

Real Life Stories

Lighthouse Edition



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Real People
in
Real Places
with
Real Problems
Looking for a
Real Answer

*People so Real that it could
be someone you know.*

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CHAPTER 1

I Never Felt Like I Belonged

My self-worth was so low that I began to have suicidal thoughts...

I wondered what it would be like for me to walk out into moving traffic...

I thought if I just died and disappeared, then people would love me...

I grew up going to church off and on. My grandmother would take me to church when I spent the night at her house. I would always observe the people worshiping God and feel a bit envious. I could never understand how, even as a young girl, I never felt like I belonged. I always felt everyone else knew themselves, but I didn't. I felt everyone had a place to belong, but it never seemed like I did.

My relationship with God was always very complicated. I desperately wanted to please God. I wanted Him to be proud of me. I desperately wanted to feel seen by Him. However, my image of my Heavenly Father was clouded. I believed that God was pleased with everyone but me. I believed that God was proud of everyone but me. I believed that God saw everyone but me. I believed that God accepted me, but that He had lowered the bar for me. I felt that God begrudgingly allowed me in, but that He loved other people more than me. I felt that He was angry with me. I felt that He was annoyed by me always asking Him for things, always striving to please Him, and always trying to be seen by Him.

Because of my clouded image of God, I eventually gave up trying to please Him. I decided to try to please people instead. I tried to seek attention from others in any way I could. I allowed every person in my life to take advantage of me and treat me poorly because I thought that was what I deserved. I allowed people to speak curses over my life because I believed those things about myself already. I believed that everyone could see my brokenness and was drawn to it. I was a magnet

for people who sought to hurt me, curse me, and take advantage of me.

My self-worth was so low that I began to have suicidal thoughts. “The world would be better off without me,” I thought. “If I just died and disappeared, then people would love me.” I began to imagine what would happen if I drove off of a cliff while I was driving. I wondered what it would be like for me to walk out into moving traffic. I fantasized about what people might say about me after I was dead. I went to church every Sunday but tried to sneak in right as church started and sneak out as soon as church ended to avoid being seen.

Even though I knew many things about Jesus, I didn’t know Him personally. There was a moment in my room that I began to write out all the things I felt were unlovable about me. I wrote everything that I felt made me unworthy of anything good. As I wrote this list, I heard the still-small voice of God tell me a verse in the 139th Psalm that I had heard many times in church: “For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Then I heard the still-small voice of God ask me a question: “When are you going to allow me to give you what you’re searching for?” I began to weep, and I surrendered my life to God.

Since that day, I have opened myself to receive God’s love and acceptance that He gave us through His Son, Jesus Christ. My identity is in Christ Jesus. I have rejected the thoughts about myself that I used to accept. I have found a community of believers that I can grow with and serve Jesus with. I have found my passion in studying the Bible and teaching God’s Word to others. Through studying the Bible, God has revealed to me His perfect, unfailing love for humanity – me included – throughout history. He has called all of us to Himself that He can give us what no other person, accomplishment, or possession can give. He is not angry with you. He is waiting for you to call on Him and surrender your life to Him.

Today, I am serving in my church. I am part of the leadership team for our church’s Young Adults ministry team and am allowing God to use me to minister to young adults who are just like me. I do not serve God hoping that I will earn God’s love and acceptance. I serve Him willingly

and wholeheartedly because I know that I am already loved by Him. My relationship with Him is not one that I have to strive for acceptance. My relationship with Him now is one that I choose everyday with joy. No matter what happens in my life, there is a constant joy and hope that despite my circumstances, He will never leave me, abandon me, or forsake me. Praise the Lord for His goodness!

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CHAPTER 2

I Carried the Weight of My Past

Life was so confusing... I felt so alone...

I felt like I was destined for a life of pain...

My world had crumbled...

Right before I was born, my grandfather was killed by a semi-truck. My father liked to drink a lot, and it made him mean. He would get into physical fights with his brothers during family gatherings. I would be ushered upstairs to watch all the young children. This is when I began to grow up rather quickly. At age 7, I found out that my father had been cheating on my mother. They didn't separate right way, but it was brutal. There were times my father would verbally and physically beat my mother. My mother found a boyfriend, Jimmy. My father attempted suicide in front of me and my two sisters while my mother was at work. He continued this abusive behavior in all his romantic relationships. This caused me to struggle with anxiety as I was growing up.

My mom and Jimmy married and were expecting my brother. He was born April of 2004 with CMV. After living in the NICU for 2 months, he came home. I quickly became the one who would help my mom with everything. One night, I had woken up from being sick and came upstairs. He was sleeping in his basinet, hooked up to monitors and a breathing machine. Something in my gut told me to check on him, but I fell asleep on the floor in front of him. I awoke in the morning to my mother screaming and my stepdad turning him over and bile oozing out of his mouth. This is the moment I began to carry guilt the size of a truckload. I remember that night my mother crying in my arms, asking me what was she going to do. I became my mother's emotional support system. I was only 10 years old. We started to attend a church with two gay lead pastors. Life was so confusing. I definitely didn't think there was a God. If there was, why would my brother be gone? A few months later, she became pregnant with my youngest sister. I was so angry she

could replace my brother so quickly. She was born with cerebral palsy and mild autism.

Once I started 8th grade, my mother was arrested for embezzling money from payroll at the nursing home she worked at. She took a plea agreement and was put on house arrest. It was during this time she met a man online from New York. He went by his middle name, Romeo. She was enthralled in her new relationship. This was the time I had heard a couple people in my grade who were self-harming. I decided to give it a try so that I could be the one in charge of my own pain for once. I would use razor blades or scrape thumbtacks to cut my upper thighs. I would even punch my legs until they were bruised so every time I walked I could feel them throbbing. I only cut my upper thighs so no one would see the marks. I was hurting so much, and I felt so alone. I was trying so hard to be strong for my sisters and for my mom. My mom's pregnancy led to an abortion, which caused severe depression. I had to take care of my sisters. Once she was off probation, we moved to New York. It was very hard to keep moving. Nothing was stable for me. I was 15 and got my first job. I thought I was doing better until I got into a relationship with a guy a little older than me. He ended up joining the Coast Guard, and then we had a long-distance relationship. He broke up with me while I was in class, and I had to have my mom pick me up from school. I hadn't cut myself in a while, but I did that day. My mom was concerned about how I was acting and forced me to go to the hospital to be evaluated. I was thinking, "At this point, why would she care now about me? Why would anyone care?" I felt like I was destined for a life of pain, and I just didn't see how anyone would love me. I was a teenager in my own world, but I was also aware of all the verbal abuse my mom and Romeo were doing to my sisters. I wouldn't learn the extent of this abuse until later on in my life.

