studied Scripture. In fact, when he visited his sister in San Francisco again in April of 1948 and went to First Orthodox Presbyterian Church with her, the church's pastor asked him to speak at their Friendship Night. Jack spoke for the first time about his decision to become a Christian—before he actually became a Christian.

Looking back on the period of his life from 1945 to 1948, Jack described himself as being “half-way converted”—“If I had to introduce [a non-Christian] to what I had [before December of 1948], they were going to be miserable. At least a non-Christian still had some fun. Who wanted to drink the vinegar I had going down me every day?”

ELLA MAE'S CHURCH was part of a small new denomination—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)—that had been founded in 1936 by J. Gresham Machen, who had also founded Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) in 1929. Machen, the OPC, and

WTS would each play a pivotal role in Jack's life—starting with his conversion.

One October day in 1948, Jack picked up a book by Machen called *The Christian View of Man*. Throughout that fall, Jack had been desperately reading Scripture without getting much out of it. Romans and Ephesians had especially drawn his attention, and he was looking for help with understanding them. As he read Machen's book, although he was beginning to fall asleep, he pushed on through it—ever a disciplined reader.

When he read what Machen said about election being the power source for life, his temper flared. Predestination struck Jack as the world's most awful doctrine. He loathed it. When Machen cited Ephesians 1 as his warrant for this teaching, Jack thought it was surely impossible for such hideous doctrine to be in the Bible. He incredulously threw aside Machen's book and opened his Bible to Ephesians 1. There it was—right there in the Bible. Jack writes, "It was like gasoline touched by a lighted match. Almost instantly I was fully awake. What was this incredible stuff?"

Jack was shocked by the revelation. He argued with Machen and God, rhetorically demanding to know what predestination did for his freedom. To lose his ability to choose "seemed somehow to rob me of the most important thing in my life." Who did God think he was?

In response, what seemed to Jack "like a voice," arose from the pages of Scripture to say, "God! And who do you think you are?" The question shocked Jack's soul. There was only one possible answer he could give: he thought *he* was God. For the first time in his life, Jack realized the treasonous nature of the sin that lay underneath all his other sins.

The starkness of my insane answer shocked me. . . .

My thoughts were in complete upheaval, but one truth cut into me with the force of sharp-edged surgical steel. I had lived only for my glory and not for God's. His plan was for me to live for His



glory and will, and I had never done that for a single moment in my life. In fact, it had seemed to me that I had done Him a considerable favor by believing in Him.

The idea that He was the absolute center of all things glorious had never crossed my mind.

Now exposed, my conscience said to me: what a cagy, selfish, evil person you are! Of all people, you are the most hugely egocentric man who ever lived!

Scripture and the Holy Spirit awakened Jack to the truth about himself and the truth about God. He realized that his mighty self-generated labors over the previous three years had been for his own glory and not for God's. He knew that he had judged other people wrongly before; now he realized that he had judged God wrongly, too. He had been so neurotic about his sins that he had missed the truth that the heart of his sin was directly against God's majesty, against God's glory, and against God's holiness. As shocking as this sudden recognition of God's holiness was to him, another breathtaking revelation staggered him even more.

At that moment I was cut to the heart. I realized the utter impossibility of ever changing myself. . . .

I was hurt so deeply by the law of God I couldn't even cry. I was beyond tears.

All I could say is "God, forgive me. God, I had you all wrong. I will put down my weapons. I will stop fighting you." I could say, "God, I don't know why you would want me, but I am giving myself to you anyway, here."

I wasn't expecting anything, but when I said that, when the pride that ruled my life for the first time was exposed, cut into my heart by the Holy Spirit through the Scripture, I was desperate, and I was astonished by what happened to me then.

Completely unprepared for it, the next moment I knew assurance of total forgiveness.

How could you know like that? I just knew that God had moved me, that he had received me, and my sins were on the cross and Christ carried them away.

I had such peace in my heart; I was so filled with joy over the gospel.

Before, Jack had thought that he was a Christian. Others, too, had presumed the same and even let him teach. But Jack had done nothing more than work at saving himself for more than two years. “When I do anything . . . I do it with my whole heart. And if anyone could have saved himself, I could have.” After reading Ephesians 1 that day, Jack was completely stunned by God’s omnipotent grace. He was utterly helpless and speechless. “A sense of shame began to come over me that I had misunderstood God and the universe. And that behind it all, I wanted to be saved for my glory. And I wanted to insist that it had been my will that had chosen Christ.”

Jack’s pride had blinded him to the state of his own heart—to its belief that God should have been grateful that Jack had taken the leap of faith and believed in him despite such little evidence. After all, God had robbed him of his father and substituted for him an abusive stepfather. Then he had robbed Jack of Leo. Now he expected to get the glory for Jack’s choice to believe? Was he saying that Jack’s faith did not create anything—that even his faith was a gift of God’s omnipotent grace?

When Jack finally gave up his right to independent choice—the most precious thing in his life—and surrendered his false idea that he somehow had to save himself, suddenly the music of the gospel sang from Ephesians 1 into his heart and life. He finally settled things with God.

