

GOD Encounters

Stories of His Involvement in
Life's Greatest Mysteries

**FREE
EXCERPT!**

JAMES STUART BELL

YOUR FREE EXCERPT

from *God Encounters*

“Folks ask me if it was a dream or a vision.”

James H. Smith, as told to Leslie Payne

Born to an unwed teenager, James was passed around for the first ten months of life until his great-uncle Charlie and great-aunt Ola took him in. “I grew up not knowing who I was and thought I was a nobody,” says James.

Uncle Charlie thought differently. So did God.

Uncle Charlie taught him to build a wagon from scrap wood and use the wagon to deliver food around the neighborhood. “With the jingle of change in my pocket, I began to feel I was better than a nobody. I was helping provide for the family, just like Uncle Charlie,” says James.

“My great-uncle was a man of moral character and wanted us to be the best we could be, so he pushed us kids. We all worked hard at home, scrubbing floors and polishing doorsteps. He made sure we were in church every Sunday where I served as an altar boy.”

As the years marched by, Uncle Charlie started using a cane, and James made his own way in the world. After Aunt Ola died, Charlie moved in with James and his family. As he walked through the house, his cane tapped rhythmically against the floorboards, blending with the sound of the girls’ giggles and tears. Those family sounds were like a song James loved to hear over and over.

When he was ninety-six years old, Uncle Charlie’s cane was propped up in the corner of his room for the last time. The man who had worked so hard to fill the void in James’s life died. Uncle Charlie

was gone, but the questions of James's own self-worth lived on. He could no longer look to him for wisdom and advice.

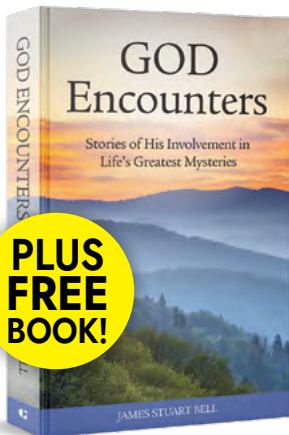
“The Lord knew my needs. In His perfect time, He gave the direction I needed that changed the course of my life.”

A number of years after Uncle Charlie passed on, James became sick with double pneumonia for the second time. As he lay in bed growing weaker each day, he labored with each breath. Beads of perspiration trickled down his forehead, and his body ached with fever. Family and friends prayed for him, not knowing if he would survive.

“One day the familiar sound of tapping against the wood floor caused me to rally my strength and open my eyes. I knew the sound of Uncle Charlie's cane as well as I knew the sound of my own voice. Though I was puzzled as to how he got into the room, I was eager to look into the face of my hero.

His clothes were bright white and wrapped around him like a robe. I felt peaceful as I enjoyed his presence. Too soon, his cane tapped in rhythm against the floor as he turned and walked away from me, and then he disappeared.”

From the moment of Uncle Charlie's visit, James got better. “Here I am today more than fifty years later, a retired United Methodist pastor. That visit from Uncle Charlie was my call to the ministry, the answer to so many of my questions. Uncle Charlie had been dead for years, yet the Lord still used the man in my life. **Folks ask me if it was a dream or a vision. Best answer I can them give is, ‘It was Uncle Charlie.’”**



Be touched by James's life-changing journey on page 48 of *God Encounters*.

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YOUR 2ND FREE EXCERPT

from *God Encounters*

Many Gifts in One

Lisa Plowman Dolensky

*W*ill he laugh or squeal first? I wondered.

There's nothing quite like planning a surprise for your child. Even when you're a pregnant and weary waddler with an energetic toddler. I was barely able to put one swollen foot in front of the other as Max, my two-year-old son, dashed down the store's toy aisle, giggling all the way.

I'd so looked forward to the toy-aisle visit. Instead of window-shopping as usual, Max would be getting a popping-balls push-toy vacuum like I had when I was a kid. It would be our first memory of purchasing a toy together.

Today I was anxious to see his look of excitement when we officially walked out with a toy he could claim as his very own.

Max handled his favorite toys, and then I introduced him to the toy "vacuum."

"Vrrrooommm! Look at what Mommy's got for you!"

He squealed first, his little body trembling with delight. Then he began to push the vacuum with gusto. I let Max roll and push it around for more than five minutes. Then I gently took it from his hands explaining, "Mommy's going to buy this for you. . . ."

But before I could finish my sentence, my darling's face fell, tears began gushing, and he opened his mouth wider than ever in a record-decibel piercing bawl! The resonation nearly threw me into labor.

Max held on with hands, legs, and feet. His all. Refusing to let go, he fell onto his back and nearly pulled this great mother load down with him.

He shrieked between sobs, “Mine! Mine!”

Where was the laughter?