I met my husband Eric in my junior year of high school. We dated two years before he left for the Marine Corps. At 19, I moved out to go live with my dad in Texas. I had gotten a job at a bar & grill to make some money before moving again. My dad had lost his job while going through his 4th divorce. He would end up sitting at the bar from the start of my shift until the end. It quickly took a toll on my mental health. One night, he took a loaded pistol and put it to his head. I was begging and pleading for his life. I said, "I am getting married. Don't you want to be

alive for your grandkids?” Thank God, his friend was staying with us for the weekend and was able to talk my dad down.

Shortly after Eric and I married in 2014, in North Carolina, we found a church we would call home. I gave my life to Jesus and was baptized January of 2017. Life felt like it was getting better. My childhood was behind me, and I thought I was healing. A day after I gave birth to our 2nd daughter, I found out my stepdad had been sexually abusing my sisters for the past 8 years. My world crumbled. It all felt like a lie. I remember sitting on the bed trying to replay everything. What signs did I miss? How did I not know? Why didn't they tell me? I began to carry another load of guilt that I was never meant to carry. Since I helped raise my sisters, I also felt like I failed as a mother. Mentally, it was hard while I was trying to have a family of my own. Around this time, Eric was getting out of the military, and we moved to Indiana. The court trials were postponed again and again due to Covid. My emotions were everywhere. I was hurting so much for my sisters. Finally in 2022, the first trial began. He was found not guilty. The devastation was catastrophic. Around this time, a toll began to be taken on the relationship between my mom and me. That is something I'm still trusting God to mend. In 2023, the 2nd trial began. After a long two weeks of my sisters testifying, he was found guilty on all charges. He was sentenced to 18 years.

For so long, I carried the weight of my past and trauma that I wasn't meant to carry. God has delivered me from it and forgiven me for holding onto it. There are some days that I struggle, but I know Jesus understands my struggle and is with me. I've learned how to cast my cares upon the Lord. There is hope in Jesus. Your story is important, and it is worth telling. I have been married for 9 years and am raising our four daughters in Christ. We homeschool and are breaking all generational curses! We have even started our own faith-based podcast “Unqualified But Faithful” to be able to help others in their walk with Jesus and to share the gospel! God is so good!

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The Truth

The people you have just read about had to come to a place of knowing, understanding, and accepting the truth before their lives could be changed.

As you read through these “Truths” in the pages ahead, take time to think about your life. These truths, when received, invite you into a loving relationship with God that will bring you peace, joy, and personal transformation to discover and fulfill your life’s purpose and destiny.

Throughout the rest of this book, in between the many more “Real Life Stories,” we will share some of these truths with you.

CHAPTER 3

I Hit Rock Bottom

I became not only the girl he cheated with but the girl he cheated on...

I was depressed, lost a lot of weight, and had insomnia...

I felt an emptiness in my gut...

Nothing satisfied me anymore...

I grew up going to church every Sunday from the time I was little until my teenage years, but it was mainly tradition. We prayed the rosary together as a family on occasion, and during those times I felt close to God. I loved Him and wanted to be a good person. We had a crucifix in our home. Whenever I would look at it, I was filled with compassion for Jesus and anger too. I was angry with the evil people who crucified Him. "How could they do that to Him?" One time, I un-nailed Him from the cross and envisioned Him coming back to life, hugging me, and thanking me for saving Him. Little did I know, I was the one who needed saving!

In junior high school, I started attending a youth group that introduced me to having a relationship with Jesus. The people there were so joyful, and I was shocked that people could be so excited about Jesus. I loved going to youth group. I fell in love with Jesus and had so much joy and peace in my life. During high school, the youth group underwent a lot of changes, and it eventually died out. At the same time, the world was starting to get my attention. I started to party, date guys, and just follow the ways of the world. I lived for the next party and dated lots of guys.

In college, the partying was over the top. At my peak, I partied every day! At that point, I also got involved in a relationship that would have a significant impact on me. I was madly in love with him, but he was totally wrong for me. I was also completely wrong for him. We were selfish, partied too much, and were both cheaters.

My last year of college, it was as if I began reaping from all the years of

partying and cheating. I hit rock bottom due to all my choices. I became not only the girl he cheated with but also the girl he cheated on, and he broke my heart! At the same time, I had lots of drama with many people, lost my job, and wrecked my car. I didn't know how to handle the stress of it all. The drinking was the worst, and the tears were nonstop. I was depressed, lost a lot of weight, and had insomnia. I began to pray again, but it was more like begging and pleading with God to help me.

I remembered the days of long ago when I had joy and peace with Jesus. I began crying out to Him, begging and pleading with Him to take me back in time to the days of youth group. I longed for peace! I had never been in so much pain. I felt an emptiness in my gut. Nothing satisfied me anymore.

Somehow, I came to the conclusion that I was going on a search for God. I would try all the religions of the world to find Him. Even though I had previously known God, it's like I had forgotten it all because of all the darkness I had lived in. During that time, I met a lady who was a Christian. I reached out to her one day just to inquire about her church. She was actually on her way to a mid-week church service and invited me to go with her.

That day, the pastor taught on the topic of making real changes. It was exactly what I needed to hear. I responded to the altar time, and the lady came and prayed with me. The way she prayed with me was as if she could see right through me and understood all my pain. She seemed to have knowledge of details I had not told her. Her prayer touched me profoundly. She asked me if I wanted to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I remember thinking that I had tried everything else, why not give this Jesus a try. I repeated a prayer of repentance and asked Jesus into my heart. At that moment, it was a simple prayer. I was open to Jesus, but I had not really understood what this meant. That night, I slept for the first time in months. I just felt so rejuvenated, like I could breathe again.

The following Sunday, I went to church again and as soon as I walked in and heard the music, it touched my heart. I knew deep within me that I had found what I was looking for. I observed how all these people loved God and worshipped Him. I was taking it all in. Hope was born

that day. I began envisioning myself living in a new way. I didn't know how it would all work. There was so much junk to sort through. Yet, it felt like the pain of staying the same was greater than the pain of changing!

Then, all hell broke loose! My boyfriend and I had begun fighting really bad, especially on the weekends. We were always drunk and fighting every Saturday night that we'd be too tired to get up for church on Sunday.

A few weeks later, I ran into my Christian friend. She asked why I hadn't returned to church. I was honest with her and told her about the fights. Her response surprised me. She said, "Well, you know why that is, it's because the enemy causes you to fight every weekend to keep you from going to church." She said it so confidently. I got so mad – at the devil! Then I determined in my heart that he would not have his way anymore, and I would go to church every Sunday! And that I did!

God began a deep work immediately in my life. The first few months, I spent so much time at the altar and cried so much. God was cleansing me from the years of sin and darkness. I was so in love with Jesus. I said goodbye to my old life and walked away from it all – the parties, the alcohol, and the friends. I was set free from so many things instantly. Other things took time and learning new ways.