For Jack, becoming a Christian meant choosing to give up his trust in his own wisdom and choices. He later wrote, “A lot of people who pray the Lord’s prayer ‘Your kingdom come’ would be horrified if it happened, because what you really want is ‘Lord, I want my agenda.’ I want to protect myself, defend myself, make

excuses. . . . And God says now, 'I'm going to give you so much love you won't need these other things.'"

Now in union with Christ instead of fighting God's sovereign grace, Jack found the joy and peace of God flooding his heart and mind. He now placed his faith in "a God who is God all the way."

Although Jack had originally feared that a predestining God would squash his freedom, his knowledge of divine election instead produced a continual power source that enabled him to live in joy and freedom. Furthermore, his recognition of God's irresistible grace gave him the courage that was necessary to free him from the fear of people like his stepfather. The oft-misrepresented doctrine of predestination, which Jack had once hated, supplied him with an inexhaustible love that conquered his driven, restless heart. He thought that "it seemed such a shame that there could be anyone in the universe who didn't live for the preeminence of Christ."

Jack Miller had become a new man in Christ. His life, which now had Christ at its center, had new purpose, new coherence, and new direction. After he had learned of Leo's death, Jack had rejected family counsel, dropped out of college, and returned to Oregon for three years. Now, he readied himself to study philosophy and history back at San Francisco State College.

Before he left, Jack shocked his mother and the little Presbyterian church in Gold Beach by asking if they would like him to preach a sermon. His request so astonished the church that they decided to hear what the young man had to say. Once Jack started preaching, they could not turn him off. When he wrote about it later, he could not remember all that he said that Sunday morning, but he did recall one central point that he made: "One thing I'm terribly afraid of is that some of you might think you know Christ, but you are still living for your own glory, and you haven't had the joy of a surrender to God who is God all the way."

WHEN JACK RETURNED to San Francisco in December of 1948, he arrived in a grossly overcrowded city that had been transformed

since he was last there during the war years. He had little money and no sustainable job, and, since staying with his sister long-term was no longer practicable, he needed a new place to live from which he could more easily access his church and school. Since his family history and pioneering mindset did not allow him to avoid work, miss a meal, or look for a handout, he picked up a bucket and rag and spent a month offering to wash windows in an urban neighborhood. Though he was inexperienced at both window washing and door-to-door evangelism, he used this opportunity to share his new faith, figuring that if he could ask strangers to wash their windows for money, he could also ask them if they had “heard about Jesus and the joy he brings to those who have him all the way as their Lord and Savior.”

After about a month of window washing, Jack found a job working as a breakfast cook for twelve single men in a boarding house on Eddy Street. Boarding houses with low-cost rooms were common in San Francisco—especially in the Tenderloin district, which was considered to be the “black hole”<sup>8</sup> of San Francisco. This particular boarding house was dilapidated on the outside—and even worse on the inside. Despite its conditions, the work offered Jack a place to live, food to eat, a pittance of income, and close proximity to his school and church—which was important in a city that was hard to traverse on foot. Bill, the owner, trained Jack to cook for his rough, blue-collar boarders.

At the boarding house, Jack came to understand that omnipotent grace runs downhill. He was cooking for men who were belligerently irreligious. So he offered to share more than food with these men and talked to them about Christ as he served breakfast. Since he was their cook, they could hardly avoid him. Jack, as a former atheist, knew what it was like to have others preach down at him, and he did not want to force his ideas or religion on anyone. As a college student, he also wanted to speak intelligently. Yet he soon realized that communicating the Christian faith required more than friendliness and intelligence. He had to meet the men where they were.

Among the men who were staying at the boarding house, Jack encountered a revolutionary who despised Christians and the Bible. As a member of the Socialist Party, the man looked forward to the day when enlightened society would line Christians up against the wall and shoot them. Jack decided to treat the man courteously while praying that the Lord would open his heart to the gospel. Although nothing came of his relationship with this angry revolutionary, he remained undeterred.

Another man, a dock worker named Tony, was also bitter toward Christianity—in his case, because he was an atheist. An Oregonian background had taught Jack that men like Tony respected courage, and although he was smaller than Tony, he wanted to reach him for Christ. He agreed to arm wrestle him, praying for the strength to keep his arm unmoved as Tony tried to wrestle him into compliance. Despite Tony's best effort, Jack's arm held up to the man's strength. Within a few days, Jack gained permission to talk to Tony about Christ.

