

# Chapter 3

## My Faults & Failures

*Even a child is known by his doings,  
whether his acts are pure, and whether it is evil.  
Proverbs 20:11*

*For all have sinned and come  
short of the glory of God,  
Romans 3:23*

# My Faults, Sins, Failures

## Proverbs 22:6

*Train up a child in the way he should go:  
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

Just because God saves you and calls you it does not mean you are perfect and do not have struggles with sin. We all must battle with the old nature and this sin infected world that wants to bring us down. I'm not going to tell you all my sins, but let me illustrate a few childhood sins that afflicted me.

### My Secret Sins – Down by the riverside

My mother saturated us with prayer and the word of God. Mom drilled into us her other favorite biblical quote: *“Be sure your sin will find you out.”* (Numbers 32:23) We knew that we could never get away with anything that mom wouldn't know about later. How did she know? She would always warn us, “God tells me”, and He always would.

Sometimes it was God who told her, but other times it was one of my brothers. Once when we lived in the town of Monroe, Michigan we lived a few blocks from the river where we took up fishing and hunting for crayfish under the bridges. One day we discovered an old waterlogged Playboy magazine with pictures of naked women on every page. The only time we would have had contact with something like that was in the forbidden basement of our grandfather who had nude calendars on the walls. Of course, in our curiosity we had to find out what was so bad down there. Once our mom found out about the calendars we were banished from descending to that pit of hell.

We couldn't believe our find! We had no knowledge of those things. We couldn't believe women looked like that underneath those clothes. This was way better than grandpa's basement calendar. So, rather than avoiding those images (curious minds want to know) we took that waterlogged magazine and hid it in a crack under the bridge where we could return to study it more thoroughly. We swore ourselves to secrecy with an ominous feeling that somehow mom would find out. She did.

One day we made the mistake of having a little brother along when we visited our palace of porn. When he spied what we were looking at he grabbed a page and ran all the way home to tell mom the news of what Dave and Dickie were doing down by the riverside. How embarrassing! I'm sure that lecture was a livid tongue lashing. Dad got dragged into the spanking phase of our punishment. (I overheard my dad say, “What did you expect, boys will be boys.”) But what I remember most was not the lecture or the spanking, but the certainty that mom knew, or would know, everything we did. God talked to mom.

### Toilet Paper Adventure

While we lived in town on Wadsworth Street we had only one bathroom and that without a window or fan. Mom and dad would often light a match to dispel the odors in the room. That was our cheap air freshener. One day I was sitting on the toilet and saw the matches sitting on the back of the toilet. I decided to play with them, lighting and dousing one after another. Soon that got a bit boring. I wondered if toilet paper would burn slowly or rapidly. I got my answer in a blaze of flame. It burns quickly! The whole roll seemed to catch fire. I quickly doused it with my hand but it left burn marks on the wall. I tried everything to clean those marks. I tried soap, Ajax and bleach. Nothing would remove those stains. Being clever, I decided to unroll a few sheets of toilet paper and left it dangling enough to cover the marks. Within the hour mom called everyone to line up in the kitchen. We were in trouble. Someone had played with matches in the bathroom. She found the marks on the wall (God told her). Now she wanted the guilty party to step forward and confess or all of us would get a spanking. There we stood, six little innocents all standing in a row. I was under great conviction and was about to step forward as I secretly prayed, “Lord, deliver us now and in the time of our death,” when suddenly my sister, Norma Jean, burst into tears and confessed that she had played with the matches and left the burn marks on the wall. She got the spanking and I got off scot free. But I learned a lesson – *“Be sure your sin will find you out.”*

That “sin” of hiding my guilt dogged me for many years until as an adult my siblings were remembering events of our childhood and the toilet paper episode came up. I finally admitted to my sister that she took my punishment and that I too had played with matches in the bathroom.

### My Mean Streak

I was probably 9-10 years old when we had a streak of stolen property. Our ball gloves, baseball bats, baseballs, and a myriad of our precious possessions suddenly disappeared from our backyard. It didn't take us too long to figure out who was pilfering our treasures. It was a little boy who lived down the street. I could best describe him as a kleptomaniac. He had sticky fingers. Nothing was safe when he was around.

We were cartoon addicts in those days and cartoons weren't always the best examples of good behavior. I remember having seen Bluto in the Popeye cartoons doing a mean dastardly trick on a monkey that kept begging for money. In my mind I thought I would teach this little brat a lesson. I would lure him into my trap by offering him some easy money in the shape of a quarter. My plan was to heat it up, offering it to him just like Bluto did. I hoped he would take it and scald his hand which would teach him to never steal again. The day came when my parents were away. The little neighborhood thief came into our yard again. Being aware of his thieving hands I went into the kitchen, got the tongs, and proceeded to heat up a quarter on the gas stove. (Bluto did this to the monkey). I called him to the door and said, "Hey, Billy, you want some money?" Of course he eagerly said, "Yes!" and I threw him the hot quarter. He instantly grabbed it. There was no immediate reaction when he first grabbed it in his fist. Then his eyes got real wide and he screamed bloody murder and ran home still clutching the quarter.

I felt bad for his scalded hand. I thought the matter was done and he had learned his lesson, but when my parents got home the phone rang. It was his parents furious and threatening to call the police for such an act of terrorism. I don't remember how my parents got out of a lawsuit or an arrest but I did get the spanking of my life! I only remember my parents saying, "What were you thinking?!!" Obviously, I was not thinking clearly. I was thinking of doing unto him as he did to us. It was another lesson to show me that my heart was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

## **My Temper**

I had a temper. I had a bad temper. I had an explosive temper. I had a violent temper. I had my dad's temper. My temper often got me into trouble.

I remember a particular time when I got into a knock down drag out fight with my brother Mike. He was younger than me, but we were about the same size. I was a runt and he was growing rapidly. We got in a fight out on our ball field. He managed to put me down on the ground in a headlock, which wasn't easy to do, and he wouldn't let me up. Then he added a Dutch rub. (A Dutch rub is when you take your knuckle and rub it into someone's hair.) I got madder and madder and said so, "Mike, when I get up I will kill you!" I meant it. I was furious! Then I warned him again, "Mike, don't you ever let me up, because when you do I'm going to kill you." He did let me up. When he did I went berserk. I jumped to my feet and with all my strength I clobbered him with a round-house fist right to the eye. I heard and felt a crack as he screamed in pain and dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Mom heard the scream, as did everyone else, and Mike was rushed to the hospital emergency room. Once the dust settled and it was determined that Mike would live, howbeit with a huge black eye (which later I was quite proud of having given him), Mom took me aside into her bedroom and had one of those sermonizing and deeply convicting talks. I remember that one because she was right. She said, "Dickie, you have your dad's temper. When you get mad you lose all control and if you don't get it under control some day you will kill someone." Then she suggested a trip to the altar for victory over my temper. I knew she was right. I had a bad temper and when it hit I would go crazy and lose control of myself. I went to my room that day feeling horrible. I had come very close to killing my brother. If I had laid my hands on a baseball bat I think I would have beaten him to death. That's how out of control I was.

I did go to the altar that Sunday to ask the Lord to forgive me, though secretly I was quite proud of the shiner I gave my brother. When the elders knelt to pray with me I began to cry and told them about my temper and that I could not control it. They prayed with, for and over me that day that God would remove that poisonous temper from me. And He did!