Today, I have been walking with God for 24 years. He has taken me on wild adventures. I would not change any of it! From the moment I said yes to Him, I have not looked back! Jesus is EVERYTHING!

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CHAPTER 4

Alone and Unloved

I lived with a lot of fear...

Fear of failure...

Fear of disappointing others...

Fear of letting people down...

I put up walls and tried to protect myself from people...

I was lost and broken, until...

I can't remember a time where I didn't know of God. I remember hearing about Him throughout my childhood, little bits here and there, but never really knowing Him. Although if you asked me back then, I would have told you that I was saved. Now, I know better.

There was a lot of chaos and trauma growing up. My dad was a bad alcoholic and had a bad temper. My parents would fight a lot. My dad would get drunk and kick my mom out of the house with us kids (me and three siblings). I lived with a lot of fear as a child. It was not only fear of what my dad was going to do, but also fear of failure, fear of disappointing others, and fear of letting people down. I never really knew who I was or who Christ was. I became a striver. I was striving for people's love, striving for acceptance, striving for any kind of control I could get. I grew up in an environment in chaos and no self-control. As I grew older, I didn't really understand how much my environment shaped me. I didn't realize how much fear I was carrying.

I went through my entire life making decisions based out of the same fear that I grew up in. I made a lot of poor decisions. I married a man who had the same addictions that my dad had. I stayed for fear of being alone. My dad ended up getting sick from his drinking. He had to stop drinking and went through two separate seasons of illness. Through those seasons, he found the Lord and got saved. That encouraged me. I was attending church where he went and checking the church box weekly. I thought that was good enough, but I never really knew the Lord. When my dad became sick the second time, he ended up dying.

At that time, I was very close to him. However, I never heard the words from him that I wanted (I'm sorry or I love you). It was very devastating to me and my family when he died, and I stopped going to church.

I spent the next 16 years living without my dad. My family fell apart. I wasn't going to church, and I didn't know God. I wound up divorced after 18 years of marriage. I was living my biggest fears. I was alone, disappointed, and unloved. I look back and can see God calling me even though I blocked His call so many times. He blessed me with two children, allowed me to become a nurse, and still kept calling me. I would pray during this time and would occasionally try to go to church, but my heart wasn't in it. I put up walls and tried to protect myself from people and even from God.

I met a man, Jim, and it was a very rocky relationship at first. We were two broken people trying to find our way. That is never a good thing. At one point, we broke up, and I was devastated. I again was alone and really just sick of myself and sick of fear. I cried out to the Lord and just kept crying. I didn't know what to do with my life. At one point, I was so full of anxiety and fear that I was taking medication to try and calm down. It didn't help. I would drink, but that didn't help either. It was the one thing that I hated and knew destroyed my dad's life. I was lost and broken. I had a desperation for freedom from the things that were pulling me into a dark abyss, but I didn't know what to do to get that freedom.

One day, Jim asked me to go to church. We were broken up at the time and both going through a very heavy time. I went to church with him and sat next to him. We would leave and go our separate ways until the next Sunday when we would see each other again. It was a very strange thing to go with him while broken up, but I still went. The Lord started to really work on me, and this time I began to hear His call. I started having dreams about Him and even one night woke up yelling out to Him. He was working on me separately from Jim. He was working on Jim at the same time. I started to crave the Lord's presence because that's where I would feel peace. I started to change the things in my environment that were chaotic and wrong. Instead, I filled myself with His presence. I started to journal and get to know women at the church and even started taking classes that taught me more about God and walked me through healing.

I rededicated my life to the Lord. This time, I had a full understanding of who He is and what a relationship with Him was. I wanted Him in my life all the time and wanted to live for Him. In the most loving way, He showed me what love is, and He brought healing to a lot of broken areas. He showed me what I needed to repent of. I went through deliverance and healing from fear and a lot of other things. I have not battled fear since! I learned how to fight back. The enemy will always try to bring fear back, but I don't allow it. The Lord has sustained me, grown me, and taught me in ways I could never imagine. I fully surrendered my life to Him, to His ways, and to His path that He wants me on. It's been the most wonderful journey. He corrects me when I'm out of order and continues to shower me with His perfect love. There is freedom that is found only in Him. It is a freedom that is not of this world and there is no other way to get. I will never turn from Him again. I know that I will someday see my dad in Heaven, and that is a sweet moment I look forward to.

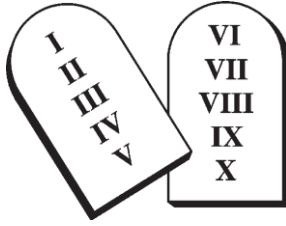
And what happened with that broken relationship with Jim? Today, we are happily married, serving the Lord together, sharpening each other, and living for our Savior! God has done a miracle work in my life. It is not because I'm good but because He is good. I have fully surrendered to Him!

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God's Law



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1 You shall have no other gods before me
- 2 You shall not make yourself any graven image
- 3 You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy
- 5 Honor your father and mother
- 6 You shall not kill
- 7 You shall not commit adultery
- 8 You shall not steal
- 9 You shall not lie
- 10 You shall not covet

Each of the people you have read about had to face God's Law.

Have You Obeyed God's Law?

Are You Sure?

You can go to the next page and read several more "Real Life Stories" or you can skip ahead to our next truth on page 25.

CHAPTER 5

A Fatherless Home

Abandonment and rejection...

I built walls and stepped into survival mode...

I grew up in a fatherless home and felt a lot of abandonment and rejection growing up. I would see my cousins with their dads. I felt jealous and angry, knowing that I did not have a dad of my own who loved me enough to stay with me and take care of me. My uncles were like father figures to me, but it was not the same. I walked through life having a lot of anger, pride, frustration, self-condemnation, hurts, offenses, rejection, abandonment, and so much more. The list is endless. At a young age, my mom and I moved around a lot. We were living with different family members until we finally got our own place. My mom worked a lot, so there wasn't a lot of supervision. I can recall having a strong desire to be wanted and loved. I am sure my mom loved me, but when there isn't stability and security growing up, those feelings start bubbling up inside. My mother had a few boyfriends I can recall and some situations that were not suitable for children whatsoever. Through it all, I built walls, stepped into survival mode, and fended for myself.

At age 18. I met my husband. From the moment we met, there was a spark between us. Although it was tough, I came from a background of tough and could handle whatever came my way. Even though we would bump heads at time, I felt then as well as today that we're soul mates. I got married at age 20 and had our daughter as well. It was then that I learned a different kind of love. As the years went on, my husband and I faced a lot of adversity. We had our ups and downs. Our downs consisted of consequences from the use of drugs and alcohol, pride, anger, manipulation, and control. I was a mother, wife, college student, woman, a Mexican woman at that, daughter, friend, and sister. I was so many things to so many people. It was overwhelming, even frustrating at times. I never learned good coping skills. I lived life in survival mode, day in and day out. I tried my best and did all that I could do to keep my marriage and protect my family. I eventually had a son and life continued that same path. The good days were really good, and the bad

days were really bad. This roller coaster continued for years. Towards my early 30's, I felt like there had to be more to life than the way we were living. I began really searching!