Jack felt the instinct, as a new Christian, to witness to those who were closest to him. As a young man in the rough-and-tumble world of the Tenderloin, he also learned the importance of trusting others, including non-Christians, rather than trying to handle things by himself. Jack wrote later, "Some Christians want to rush in and confront others with the gospel without taking the time to build a relationship of trust. Others . . . [build] relationships, but never . . . lovingly confront their friends with the claims of Christ. I have been guilty of both mistakes. This is when we learn what prayer is all about. As we pray, the Holy Spirit gives us what we need: the right combination of love and boldness as we share with others the words of life."<sup>9</sup>

Jack knew that "the gospel was intended for desperate people."<sup>10</sup> And, especially in the absence of his earthly father and brother, he himself urgently needed to hear the voice of his heavenly Father. He pored over the books of John, Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, and James like a "Bibleholic"<sup>11</sup> until whole chapters fixed themselves

in his memory. Another resident at the boarding house, an unemployed drunk named Mel, asked Jack why he read the Bible all the time. “Mel,” Jack replied, “it’s the only way I’m going to make it.”<sup>12</sup> Both men had big needs. Jack’s drove him to the Bible; Mel’s drove him to the bottle.

Jack’s openness about needing the gospel intrigued Mel, but initially Jack did not take Mel’s ensuing interest in the Bible seriously. Then, around one o’clock one night, Mel knocked on Jack’s door; his knock, however, did not awaken Jack. Determined to read the Bible with him that night, a drunken Mel charged the length of the hallway and rammed his way through Jack’s door, tumbling on top of a now fully awake and terrified young man.

Another encounter in the boarding house taught Jack an important lesson about the power of grace in situations when a Christian humbles himself and leads in repentance. Thankless housemates complained about Jack’s average cooking or criticized his naive faith. After one of them, Big John, had spewed complaints and criticisms for weeks, Jack finally told him off in front of everyone. The man stopped complaining, but Jack’s conscience troubled him so much that he finally approached Big John to apologize for being a rotten example. As Jack spoke, Big John’s expression changed. “Please, please, don’t apologize. I think you are right . . . I’m not thankful for anything. I’m so ashamed.”<sup>13</sup>

Jack honestly received John’s apology and forgave him. As little Jack and Big John talked about the work Christ had done on the cross, Big John humbled himself, kneeled in his bedroom, and prayed to receive Christ. Jack and his most vocal breakfast critic became friends—and, more importantly, brothers in Christ. God was demonstrating the power of his gospel to hard-case sinners, who, like Jack, were also discovering that God’s grace is far greater than they could have ever dared hope.

Jack did not fully realize at the time that he was “learning more about sharing Christ by living in this boarding house and cooking breakfast than [he] ever could have learned from a systematic course

of instruction.”<sup>14</sup> He would go on to advise others, “Wherever you ‘cook breakfast,’ there is your classroom for learning to share your faith. The people you encounter daily are the ones Jesus wants you to share the gospel with. But make sure that you are understanding and loving the gospel more each day yourself or you will not be able to love and understand the friends at your ‘breakfast table.’”<sup>15</sup> As Jack publicly displayed his faith through life encounters that he had with these men across the table, he recognized how much he himself continued to need the gospel if he was going to be able to love others.

The relationship between Jack and another of the boarders—Gus, an atheist who was studying biology at San Francisco State—started poorly. A month after Jack arrived at the boarding house, the two men, who both deeply cared about the truth, engaged in an intense argument about science, evolution, and Christianity. On New Year’s Eve, Jack invited Gus to a young people’s gathering at First Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Gus agreed to attend but planned to leave before midnight in order to make it to some New Year’s festivities. When the group started talking about what Jesus meant to them, Gus remained fixed in his seat. On their leisurely walk home, Gus astonished Jack by saying, “I don’t see how anyone could be here tonight and come away an atheist.”<sup>16</sup> Arguing about the truth had not changed Gus. Instead, he had been won over by seeing the love that believers had for one another in their community of faith.

The boarding-house owner, Bill, believed that truth was a matter of preference—that it was different things for different people—rather than an unalterable reality. He had a weak moral center and had made lying and questionable business practices into a way of life. For some time, he used a naive Jack to carry his illegal bets to his bookie. Bill laughed at Jack and dismissed his frustration when he found out what he had been doing for Bill. Displaying no indication of remorse, Bill figured that he would find another unsuspecting person to carry his illegal bets for him.

By the end of May 1949, deteriorating personal health, combined with the disrepair of the boarding house, forced Bill to close it. Overlooking his unscrupulous behavior, Jack and Gus took care of Bill and closed his business—not because he deserved for them to continue to care for him in this way, after everyone else had left, but because the young men loved their unloving boss for Christ's sake. All three of them needed the gospel. Whether or not Bill would receive God's grace was not primarily Jack's burden but ultimately, like his own salvation, a work of the sovereign God.

DESPITE THE TRAGEDY and abuse that had occurred during Jack's childhood, he remained proud of his pioneering heritage and loved the untamed, pristine beauty of southwest Oregon. During the summer of 1949, Jack worked for the National Forest Service by spotting fires in the Siskiyou Mountains. He boarded in the Snow Camp Lookout, which was located above the Upper Pistol River and the Grasshopper Hill ranch that had once been owned by his father, Elmer.

In San Francisco, the city lights had obscured the majesty of the stars. Now, as he looked at the concentrated glory of God's creation—at the stars that were amassed above the great shafts of the mighty redwoods and Douglass firs—Jack thanked the Lord for everything that had happened to him.