

# Never Too Late

*as told to Jeannie St. John Taylor*

When the realization hit my friend Nancy Russell that her father was afraid to die, she knew that understanding came from God. And she knew she was supposed to go talk to her father about the Lord. Even though he lay like a corpse in the final stages of Alzheimers. Even though he'd abused her as a child.

So, praying for wisdom and supernatural help, Nancy climbed into her car and drove to her father's nursing home. He lay on his back in semidarkness, vacant gray eyes staring at the ceiling. Nancy moved to the edge of her father's bed, and reached for his hand. It was cold and unresponsive.

Leaning close, she began to talk. "Daddy, it's me." He didn't respond and she didn't expect him to. "I want to thank you for being my daddy," she said.

For the rest of the evening, all day Saturday, and most of Sunday, Nancy perched on her father's bed, struggling to think of good things to say, praying for her father's salvation. She rubbed the back of his hands, brushed his hair, and leaned close until her back ached. She chatted non-stop about every positive event she could remember from her childhood. But her father's hand remained limp.

Late Sunday afternoon, a confusion of voices from the hallway announced visiting singers. When they launched into an upbeat version of, *Bicycle Built for Two*, a long forgotten memory nudged Nancy. "Do you remember singing that, Daddy? You had a beautiful voice."

Her father squeezed her hand!

Nancy's heart raced. God had opened a door!

"Daddy, I know you're afraid to die," she said. She traced patterns on his palm, praying her touch could hold him while she outlined the plan of salvation she'd presented so many times before. "If you accept the Lord, Daddy, you won't be afraid to die."

Her father lay still, his eyes blank.

"I know you understand me, Daddy. God is in the room translating for us, removing your confusion. I know you don't want to go to hell. I know you feel badly about a lot of things.

"I forgive you, Daddy. Now God wants to forgive you." She could hear urgency building in her voice. "I'm going to pray now." She took a tremulous breath. "Dear Jesus, my Daddy wants to say he's sorry." She cradled his hand in both of hers. "I'm going to pause now so you can say you're sorry, Daddy." As an act of faith, she waited, giving him time.

“Now, ask Jesus to come into your heart.”

Tears slipped down her cheeks. Had he heard? “Do you know Jesus is in your heart now?” she asked. She craned her neck to look directly in his face.

Her father turned his head slightly and made eye contact with her, his soft gray eyes completely clear. Two tears dropped onto the sheet, spreading into dark circles. He squeezed her hand . . . hard. Then the blank expression returned and her father disappeared again.

But Nancy knew she’d see him someday in heaven.