At age 33, as life continued, so much had happened in our life that at times it felt unbearable. My husband and I were still together, only by the grace of God, even though we did not know Him just yet. We had a daughter and a son. We had experienced a huge death in the family that shook our world. As a result, we were trying to get closer to God but didn't really know how. My sister-in-law is an amazing woman of God and prayer warrior. She believed for the salvation of her family and would do whatever was needed to plant seed and water. She had been inviting us to her church events. We would sometimes attend, but we would leave feeling like this is not for us. In 2016, she started attending a different church. She would ask if she could take our kids with her to family night if my husband and I couldn't go. We were always tired, so we would agree for the kids to go. We would attend Catholic church from time to time. However, that too felt like it wasn't for us. There must be more. We continued in our lives with the ups and downs, the partying, and looking forward to the weekend just so that we could drink and get wasted. It became a common theme, and my kids were aware of that routine. In March of 2017, on a Saturday night, my son asked us if we could go to church on Sunday. At that point, there was no way we could make it that Sunday. Our partying was in full swing, and most likely we would be in bed all day the following day. His reply was heartbreaking to say the least. He wanted to make sure that we would not party too hard and get wasted so that we could attend church next Sunday, the church where his aunt had been taking him and his sister all this time. I of course said, "Yeah, for sure," brushing it off and continuing with my night. That following week, as we got closer to Saturday, my son reminded me of the promise we made. With a sober mind and the desire for more in my life, I made a conscious decision to follow through. We attended church on March 19, 2017. That day, my whole world changed. As I sat there, I felt raw and open on display. The pastor was speaking straight to me and all that I was feeling and experiencing. I felt like God was calling me out and asking me if I was done searching, telling me that He would give me all that I was looking for. I cried so much that day, and I felt such a peace within me the moment I said yes. That day was the beginning of a new life for me!

The aftermath not many talk about, but I hope this gives you some reassurance, is that all hell breaks loose after you say yes to God. Things don't get easier. If anything, the devil is really mad and will do whatever to keep you where you were. The difference at that point was that now I had God to fight for me, to give me all that I needed to overcome whatever circumstances I faced. It was seven hard months because as a family we were in a battle zone between good and evil. I was now saved, and the things I enjoyed before were no longer appealing. The old desires were in a battle with my new desires to do things God's way. I needed to make intentional choices, whereas before I just did what felt good without thinking about it. Take heart and stand firm. Lean on God. He will carry you through it. Read His word. It will be the best weapon you'll ever have!

It has been six years since Jesus saved me! He has transformed my heart and rescued me from that awful roller-coaster life I was on. He has redeemed me, delivered me, healed me, and restored me. My life is abundant, but that doesn't mean easy. I have trials and tribulations, and I as well as my family are constantly growing in the things of the Lord. He is always refining us. However, it's abundant because HE is in control. HE just asks for my surrender and obedience. The Lord has restored relationships that only through Him could ever be restored. There has also been relationships that are no longer how they used to be, but I trust and believe He will restore those as well. As a family, we serve at our church and are so blessed to have a church family like the one we have. The Lord has provided a peace that I just cannot explain. I know that He is always with me, and I am no longer an orphan. I have a Father in heaven who loves me and tells me that I am enough! He is a Father who calls me His own. He has chosen me and predestined me before I was placed in my mother's womb. He created me with a plan and a purpose. He guides me every day, and I can love today because He first loved me. I am so thankful and grateful for all that the Lord has done in my life. However, I am not an exception. He can do this and more for you and your family. I pray that my story has blessed you today and that you give God a chance. He is always pursuing us!

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CHAPTER 6

My Old Destructive Ways

I started to feel like the black sheep of the family...

I went through some rebellious years...

I was very insecure about myself...

I felt trapped and controlled...

I got lost in partying, drinking, doing drugs, and sleeping around...

I had hit rock bottom...

As a child, the youngest of four, I grew up in a good home with my parents and siblings. I had the affections of my father and a mother who loved and took care of us well. My parents believed in God, and I remember going to church at times. At one point, I remember my father switching religions, searching for the truth. Eventually, we stopped going to church altogether, and he chose to study the bible on his own.

As I approached my teenage years, I began to feel the lack of affection and attention from my father and I started to feel like the black sheep of my family. I also believed my father was too strict and controlling, and I went through some rebellious years. I desired praise and acceptance, but I felt I was not getting that at home. At that time, I knew who God was but did not have a relationship with Him.

In Jr. High, I started going to a youth group along with my best friend. I loved it. We would all pray with each other, sing songs, and worship God together. I accepted Christ in my heart as my Lord and Savior, and I felt His love in ways I never had before.

As time went on into my high school years, the youth group ended, and I started letting the world influence me in negative ways. I was very insecure about myself, to the point of self-loathing and being suicidal at times. I was disrespectful to my mom. I felt trapped and controlled, and I wanted to be free.

In college and throughout my 20's, I got lost in partying, drinking, doing drugs, and sleeping around. I was doing things I never thought I ever

would. I had many different relationships during this time. One relationship was extremely toxic and damaging. He was charming but manipulative, and he took advantage of my insecurities. He was verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive. Eventually, I was able to break free from him. I had hit rock bottom and felt so lost. I reached out to my best friend, who had been living for God and going to church. I asked to come to church with her, and while I was there I felt God's presence once again. I rededicated my life to God and was excited to start living for Him and leave my destructive ways behind.

Soon after, I decided to move to Miami for a travel nurse assignment. Although my friend was concerned about me leaving so soon, I believed I would find a church there and would be fine. I was wrong. I quickly found myself right back in my old destructive ways from before and even worse.

After a couple years of travel nursing, I decided to move back to my parents home. During that time, I continued to party, all the while feeling the guilt of knowing what I was doing was wrong. I longed to be back with God. I ended up pregnant during that time. After having my daughter, I would try to get back to church, but then I would go back to partying and finding excuses not to go.

One day, my friend invited me to join her in a program called Hope and Healing. During that program, I received healing from God in many ways. I was able to forgive myself and others and receive forgiveness from God for some of the terrible choices I had made in my past. I had a huge breakthrough moment one night. For years, I had been searching in all the wrong areas for the love and acceptance I was lacking. I tried to fill that hole in my heart with the attention and affections of men for years, and God showed me that He was the only one who could fill that hole. His love was sufficient, He would never fail me, and He was there for me all along as my heavenly father. Even though my father loved the only way he knew how, it could never fill the space that I was supposed to let God fill. I forgave my father, forgave myself, and allowed the love of God to fill me and complete me. I began to learn what it was like to walk in that love, and finally I was learning to love myself as well.

