

A painting depicting a figure in a dark, textured suit standing in a room. The background wall is covered in a dense, chaotic pattern of vertical brushstrokes in shades of yellow, orange, and red, resembling flames or a wall of fire. The figure is positioned in the center, facing slightly to the right. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract, with a focus on color and texture.

MELTDOWN

Rick Tuttle

MELTDOWN

By

RICK TUTTLE

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Dr. Rick Tuttle

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wife, Robin, and children, Christine and Deanna, for encouraging me to write this book.

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PROLOGUE

As his wife Natasha peeked into the church, she found her husband at the front of the church, kneeling down but looking up, as if speaking to someone. As she listened, it sounded like Zain was accepting instructions. To anyone else that may seem somewhat odd, but not for Natasha. There were numerous occasions when she had found her husband in such a deep conversation that he was not even aware of her presence. She listened for just a moment but was certain she heard him say, "Yes Lord, I understand, but others won't. Yes, I will do as you say and not worry about what the opinion of others may be."

Sometime ago her husband, and the pastor for many, had determined that a closer walk with the Lord was not only possible, but necessary for the pastor of a church, regardless of how big or small it may be. While being the pastor of a country church was not his first choice, Zain found himself satisfied to be where the Lord wanted him without consideration of the personal cost. Most men who are called to pastor have dreams of a big church near a city of sufficient size as to feel as though his work is never done. However, when a man is called to pastor a rural, country church and has visited the same house many times, it is easy to start to believe that he is not making a difference.

At dinner that evening Natasha said, "I came by the church earlier and saw that you were in prayer." Her desire was to get a little information

as to the content of the conversation she overheard and her curiosity was heavy in the air. She was just itching to hear what "others" would not understand. That clearly did not include her, for although she was quiet, she had always understood the desire of Zain's heart and had often encouraged him when he felt the weight of being a pastor on himself.

"Oh! You heard that?" It was as if Zain, for the first time in their marriage, had a moment when he was hesitant to share with her what the Lord was doing. "When we finish supper and open the Bible I will show you something that I hope will help explain it," he said. The rest of their dinner was eaten in silence. Although Natasha wanted to press for more, she knew it would do little good and could even be an opportunity for the devil to slip in and cause a division.

As was this couple's custom, sharing the cleaning, Zain gathered the dishes and took them into the kitchen while Natasha dutifully and happily drew the water to wash the dishes. Zain finished wiping the table and dried it with a towel so when the Bibles were laid open they would not be spoiled with food. Zain had not consciously thought on it for some time but it was important to him to handle the Word of God with the right heart and attitude, including making sure that it was not damaged any more than necessary.

With dinner ended and the table cleared, Zain opened his Bible to the desired passage and quietly prayed that the Lord would enlighten their eyes as they read and studied His Word. Coming around the corner from the kitchen, Natasha suddenly had a little feeling pass through her that she could not

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explain, yet it was as if a familiar calm settled in. She knew that Zain had taken his time to bring this study about and a familiar song just entered her mind and escaped her lips in song; "We have come into this house and magnified the Lord to worship Him, We have come into this house and magnified the Lord to worship Him, We have come into this house and magnified the Lord to worship Him, Worship Him Jesus Christ our LORD!"

Zain looked up, tears falling from his cheeks, and said, "Truly God is good and knows just what to do to make this study special." Now Natasha's heart was really racing but she attempted to keep her calm demeanor while she took her seat. What she really wanted to do was grab her husband and shake him and say, "OK! Enough of the secrets! Cough it up!" but instead she just smiled and sat waiting for Zain to lead, as he should, in their nightly Bible time.

Zain looked at his wife of so many great years together and asked, "Do you remember the time when the Lord began to call me into the ministry? Those moments when the Lord seemed so real like we could just reach out and hug Him? Or the time when we were called to start a church overseas for the Military? That closeness would be hard to describe." Puzzled, Natasha looked at her husband and understood that this was not going to be just an average Bible study, but rather a time when the Lord was going to open up to the both of them so He could accomplish His good pleasure.

Breaking the silence in the room, Natasha cleared her throat as if she were about to say something of great importance but she really had

such a dry throat it was difficult for her to speak. "I remember like it was yesterday, and also the time when you were not sure about retiring from the Navy and we spent much time in prayer. The Lord just showed up and confirmed that we were right where He wanted us in our lives and that He had a plan that would one day make sense to us." Zain smiled and knew that his "help meet" was right beside him and would understand what would come next in their Bible study. "Do you remember in Genesis when God spoke to Noah?" asked Zain. Natasha sat quietly and nodded her head to let Zain know she was ready and waiting for this conversation to continue.