My own mouth gaped open, but nothing came out. I was in shock and at a loss for words. Had the terrible twos arrived this second? Just in time for baby? Panicked, I looked around for any welcomed parental support. I hoped to hear the manager’s voice break in over the speaker’s music, “Parent support needed aisle nine.”

Instead, passersby either ignored us or threw us disgusted looks. Everything I’d been reading about effectively disciplining children was now forgotten. All I could lucidly think to do was pray silently, Lord, please help me. What should I do?

I felt a stare and sheepishly looked around as I disappointedly placed the toy high out of reach. A wrinkled, gray-haired, hunched woman, who was probably in her seventies, stood there smiling and tapping her walking cane. We had her attention, and she suddenly had mine. She lifted the cane and pointed to Max, saying, “If he were just a little bit older, you could just leave’m here.”

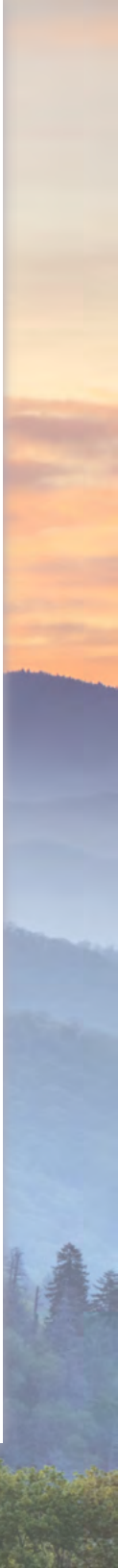
Her wit and wisdom made me laugh unexpectedly.

Then she said more affirming words: “Let him wear himself out, but don’t let him get his way.” Then she placed her cold hand on my shoulder and said words my tired heart needed so desperately to hear, “You’re a good mother.” I said, “Thanks for coming to the rescue. So how many children do you have?”

My kind stranger replied, “Five too many, but never enough.”

She slowly walked away as I began to wipe Max’s runny nose. When I looked up, she had rounded the corner, and I never saw her again.

Pooped and with spirits popped, I zigzagged down aisles until I could cart a slumping, half-dozing child out of the store. Tears slowly rolled down my own cheeks because I’d wanted this special gift to happen before the baby arrived. My husband often traveled out of town, my energy was getting low, and I knew we’d probably missed one of the best opportunities. It would just have to wait.



Many Gifts in One

(...continued from previous page)

There were more important things in life. I prayed, God please forgive me for feeling sorry for myself.

I waddled to my car, lifted Max's limber body into the car, and buckled him into his car seat. He now looked so angelic in slouched slumber. It began to mist rain. I locked the car.

I walked just a few steps to return the buggy to the designated shed. Just as I pushed it in, I noticed that the cart in front of it had a full shopping bag left in the tot-sit spot. I sighed reluctantly and grumbled, "Oh, great. Now I'll have to return this bag someone accidentally left, wake up Max, and carry him back in to do so."

I reached for the bag. I noticed a familiar blue handle peeping out of the top. One single purchase was inside—a popping-balls push-toy vacuum. A note was jotted on the back of the receipt: "For big brother when baby comes."

I suspected that the "angel" I'd just met had left this present.

Before I got in to drive, I let out a low volume shriek. First I was giddy and giggling. Then I silently wept a few tears of thanksgiving for the surprise gift my own heavenly Father had planned for this daughter.

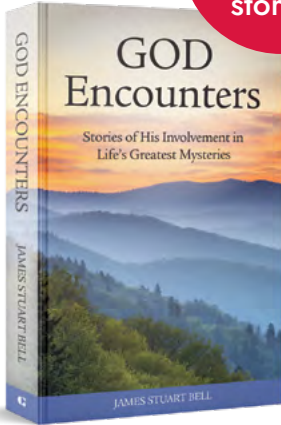
Actually, many gifts. Not just a toy, but also answered prayer thanks to help from a wise, kindhearted stranger. I also walked away with the gift of increased confidence regarding my own parental discernment.

I called the store later, but wasn't able to learn who had made that surprise purchase. However, I did learn that I have to exercise tough love by saying no when necessary. It will help my children prepare for their future days of independence when they are old enough to learn on their own, when I just have to "leave 'm here."

If this true story warms your heart, [click here to order God Encounters](#) and get *Cup of Comfort Book of Prayers* **FREE!**

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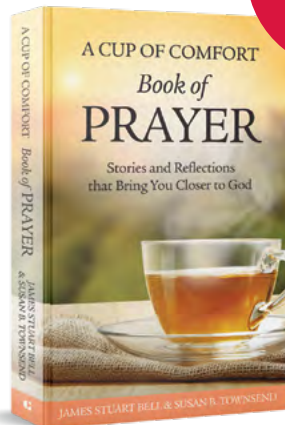
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