During that time, I still struggled leaving my old life. My friend invited

me to a friend's house with some sisters in Christ. That day, I heard powerful testimonies from these women, and I was blown away. When I saw the huge transformations God had made in their lives, I knew He could do it for me too. I longed for it. So, as I was leaving that night, I decided to open up to them about my struggles. I asked if they could keep me in their prayers. One of the girls suggested praying over me right then. They surrounded me and prayed. I never felt such powerful prayer before. I felt God speak to me in a way that night that made me feel empowered to finally submit my life to Him and leave the old destructive patterns behind.

After that night, I decided to let go of things and people that were causing me to stumble. It was a process for some and quick for others, but I was finally committed to letting Him lead my life. After some time, I learned about getting baptized. I was ready to make a public declaration, die to my old life, and be raised to my new life with Christ. I was baptized 15 years ago, and I have not looked back.

Around the time I was baptized, I also met the man that I would eventually marry. He is a wonderful man of God, and I am thankful to God for him. He's been such a blessing in my life. We've been married 13 years, and we have 4 beautiful children. We've been serving together as a family in God's kingdom over the years in many different ways. God continues to work in us and through us, exposing more and more to us lovingly and patiently day by day. God also recently took us through a powerful season of deliverance and freedom from oppression, and I look forward to each new season He will continue to carry us through.

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Sin

On page 20, we asked if you had obeyed God's Law. *Have You?* Most people will say, "Yes, I have. I am a good person." Let's focus now and take a close look at some of God's Laws:

Commandment No. 9 says: *You shall not lie.*

Have you ever lied? Told a fib? Maybe just a little white lie? Twisted a story to meet your need? Lied when you were a child? Lied at work? Lied on your tax return? Lied for your spouse or kids? If I lied, what would that make me? A Liar.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 8: *You shall not steal.*

Have you ever stolen? Taken something from work? Taken a piece of candy? Cheated on your taxes? Worked for cash and did not claim it as income? In your younger years, did you take anything that did not belong to you? What is a person called that has admitted to the above? A Thief.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 7: *You shall not commit adultery.*

Have you committed adultery? Jesus said, "Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you ever looked at another person with lustful thoughts? What would a person be called that has done the above? An Adulterer.

At this point we have talked about three of God's Laws. How many have you broken?

Take a moment to go back to page 18. See if you have broken any more of God's Laws.

From here, you can go to the next page and read more "Real Life Stories," or you can skip to page 31 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 7

I Never Turned Back

As my girls reached their teen years, they started making choices that didn't line up...

It was a battle, and I had to learn to fight...

If you are struggling to keep your family afloat, don't carry it alone...

I was raised in church, but I was not a Christian until I reached my teens. I grew up in a very loving home. I grew up respecting my dad with the highest honor. I always looked to him to “guide me in the way I should go.” Giving my heart to the Lord in my mid teen years, I can honestly say I never turned back. This is not to say that I never felt God far from me at one time, but I was able to feel Him close again.

So, once I began to have children, I always instilled in my children that if they were going to be a part of something, they needed to be honest and abide by the rules of whatever they were going to be a part of. My favorite scripture was “train up your child in my ways for when he is grown, he will not depart.” This is a promise from the Lord. So, I strongly believe that if we do this, He will always bring our kids back towards Him.

As my girls reached their teen years, they started making choices that didn't line up with His ways. I went into a time of prayer and fasting on how I could help them. I started praying for a church that would help me guide them to what God had for them. His ways are always better. After a year of praying, I received what I believe was a prophetic dream. In my dream, I could see myself on a circus tight rope. Then God put a crown on my head and told me, “You have to balance yourself to get to the other side.” So, I proceeded to walk on the rope while balancing my crown. As I did that, some black birds started trying to take what was in my crown. So, get this picture: I'm balancing, trying not to fall, plus trying not to drop my crown and now swatting the birds from getting

what was in my crown!

In this dream I didn't know what was in my crown until I got to the other side. God told me to remove what was in my crown. Inside, I found a men's gold pocket watch. As I looked closely at the watch, my daughters' names were dangling from where the numbers were: Priscilla, Elsie, Crystal, and Stephanie. I turned the watch around, where I found a scripture engraved on the watch. "Proverbs 22:6. Train up your child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it."

When I woke up from this dream, I knew it was prophetic, and I knew I had to be obedient. So, I started praying for that church. I'm not saying it was easy. It was a battle, and I had to learn to fight this battle in the spirit realm. That's when I grew spiritually in Christ! My four girls are now serving the Lord and are operating in the gifts and talents that God has given them! I know that I know that my children and my children's children belong to Him. God lends us our children to love and nurture and give them back to God. They are His. They don't belong to us. They are what He says they are! If you are struggling to keep your family afloat, don't carry it alone. Give it to God and let it go. Trust Him to do the work that needs to be done.

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CHAPTER 8

A Picture-Perfect House

I felt like such a screw up...

I wanted to disappear...

I became “boy crazy”...

I felt alone and not loved...

I was extremely depressed, feeling so alone...

I was drowning in fear...

I was trapped...

I couldn’t bear it any longer...

I am the youngest of five children that my mom and dad had together. My parents separated before I was born and were divorced before I could walk. My mom moved me and my two sisters from Chicago to Indiana, after my oldest brother died when I was four. She bought a house and took on a full-time job to support us. My mom’s boyfriend from the city immediately lived with us. I had the picture-perfect house on the outside. With my mom being overworked and suffering from my brother’s death, I was verbally abused, dismissed, and told what a burden I was. I felt worthless and thought everything was my fault. At times, I was beat. I still remember getting an outfit dirty on our swing set and being left having to explain the alarming, dotted bruises all over my legs that the brush bristles left.

My sisters and I saw our dad every other weekend. He remarried when I was eight. My mom’s boyfriend became addicted to cocaine and started abusing her. He was in and out of the house for years. After both my sisters were gone to college, the abuse I suffered worsened. I continued to go to my dad’s house in Illinois. It was the only place I saw what a healthy relationship looked like. When I was 14, my mom’s boyfriend was gone for good. My mom would cry herself to sleep. I wanted to disappear but needed love and attention. I started looking for it outside the home. I started having sex and became “boy crazy.” This made my relationship with my mom even worse. I felt like such a screw

up. I started hitting my head against my bedroom wall under my hair so no one would see the bruising. By fifteen, I became very sexually active and started burying my pain in weed. One day, the abuse became so bad I hit my mom back. This led to problems with my entire family, leaving me feeling even more unloved and alone.