"I'm not sure if this is going to make sense to you or not, but, like Noah, who was to build an Ark to save the people of the world from utter destruction, the Lord has told me to do some building. Not to save the world, but to care for my family and help meet the needs of others as He would direct." He paused for a moment to let that statement settle in and to prepare her for what was yet to be said. Zain looked intently into the hazel eyes of his wife and coworker of so many years. She hardly blinked and it was difficult knowing if this was making any sense, but he pushed on saying, "God told Noah to build the Ark with specific instructions, and, like Noah, I have received instructions as well. What God has not done is tell me when to begin, where to build, or how this will be accomplished financially."

Natasha finally blinked and swallowed hard enough that Zain heard it. He was thinking to himself, "It must be hard for her to swallow this

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story," as a smile swelled up across his face. She just looked at him for a moment and replied, "What?" They laughed for a time, unsure exactly why, but it did help to break the tension in the room. After the laughter stopped Natasha said, "Let me get this straight. God told you to build something and has not yet shown you the when, the where, or the how?" "Yep, that about sums it up!" was all Zain could reply. "OK," said Natasha, "I believe you and am here to support you in any way possible. I heard you say that others would not believe you but I want you to know that does not include me, and I'm sure it doesn't include the other members of our family either."

A familiar passage in the Word of God was in their Bible study for the night. *Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* After much discussion about this and all the "what if's" they had as the Lord was helping them start this journey, they ended the time in prayer. "Dear Lord, we are in way over our understanding of what you want us to accomplish, so if it's OK with you, we will just follow your Word and lean on you and not our own understanding. We will follow you even when others may not, and we will accomplish what only you will give us the strength to do, Amen."

MELTDOWN

Chapter 1

Spiritual Preparation

Zain Roberts had always wondered if he could pull the trigger when his gun was pointed at a person, as opposed to a target, being a preacher and all. After submitting to training, passing a background check, having a permit issued, and becoming comfortable carrying a weapon, the question remains as to whether or not one could really pull the trigger when called upon. That question was answered a few days after the fall of all he knew of law and order. It was not an easy question to answer, but he determined that any intentional action toward any person that would threaten the well-being of his family, including his church family, would be cause enough. Being a pastor in this day and age was not easy and yet here he was. Zain knew what was coming and making preparation for it was difficult and often accompanied by great criticism, even from the family that he loved so much. Now here he was in a world that you might read about in a science fiction book of apocalyptic proportion.

Time seemed to pass slowly as days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Zain recalled the days when it seemed as though a year would go

by and many people would make a comment about time flying. "Busy" would be the excuse many used to not pay attention to the little things in life that truly carry value. Values change quickly when work is defined as a day of foraging for food. Water was not the real issue, as most science fiction stories would depict. He had put in a new well one year before the "meltdown" (as most have come to call it) and with the help of the self-contained power plant there was sustained power adequate to provide for the household needs. The key in this style of living is not to flaunt your preparation accomplishments, lest others would see and act out of desperation or greed to take what does not belong to them.

Food was not an immediate emergency either, but not knowing if life would ever resemble the old normal, Zain felt it important to hunt and fish when he could to supply fresh meat, and not deplete the stored food supply as quickly. The Lord had blessed with a year's supply of freeze-dried foods that was stashed for emergency rations. His family had helped out during a flood in the area and the Red Cross had brought in a lot food. As life returned to normal and the families chose not to depend upon the government but rather depend on neighbor helping neighbor, as it should be, the need for the food supplements dwindled. The Red Cross had already allocated this food and did not want to be bothered with restocking the shelves, so they contacted several of the families that had helped and simply dropped it all in their laps. This was likely a political move. They did not want to appear uncaring and since the amount of food had already

been leaked to the press, what could Zain do but thank the Lord and store the food for whatever may come their way? He did, and stored as per the directions, in a dark cool room. Hmmm, who would have ever thought about storage of food? Oh yes, the Lord did! As Zain was building the extra rooms in the secret building project, a storage room was added with just enough space to hold all that food. Imagine that! What God does to prepare His servants!

The most pressing issue they faced was the invasion from the city folk when they realized the government would no longer meet their every need or desire. As a simple preacher, Zain had always preferred country living over city living and now it made perfect sense. The family garden had been planted and they were still reaping the harvest from the previous year with hard work and planning for the old-fashioned act of canning produce. In a few short weeks canning would again be a major task in preparing for the winter months. That is, if there was any garden left to harvest! Protecting family had now been increased to include providing their food and water. Zain had no problem sharing with those in need but watching for the theft of food that was necessary for his family and extended church families by strangers that believed they had the right to take without even asking had become a daily task. What do you tell a man who is scavenging for his family when there appears to be plenty for him to eat and take, but you have planned for the harvest to be used for your family's extended needs?

