I was once overcome with Guilt from my past sins and convinced that God\'s Grace was for everyone but me. I was a habitual sinner. Repenting only to sin again. I like to say that I attended the International School of Sin earning a PHD in Backsliding.nThat was before the miracle of an angel God sent me to answer my prayer of confirmation of his forgiveness. Grace Trumps Guilt is my personal journey from debilitating feelings of guilt to triumphant gratitude in the wake of God\'s Deliverance for me.nnIntroduction and Chapter One:nnGRACE TRUMPS GUILTn1nIntroductionn“Donna, do . . . you . . . go . . . to . . . church?” my brother Frednasked, with a hint of sarcasm in his voice. I looked at him, not entirelynsurprised by the question, and then slowly responded, “Fred, Inintentionally and regularly attend church!”nIntentionally seeking God was the point of the eulogy that had beennpreached just an hour before at my brother-in-law’s funeral. It had been anpowerful message, and one clearly aimed at those not saved. My brotherin-nlaw, Billy, had been in a fatal car accident and had died instantly. Hisnlove for Jesus was evident through his intentional service for Christ.nLarry Wells, my cousin and the minister, had given a beautiful portrait ofnBilly’s love for Christ. After the service, our family gathered in thenfellowship hall of my brother’s church, where a meal had been preparednfor us. It was a cold, rainy, December day, two weeks before Christmasnin 2008.nMy first response to my brother was to just laugh and ignore him, butnthen I thought, God answered my prayer for this very moment. I nonlonger needed to cry or joke about my salvation: I am a Christian! Onenday, when I take my final breath in this life, I will spend eternity withnJesus. Fred’s teasing had in some ways contributed to my insecurities.nI’ve been told that we say in jest what we carry in our hearts.nSeated several places down and across the table, I moved in front ofnhim, looked him straight in the eye, and said, “Fred, let me tell you aboutnthe day God sent me an angel.”nIt’s been years since that miraculous day, yet the dramatic change itnbrought into my life is every bit as real today. I cried as I spoke, and Incould see that Fred was extremely close to crying himself. There was nondoubt he believed me. He didn’t hesitate to say, “Only God could havendone this for you!” But why had I not shared my wondrous story?nDONNA COLEn2nI explained that I had shared—with my husband, our sister Jean, andna few of my closest friends—how God had answered my prayers ofnmany years and how He had given me what I needed to feel confident innmy relationship with Him.nI had no indication that it was about anyone but myself. He loved menenough to answer my prayer; no one but me could truly understand thensignificance. For that, I am eternally grateful and will worship on mynknees before Him one day. I will thank Him for that, and for so manynother blessings.nFred persisted in telling me that I needed to share my story with thenworld. His wife, sitting next to him, looked at me and said, “Donna, therenmay be others in the world, struggling with the same issues ofnforgiveness. This could help them!”nI told them that I had never thought of it in this way but would give itnmore thought—which meant I would pray about it.nThat night, I lay in bed praying, “Heavenly Father, do You want mento tell the world of this miracle?” Over the next few days, I could thinknof nothing else. Yet, how would I share my story? Perhaps a book? Inthought.nWas God calling me to tell my story? Doubt and anxiety haunted me.nI’m not a writer or a public speaker! As a true Southerner, mynvocabulary choices have occasioned several moments of laughter—withnfriends! (Of course, they laughed with me, never at me!) I was notnintelligent or eloquent enough to speak of God’s greatness and His love.nI pray daily, “God make a difference in a hurting soul through me,nspeak to the condemned through me. May I be willing and eager tonfollow where You lead me.”nThis led me to praying the “Prayer of Jabez,” from 1 Chroniclesn4:10:nAnd Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that Younwould bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Yournhand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil,nthat I may not cause pain!” So God granted him what henrequested.n(I Chronicles 4:10, NKJV)nGRACE TRUMPS GUILTn3nIn addition to praying the “Prayer of Jabez,” I have added my ownndesires for these blessings: “Bless my eyes, Lord, to see the needs ofnothers. Bless my hands to care for the poor. Bless my legs, Lord, to walknas far as You need me to travel. Bless my heart, Lord; let it benoverflowing with Your Love for all people.”nLater that week I was doing my daily Bible devotion, and the subjectnwas “Giving birth to what God has placed within you.” I pondered thenwords and felt they were meant for me!nAs days turned into weeks, I slowly began to put words to paper.n“God, I have no idea what I’m