The relationships I had in high school were with addicts I thought loved me and were all about sex. At the age of 18, I was told to leave. I worked 80-hour weeks to pay all my bills and support my own marijuana addiction. I thought I had found freedom and happiness, yet I still felt alone and not loved. My relationships followed a pattern of drugs, sex, and abuse until I was 25. At the age of 26, I got engaged to my current husband. We spent the beginning of our relationship in and out of bars, as he was a heavy drinker and I had a love for karaoke, dancing, and weed. We were married and bought a house by 27. I was set on not having children. I saw them as the giant burden I had been. Since it was just us two, our overindulgences in everything and anything we wanted carried on. I pretended his drinking wasn't so bad, as I continued to get high to find happiness. Drunken scary nights led to an unhealthy marriage, and I was now the one crying my nights away. I was extremely depressed, feeling so alone. It was my childhood all over again, a picture-perfect house on the outside but a wreck on the inside.

In 2016, we had our daughter. I had stopped smoking pot, and my husband decided to quit drinking on and off for a few years. During those years, I had overwhelming fears of losing our daughter. When her lymph nodes became swollen, I became terrified of germs and often kept her inside. I was drowning in fear. We sold our old farmhouse that I thought was causing my daughter's illnesses and needed constant upkeep. Then, in February of 2020, we bought a townhouse that needed little maintenance. We were going to travel and live it up. I thought freedom and happiness would finally come. A few weeks after we moved in, the lockdowns started. The unbearable fear and a loneliness I've never experienced before left me lying in bed at night with chest pains. The only thing that made it go away was drinking. My husband and I filled our refrigerator with booze. A few months passed, and I no longer feared a virus but feared what a virus would lead the world to become. I feared for my daughter's future. Would our "normal" ever return? I wasn't seeing any outside family or my friends. We were

“alone together,” as people were saying.

The deepest depression set in along with rage. So, I kept drinking. When I was done for the day, my husband kept going. I hated what life we were giving our daughter. I couldn't stand to be in my own home, but I was trapped along with the rest of the world. I couldn't bear it any longer. With the world crumbling around me, I knew I needed help. It was not just MY world; THE world was getting worse. I needed freedom, love, and hope for the future. I thought, “What can save me because I cannot save myself?”

I reached out to an old friend and asked where she was attending church. A few Sundays later, my family attended service and have been going ever since. I found a love I never had and happiness I never knew existed in Christ Jesus. Over the last two and a half years, God has healed my family! Praise God, my husband no longer drinks and has become the best father to our daughter. He has given himself to Christ and is now a loving present husband. Thank You, Jesus, I no longer fear the disasters the world brings. I no longer question my self-worth because God has taken my pain away. Through God's love, I have forgiven people in my past and forgiven myself. Jesus has filled my marriage with a love only He could. My house is a healthy place for our daughter. He has given me freedom from addiction, and depression is behind me. God has given me peace to forgive my mom for my childhood. I now have a real, wonderful, and loving relationship with her. Every morning, I wake up feeling joy and gratitude for my life. I have given my heart to Christ Jesus my savior, and He has made everything better! He did it all because He loves me, and He will do the same for you.

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Penalty for Sin

One day, every man, woman, and child that ever lived will have to pay the price for their sins.

The Bible says:

“For the wages of sin is death.” -Romans 6:23

Death, meaning eternally (forever) separated from God. Every person will spend eternity somewhere. Heaven or Hell. (There is no in between.) You are either with God or the Devil.

At this point, you may be thinking this is hopeless. “I cannot obey God’s Law.” The truth is you cannot do it on your own. You need help. God does not want you to face the Fires of Hell and the curse of the Law, and He has provided for you one, and only one chance of escape.

At this point you can go to the next page to read more “Real Life Stories” or turn to page 41 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 9

I Was Traumatized!

Stress...

Neglect...

Abandonment...

Rejection...

Depression...

Anxiety...

Fear...

Sadness...

Grief...

Abuse...

I was born in Mexico and came to the USA when I was 3, almost 4 years old. My family had lived in Mexico, and at some point, my dad left to work in the USA. When I was about three years old, my mother went to the USA to join him. During the time that both my parents were gone, my memory as a 3-year-old was still developing, so I had forgotten who they were. They were both gone for a year.

During that time, my grandparents were raising us. I thought they were my parents. Our other relatives helped out as well, as they all lived on the same block. I remember one specific day, I somehow ended up with my male relative. He took me where he lived, and no one else was there. He took me into his room and raped me. This caused me trauma, fear, not to trust people, and so much sadness.

Later that year, my parents came to get all my siblings and me to go and live in the USA. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment. I remember this day because I was completely traumatized. They were taking me from whom I thought were my parents (grandparents) to my real parents. I remember calling them Mr. and Mrs. for some time. I had lost my appetite and had trouble with my health. My father had to feed me nutritious shakes for a while.

When I turned six years old, I was raped again by a different relative. I'm not sure how many times it happened. Once again, this caused me trauma. My father would come home from work frustrated and mad. He would get drunk and then take out his frustrations on us kids, especially me. He would verbally and physically abuse me. I had to spend many evenings in my room to protect myself from him. That abuse included getting hit with belts, whips, and anything else he could get his hands on. One time, he burned me under my chin with his cigarette as a form of punishment. Not only did I go through trauma, but stress, neglect, abandonment, major rejection, depression, anxiety, fears of many kinds, sadness, grief, and abuse.

God, however, protected my mind from the sexual abuse until I got married.

Right before I got married, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I began to go to church and have a relationship with Him. He began to heal my heart and mind from so many fears I had. He kept dealing with the pain and hurts I carried within year after year. I went through some healing and deliverance sessions. I was set free from the sexual abuse and other trauma I mentioned earlier. The Lord did impress on my heart that the sexual abuse was going to be a long process. It took ten years of healing and developing a healthy mindset and beliefs. After ten years, I was set free from the trauma of rape. I forgave everyone who had abused me physically, mentally, emotionally, and sexually. I give all the glory and praise to God for my healing.

The Lord impressed on my heart to share my story for all those who have gone through the same things. There is Hope in Christ Jesus. There is healing available to you. You won't stay there for the rest of your life. God still does miracles. Seek Him and seek healing and deliverance from all oppression. He wants to heal you and walk you through this. God didn't forget about you. He sees you and your pain.

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CHAPTER 10

The Class Clown

My mother was sent to jail...

My father was sent to prison...

Watching porn, doing drugs, and drinking alcohol became my normal...

I joined the Marine Corps...

I felt like a fraud...