The first time was the hardest. "Mister, you are on private land without permission and you are stealing what clearly does not belong to you," was what the pastor said. The man's surprise and horror of looking at the barrel of a loaded gun was only momentary because food was so scarce that the threat of death was almost a relief. So what is the "Christian" thing to do? Zain told the man to put it all back, and proceeded to set the man down and began to talk. One conversation that was so easy to avoid in the past was religion, but no more. The preacher was not after religion so much as he was interested in telling a person of their need for Christ as their Saviour. In years past, Zain felt that he always had tomorrow, but now with the days as they were, time is a luxury that many do not have. Each day is a struggle to survive and hard decisions must be made. The Gospel message is not one of forced conversion or even a few hasty words from a frightened man. Clearly a heart transformation is necessary for salvation to be possible. The pastor's job is not to convert, but to tell of the wonderful news of what Christ had done over 2000 years ago on a cross meant to condemn and how God made it a cross of redemption. So, after speaking to this stranger, food was freely given. Zain no longer minced words with anyone, so as to whether he "got saved" or not who knew but God? The stranger listened, asked a few questions, and seemed to be extremely interested in the gift of salvation that God has provided.

The local, state and federal governments had regressed into a vote that was bought and paid for. Over the years the humble preacher saw the

warning signs when the news proudly announced that 57 percent of all Americans were accepting some sort of aid for their family needs. That number soon rose to a new record and it was not long after when the bottom fell out of the financial market and the riots that 'would never happen', like those in Europe, did in fact take place. The powers that counted beans knew that, if you had the vote from all that were on assistance, you had the power to hold the highest office in the land. Any person that would call for restraint, or re-evaluation of our entitlement programs, was instantly attacked by the media which in turn kindled the wrath of the people.

No one in this community knew what Hollywood did when the great meltdown occurred. Stories circulated for weeks and families waited with little patience and no restraint. Nonetheless, the hope that the all-powerful government would swoop in and save the day slowly gave way the reality that there was no help coming. This was true throughout this great nation, as day after day passed and hope was replaced with panic and fear. In an economy based on commerce, entertainment, and service, it was only a matter of time before it became impossible to hold up, like holding jello on a nail. There were so many families that had relied on the food trucks for subsistence and they were no longer available.

As Zain watched this he thought it perfectly resembled the "cascade effect." When one service failed the weight was shifted to another, and one by one they fell. Who produces power when there is no money to be made? And what good is money if

there is no food to be purchased? The Hollywood that was the hope of this brave, new world of entertainment worth millions of dollars brought no relief to the hungry. And when hungry people walk the streets no one is safe. It was this that caused the government to feel it necessary to fire live ammunition rounds into the crowds. This accelerated the fall of law and order.

The smarter looter sought after canned goods and fresh food items instead of the foolish greed for inedible treasures. The Bible has spoken of these days but the world always thought that America was too big to fall. God has a way of preserving innocent lives even when a government encourages abortion for any reason, making it appear acceptable and even normal. Now a nation stands in judgment with no one to blame but themselves. Many preachers looked the other way, saying nothing and doing less. The political powers made it illegal to approach a woman who was clearly heading toward an abortion clinic. Those daring to press the issue soon found themselves in hot water with the law. Could a nation's judgment come because of sin? Most certainly, but it was the culmination of a culture that rejected God as Lord and Saviour. It was only a matter of time before this house of cards would fall and Zain was a preacher who was looking for the rapture but preparing for the future.

So, to shoot or not to shoot was a real question to be answered, and answer Pastor Zain did! He was prepared. Just a few short days after the great meltdown happened, a man decided to randomly raid and loot homes in the area. No one

would ever know what made him choose the Roberts house, but the outcome was certainly not what the man had planned! With a baseball bat in hand, the intruder demanded that the preacher allow him to rummage through the house, and God only knows what else was in his mind. Zain simply said, "No. You will not assault my family and this stops right now." When intruder sneered, "What are you going to do to stop me?" the man of God brought his pistol from behind his back. He was not expecting the intruder's sudden move towards him but he was prepared to respond. A single shot rang out and the perpetrator stopped dead, with a very questionable look on his face. The last words the intruder ever spoke on this earth were, "What gave you the right to shoot?" Zain's answer to that question was simple; "The Bible commands me to protect my family." What the intruder did not know was that being a Christian does not exempt one from protecting one's family.

Since there were no longer any authorities to report the incident to, the now humbled servant had a moment of silence before burying the man in his final resting place in an un-marked hole, or grave, to be more formal. Zain began to wonder how much room would be necessary for this. If this was just the start of this mess, he was sure to be called upon again to protect his family. How could, or would, he stand before the church that he pastors and declare God's love when he must perform such an ugly act? What Zain did not know at that time, was that the very same week, four other families of his flock were similarly required to act. When they came to visit and declare their