doing. If this book idea is from You, thenngive me the words.”nThen the LORD asked Moses, “Who makes a person’s mouth?nWho decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or donnot hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go! Inwill be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what tonsay.”n(Exodus 4:11-12, NLT)nUnless one knew me during these years of doubt, it is difficult tonfathom my anguish. I wanted to know that my sins were forgiven, but Inneeded spoken affirmation from God! What if my sins were too many,nand there was no hope left for me? I had to know that too!nI believe in angels and, even beyond that, know that God has sentnmany to protect me throughout my life. Nevertheless, I prayed fornanother angel, one that would talk to me, in an audible voice, and statenclearly that my sins were forgiven! That is what God provided me, andnthat is what I want to share. I prayed many years for an angel, and annangel He sent. I have no words to express the joy I feel because of thenGrace my Heavenly Father so lovingly extended to me.nSo my answer is, “Yes, today I give birth to what God has placednwithin me. How sure I am of His love for me . . . and His love for you.nThat is why I am here, why every step I ever took was one step closernto . . . here.”nHere . . . meaning my opportunity to tell the world how beautiful mynGod is and how deep His love is for a sinner such as I. Though I left himnmany times, He never left me. He saw my tears and answered mynprayers!nDONNA COLEn4nI attend Grace Covenant Church in Cornelius, NC, and recently ournsenior pastor, Rev. Ferrell Lemmings, asked the congregation to considernsharing their individual “God Stories.” He described God Stories as onesnthat praise God, glorify God, encourage others, and strengthen their faith.nIn the following chapters I am going to share my God Story with you. Inpray that through my story you will see GOD’S BIG, BIG LOVE fornyou. If one life is changed, one soul accepts Christ as Savior, one brokennheart is mended, then this book and my story will have succeeded innglorifying God.nThe only reason for this book is to glorify God. Only He can directnan impure, sinful life such as mine and use it for His purpose.nWhatever may be your task, work at it heartily (from the soul),nas [something done] for the LORD and not for men.n(Colossians 3:23, AMP)nGRACE TRUMPS GUILTn5nChapter One:nIf I Am a Christian, Why Do I Feel Condemned?nHave you ever been to a job interview and been asked “Who arenyou? Tell me about yourself,” by the interviewer? I have, and I hated thatnquestion; I never quite knew the answer. When you don’t know yourselfnwho you are, how do you tell someone else? I failed at what matterednmost to me, and I was left hating myself and despising my existence. Inlonged to be the person my friends saw. They viewed me as confident,nsuccessful, and God-loving. I may have appeared together on the outside,nbut inwardly I was terrified. Only God knew the real me, and I was surenHe did not like what He saw.nThe real Donna, who was she? She was a perpetual sinner, but howncould I tell an interviewer that? Was it a curse? Was it genetic? Did I getnthis from my dad?—as you will see later, he certainly had committed hisnshare of sin in life. I didn’t know the answers! I only knew that was thenway it was, and I had little or no hope for change.nNot intentionally, but maybe subconsciously, I must have adoptednthe “fake it till you make it” strategy, because my co-workers and friendsnsaw me differently. Friends were always telling me how my relationshipnwith Christ blessed them. Wow, I would think. Really? I do try to helpnothers and want nothing more than for others to see Christ living in me.n“How could someone like me be a blessing to anyone?” I would asknmyself.nDaily I would cry out to my Heavenly Father, “Am I a Christian? Arenmy sins forgiven? The desire of my heart is to glorify You, yet all I do isnfail You. If I am a Christian, then why do I feel so condemned? Pleasenshow me, tell me, send me an angel . . . for . . . just . . . a . . . few . . .nminutes!”nDONNA COLEn6nI prayed this prayer for years, crying and pleading for confirmationnthat my sins were forgiven and that I was a Christian. The internalnconflict about my salvation held my soul a prisoner, regardless of hownoften I repented, went to church, read my Bible or prayed.nSome people believe that, if one is truly saved, she will not want tonsin; her life is changed from the inside out. These words confused andnterrified me and finally left me convinced that I could not possibly bensaved. Other times I have heard people say, “The devil made me do it!”nReally? I would think to myself, I’m not sure it is the devil. It is mynnature, my self-will, my innermost desires that prevent me from living anspotless, Christian life.nDo you think about eternity and where you will spend it? Eternity,nwhich means “immeasurable time,” used to be such a scary word to me.nDo you believe in heaven and hell? Do you have the assurance—or evenncare—that heaven will be your eternal home? I thought about this all thentime and was daily tormented that hell had a fair chance of being myneternal dwelling place.n“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter thenkingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of mynFather who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day,n‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in yournname drive out demons and in your name perform manynmiracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you.nAway from me, you evildoers!’ ”n(Matthew 7:21-23, NIV)nThese verses were how I viewed myself, and it terrified me. Was Inplaying games with God? Would I stand before Him one day and be toldnthat He never knew me? I walked away from God for a season. When Inreturned, I struggled believing that God had actually forgiven me. I couldnneither forget my sins nor forgive myself. Would God actually forget—nmuch less forgive—them?nI was living in bondage, my inner peace replaced with guilt, failure,nand an intense fear of death and judgment. I prayed continuously fornforgiveness, but feeling forgiven did not come. I knew I must bendoomed. These were all lies of Satan to keep me spiritually bound. Inwanted to be a Christian, and I knew that I loved God. But I must admitnGRACE TRUMPS GUILTn7nthat, more often than not, I sinned without even realizing it. Some sins Inchose to do and others I struggled not to do. It became a constant battle.nPsalm 19:12–13 says that David asked God to forgive his hiddennfaults and to keep him from deliberate wrongs. David was able tondistinguish between the two and did not allow guilt to destroy him andncause him distress. He knew that God’s grace covered all of his sins—nthe ones he didn’t realize he had committed and the ones that henknowingly committed. Therefore, he prayed that both his words and hisnthoughts be pleasing to God:nMay these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heartnbe pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.n(Psalm 19:14, NLT)nIn 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV), God’s word tells me the exact opposite isntrue from the way I felt:nFor He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and ofnlove and of a sound mind.nJentezen Franklin writes in his book , Fear Fighters, that fear is notnrational and is not based on fact. He writes that researchers have foundnthat 40 percent of the things we worry about never happen.nMy fears were based on my wrong choices and not on the fact thatnJesus died for my sins of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Once wenrepent and ask forgiveness, our sins are washed clean by the blood ofnJesus. God no longer remembers our past failures.nWhy did I fail Christ so badly if I were truly a Christian? I wasnrelying on my own abilities, and through this I started obeying thendesires of my flesh instead of continuing to let the Holy Spirit guide me.nSo I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desiresnof the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit,nand the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflictnwith each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.n(Galatians 5:16-17, NIV)nDONNA COLEn8nI enabled my failures. They became my identity: someone whonwould not stop sinning. Sadly, I saw these mistakes as proof that I couldnnot possibly be a child of God. I chose to believe the lies of Satan rathernthan the Word of God.nFor when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earnnGod’s approval. So I died to the law so that I might live fornGod. I have been crucified with Christ.n(Galatians 3:19, NLT)nPaul realized that his relationship with God was not based on hisnkeeping the Jewish laws and that he was crucified with Christ. By this henmeans that our sins died with Christ on the cross and through Jesus wenare no longer condemned.nDoes this mean that we need not worry about obeying God’s word?nNo, when we His Children trip and start to fall, the resurrection power ofnJesus is right there to catch us.nThose who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passionnand desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucifiednthem there.n(Galatians 5:24, NLT)nI thought my willingness to live a Christian life was based on mynabilities. Yes, we must want to repent and ask forgiveness, but thenstrength to see it through, to live and walk daily in victory, well, thatnstrength comes from the Holy Spirit. Don’t allow your weaknesses tonkeep you from God. He doesn’t need your strength; He wants your heart.n“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.n(Zechariah 4:6, NIV)nI hope you’ll keep reading, because, if you’ll allow me, I’m going tontake you back into my past. I’m going to show you how, like David andnPaul, I now have the peace and assurance that even my darkest sins arencovered under the blood of Jesus.nGRACE TRUMPS GUILTn9nChapter