I've struggled with anger for what feels like all my life. My mother was sent to jail before I was one year old, and my father was sent to prison before I was 5. These things laid the foundation for my hurt, abandonment, and anger. I always looked up to my parents and thought highly of them, even through their flaws. Like most families, they both worked full-time jobs, so I was watched by my aunt and grandmother. During this time, I gravitated towards my cousin as the next male role model in my life. He took advantage of my fondness for him and sexually abused me when I was 8. That fueled the anger even more. I never told my parents about what happened because I felt like I did something wrong, and another part of me felt like they wouldn't believe me. I carried that burden, trying to push it down further and further. However, what I was actually doing was feeding the anger more and more. So, in school I acted out and got into fights over the smallest things. I also wanted to belong, so I would always try to be the class clown or funny guy.

My father is Catholic, and my mother is a Christian, but both struggled with multiple addictions. My mother would take us to Christian churches, but we were always in and out of church. We would go for a few months and then stop going for several months. It continued that way until we stopped going altogether. I rarely felt accepted by the other kids, so I always wanted to sit with my mom in service. I learned about God and about Jesus but never knew Them personally. I also didn't understand how my parents who claimed to believe in God could treat each other the way they did sometimes. Even how they treated me and

my siblings at times made me mad and also had me questioning their faith. I knew of God's goodness but didn't think that applied to me or my family.

I used football as an outlet for my emotions for a long time, and I loved playing. That wasn't enough, so in middle school I started drinking alcohol and smoking weed. I also became addicted to porn. It was my way of distracting myself from the things around me and numbing myself. I told myself it was normal and that I was just doing what boys my age do. I continued this behavior all through high school. Watching porn, doing drugs, and drinking alcohol became my normal.

I joined the Marine Corps and got married after high school. Even though I stopped smoking weed, I still drank heavily and struggled with porn. My time in the military had its ups and downs. My wife and I had two daughters while I was in the corps and then two more daughters after I got out. I gave my life to the Lord when I first joined, but my lifestyle didn't show it. I still let my anger control me which led me to getting in trouble a few times during my time in. Thankfully, at the end of my contract, I got out honorably. In many ways though I felt like a fraud, back sliding at every turn. To the people on the outside looking in, I had my stuff put together and was a great husband and godly man. However, I didn't believe those things for myself. I believed the lie that since I wasn't perfect that God didn't want anything to do with me. Luckily for me, God blessed me with an amazing wife and helpmate. I overcame my struggle with porn.

When we moved to Indiana, God used my wife to speak life into me. She helped me realize that I wasn't the angry Marine with a drinking problem but that I was a child of God and had purpose. She stood by me even as I struggled with my identity. Slowly but surely, God was working in me, and it was only slow due to my disobedience. Even as I write, God is still working on me. I thank Him every day for His blessings and mercy. One of those blessings is being able to do the "Unqualified But Faithful" podcast with my wife, where we share the gospel and try to help others in their walk with Christ. I hope whoever reads this knows that God loves you and your identity is found in Him.

I'm not perfect, but as long as I keep Jesus at the center of my life, I

know He will guide me through any storm and season of life. There is more to my story, just like everyone else, so feel free to reach out via phone, email, or both. I would love nothing more than to be able to share more and also hear your story.

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CHAPTER 11

My Heart Was Numb

I lived life without a care...

I allowed my feelings and desires to lead me...

Feelings of discouragement began to creep in...

I lost friends...

I grew up in church all my life, but growing up in church and growing a relationship with God are two different things. Growing up, church felt like a routine. I was truly unhappy for the longest time and felt like I wasn't seen or heard. It got to the point where I became emotionally and spiritually dead inside. In high school, I allowed my feelings and desires to lead me instead of the holy spirit. I lived life without a care about who would be affected by my actions and justified a lot of sin because I wanted to control my fate. Being raised in a household divided by one devoted Christian parent and one worldly parent was confusing. It wasn't fair that one parent had the freedom to choose what they did on Sundays, yet the other would force me to go church and not their spouse. The division allowed me to play both parts in the world and in church.

From my junior year in high school to my junior year in college, I was abusing grace without realizing I was hurting God. I thought the temporary happiness from the world would somehow fulfill me, but it didn't. In Jeremiah 17:9, it reads that "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" My heart during this season was what I like to call numb. So why was I allowing my heart and feelings to guide me? It was because the older I got, the more freedom I had to pave my own path according to my will instead of God's. I had to surrender control because nothing was going my way. How I thought my senior year of college was going to be, it wasn't. I lost friends and received countless rejection emails for every internship and job I was applying for. I was applying my efforts and time into

everything but God. The feeling of discouragement began to creep in. I knew the only way to get rid of this feeling was to get right with God and ask Him what was next for my life. I had to repent for the way I was living, the way I was thinking, the way I was treating other people, and believing that I knew what was best for my life. The choice to follow Jesus was finally mine to make, and it was an intentional one I made.

Since then, God has blessed me with a career in an industry I knew nothing about. He restored my hope, gave me a group of friends, and transformed all the bitterness and resentment in my heart to forgiveness and gratitude. I learned that if you're truly ready to give it all to God, His promises to give hope and a prosperous future **WILL COME TO PASS**.

A verse that has encouraged me is 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance". So, whatever you're going through, **GIVE IT TO GOD!**

Feelings can be deceitful, so I pray that God guard your heart. Allow Him and the spirit to move you in all you do because it truly will change your life for eternity.

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CHAPTER 12

I Was Creating Monsters

I started to smoke weed...

I removed drugs out of the “bad box” ...

I had money to impress the girls...

My coke was laced with meth, and I thought it was over for me...

I am 23, a real estate agent, electrician, and the guy who plays too much. I grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana in a trailer park with my older brother, stepdad, and mom. Growing up, I was not privileged but always fed. I dealt with a couple rats and ants, but no biggie. I never had new clothes or shoes, but I was grateful that I had what I had.

My mom is a Christian but not the type to force me to go to church. When I did go, I felt like I was getting preached at instead of to. My pops is a playa for life and always told me to never get married. “It’s a scam,” he said. This led to many problems in high school.

I stayed in that township for a couple years then moved to Decatur around 4th grade. I started normalizing things that others wouldn’t, like weed, coke, and pills. All my new friends had older siblings that were doing it or selling it. Come middle school, I started to smoke weed myself and removed drugs out of the “bad box.”

In high school, I started to sell weed during my freshman year, continuing all throughout high school. I would smoke and sell. It was nothing crazy, just enough to get free smoke and look like I had money to impress the girls.

After high school, I joined the electrician union. That’s when I bumped into my “brother,” and he introduced me to the fast money of coke. I was fascinated and couldn’t help but get involved. From there, I met my “uncle” and made a good team. For a few months, I would visit him every other day to reup (get more product) and sell more. My career was short lived though because I started to realize that although I was making money, I was creating monsters. People would sneak out and

meet me behind their house to buy drugs so their kids wouldn't know. People would spend their last bit just to get high. That's when I told my street uncle I wanted out, but he didn't take it well. When I went to reup for the last time, he laced my coke with meth. I thought it was over for me because I would take my corner, get high myself, and go about my day. After the first few hours, I realized this was not normal. I ended up being awake for days before finally coming down and felt terrible. That's when I decided I had to move to the region simply on a whim. I became roommates with a few buddies and was introduced to a church. It was a young church and was filled with several people who had not been saved their whole life. It was a church who understands trials and tribulations and could relate to my story. I fell in love with the church and got closer to God. I found a woman who inspired me to pursue the Lord even more.

