

Revived by Grace

Emma Clay

*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by  
his own desires and enticed.*

*James 1:14, NKJV*

This book is based on the memories of the author.  
Names of real people have been changed.

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## **THE SMORGASEBOARD OF DESIRES**

It shouldn't have been a surprise, especially to Emma's family, that she joined the Army when she was seventeen, in order to travel and get away from the farm. As a child, they said she would crawl into the backseat of every stranger's car that came to the orchard to buy apples. It was like she was always wanting to leave, thinking there was more than just the farm out there.

*You shall not covet... (Exodus 20:17).<sup>1</sup>*

This is one of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses for his children's wellbeing. God knew we needed these instructions to live life to its fullest. He wanted the best for us, and he knew this was the way to have that.

This concept is best described in Merrill C. Tenney's *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. He defines the word "covet" as a "selfish longing" and "greed for material gain."<sup>2</sup> This means setting your heart on something someone else has instead of being content with the gifts the Lord has given you. That is why the Bible says Thou Shalt Not!

But as disobedient children, we sometimes go against the grain and do what we want instead of what's best. And Emma was not listening to the Lord, but was instead listening to the hounding of her own desires.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone (James 1:13).*

The Army was the way Emma thought she could escape from the farm and from something else that she was hiding from—something deep inside that had recently happened.

Her parents didn't have the money to spend on college, and she didn't want to go anyway. Since she would need no money to join the Army, it seemed like the only option. She talked a friend into going with her on what they called the "buddy system." This meant she could go with someone she knew and not be all alone on the adventure.

Emma figured she could travel all over the world, and they would even pay her to do so. The idea was quite inviting. She was promised a career, and they would train her and teach her in any area of work she would like to choose. She chose the medical field.

The Army would even pay her room and board and give her a salary while she was trained, which would allow Emma to save the money she earned. What a great option for those who cannot afford college. It seemed like a good deal to Emma, so she

joined at age seventeen. Her parents had to co-sign, which just about killed her mother.

The week they were supposed to leave, her friend backed out on her. But Emma had made a commitment, and she couldn't back out. Everybody knew she had joined, and they even threw her a going-away party.

The Army turned out not to be the travel adventure she'd hoped for. It was regimented and disciplined and exactly what she needed—but not quite what she expected.

This life is depicted well in the movie *Private Benjamin*, which was released in theaters just two weeks after Emma graduated from boot camp.

Emma actually did well in the Army at Ft Jackson, South Carolina. She had been appointed squad leader, and she was great with her M-16 rifle. She also made a great friend in her squad, and together they would pray in the barracks at night to overcome their homesickness.

She recited the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm every day, even in the chow line with her hands behind her back. She prayed for the Lord to be with her and help her get through her uncertainty.

She was afraid. She was in an environment that was very different from the way she had grown up. Her parents seemed to be saints compared to the people around her, and she wanted to go home. She realized what she had at home had been wonderful, and she had taken it for granted.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters (Psalm 23:1-2).*

Emma imagined running through meadows of green grass, swaying in the summer wind. She envisioned herself back home again, running over to the creek that flowed through the valley. She would lay down by the stream and listen to the water flow down the brook and stare up to the blue sky as the clouds floated by.

”*Attention!*” she heard a voice say, and then her drill sergeant told her to drop down and give him twenty. “You weren’t listening to a word I said,” he yelled.

Emma was shaken back to reality, and the heat from her fatigues and her boots made her sweat terribly. You see, they were not allowed to leave their shirts out. Their shirts had to be tucked into their pants and their pant legs tucked into their boots. This left no room for the air to circulate, and it was a hundred degrees outside. She knew this was so they would learn to handle the heat better.

Emma was living with people who didn’t look like her. Many were black, and she was white. Even her two drill sergeants were black. You have to remember, she had been sheltered most of her life from anywhere except the farm, with only an occasional trip to the beach with her parents.

The color didn’t matter to Emma; she looked inside people for love and kindness. She knew God made us all. She would hum to herself a children’s

song: *Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Basic training was coming to an end, and just like in the movie, her life seemed to run parallel to *Private Benjamin*.

She realized she had used travel as an excuse to not to deal with the true, underlying reason she joined.

Just like Private Benjamin had joined the Army out of sorrow for her husband dying, Emma joined to escape the guilt she felt over an inconvenient truth—also involving death.

Homesickness set in even more after her graduation ceremony and the reunion with her mom and dad. She got her assignment to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. It was there, with all the newfound freedom it offered, that loneliness truly set in. Unlike in boot camp, where she was housed in the barracks with forty other soldiers, there she was alone.