Getting closer to God came with huge sacrifices and was no walk in the park. I realize now that God had His hand on me the entire way, and the "whim" I mentioned earlier was in fact the Holy Spirit leading me. It led me to cutting ties with friends who I loved dearly, stopping activities that I found pleasure in, and repenting for my past ways. I would always get ahead then fall down, get ahead, fall down. The same cycle repeated for years, until the moment when I gave my life to Christ and focused on Him rather than my flesh. This is not to say life has been perfect, but I now know that my identity is not found in how many girls I've slept with, how much money I have, or how much I can drink without throwing up. The moment I repented and completely turned from my past temporary pleasures is when I could finally see that my identity is solely in Christ. It is through faith that I have been saved, not of my own works.

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God's Love

“For God loved the world so much, that he gave his only Son, so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17

God loved His creation (you) so much that He sent His Son to earth to pay the full price for all sin.

Jesus did not come to the earth to do away with God's law. He came to fulfill it.

Jesus came as a man in the flesh and did not sin. Not one time. He obeyed the commandments, God's Law. Fully. He did for you what you could never do.

Jesus was beaten, tortured, and hung on a cross. While on that cross, the sins of the world (your sins) were placed on His shoulders.

Jesus died for and with your sins, but death could not hold Him; the grave could not contain Him. He arose from that grave paying the full price for every person's sin. (That includes you.)

It is only through God's Love, God's Mercy, and God's Grace that we can escape the curse of the law.

From here, you can go to the next page for more “Real Life Stories,” or skip to page 47 for more truth.

CHAPTER 13

The Accident That Saved My Life

Physical trauma and sickness plagued me...

I was bullied...

I was poor...

Kmart clothes and hand-me-downs...

I dozed off and awoke to my mom crying out “Oh God!” ...

We rolled down a 400-foot mountain side...

Growing up in the 70's, things weren't quite like they are today. When I was three years old, my mom left my dad and moved us from Chicago to California to start over with her family. My mom, now being a single mother, struggled to provide the basics for us. This caused depression, which in turn caused physical and mental abuse on occasion towards me. I always knew she loved me though.

When I was around the age of 5, sexual abuse started by other family members. Physical trauma and sickness plagued me. Foul language was the norm in my family and very much in my vocabulary. Most of my elementary years I was bullied, mostly because I was poor. Kmart clothes and hand-me-downs weren't cool. At the age of 11, I was flown across the country to Chicago to meet my father, which to me was like the first time. I only had a small picture of him standing next to a large rock. I hadn't seen him since I was 4, and I didn't remember him at all.

With all the craziness already in my life, it got even crazier. The year I turned 12, my mother, grandma, and I went to Las Vegas to spend Christmas with my uncle. My grandma wanted to try marijuana to see what all the hype was about. So, on Christmas Eve, my uncle filled a bowl, and they passed it around. I begged to try it too, so my mom let me. From then on, for a few months back home, my mom and I would hang out, smoke weed, and drink wine most evenings.

The following April we went on a vacation to Yosemite with a family friend and her daughter. After spending 6 of the 7 days scheduled, the friend was homesick and wanted to leave a day early. I begged to stay, but we packed up and left anyway. My mom and her friend's daughter were buckled up in the front, while her friend and I were in the back without seatbelts. Maybe 45 minutes into the drive home, I dozed off and awoke to my mom crying out "Oh God!" and my face slamming into the roof of the car. The two of us in the back were crashing into each other as we rolled down a 400-foot mountain side. As we were rolling down, I felt a calmness, thinking I was about to die. I thought my mom was going to die, and I'd have to go live with my dad whom I barely knew.

When we finally came to a stop with the car on its side, three of us climbed up on the seats and out the side window. We could see our friend a few feet up the mountain. The daughter proceeded to climb up the mountain to stop a snowplow truck heading up, and he called for rescuers. He came down to help and reached for blankets from the car, and the car just rocked. The car had been stopped by Manzanita bushes 350 feet down. The ones who eventually pulled the car up said if we had gone all the way down, we would have most likely died because of the boulders at the bottom. I ended up with a broken nose, minor cuts and bruises, and a backache. The friend had a concussion and a lacerated ear. Her daughter had a small cut on her wrist, and my mom had severe bruising from the steering wheel. What a miracle! My mom told me later that day that she for some reason was counting the rolls and stopped at 19. She said we rolled way more than that. As I have thought about that wreck, I truly believe angels stopped that car and were there with us and protected us the whole way down.

Shortly after the accident, still without a car, my mom was searching for a ride to and from work. A coworker soon offered a ride. This is where our story changed. She was a beautiful Christian woman who shared her faith and invited Mom to church. We started attending church weekly. After learning who Jesus was, we accepted Him as our Savior. The direction of our lives and how we were living drastically changed after we recognized that Jesus truly saved us and continues to save us still. All four of us are born again believers now. The church I attended had a youth group that was so wonderful. I struggled with praying and didn't understand how these kids could pray for hours. I felt like I was just

talking to myself. I believed in Jesus, but I didn't know how to have a relationship with Him. After high school, I moved to Chicago to live with my dad to go to college and live where it snowed. My stepmother was an atheist, and both she and my dad were alcoholics. That was a mess. I never knew where to find a church, so I became a prodigal. I always knew Jesus was with me, even in the depths of my sin. A few years later, my parents went to a church where they helped out families because my stepbrother was homeless with his girlfriend and their 2-year-old, plus one on the way. The next thing I know, my parents are going to church and getting baptized. She joined the choir, and dad was an usher. About then, I met my husband. I recommitted myself back to the Lord and found out how to have a real relationship with my Savior. I read His Word! There were all the instructions and answers I needed to know Him. I have not been perfect. I've had some bumps in the road, but never once did I lose my faith in who He is. I knew He was always with me. Today, I am blessed beyond measure. My husband and I have five beautiful daughters and seven grandchildren who all believe in Jesus and sit by me regularly at church. I believe my life was spared so that I could share this story and tell of His mercy, love, and good news to everyone I meet.

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CHAPTER 14

Something Was Missing

I was a shy kid who kept more to herself...

I came out of the water crying but didn't know why...

I can't wait to see what the future has in store for me...

I was born and raised in a Christian home. I grew up attending church every Sunday, went to Sunday school, prayed here and there, barely clapped my hands during worship, and received the holy communion. I felt like I wasn't fully doing what a Christian person should do. I have always loved our Lord and Savior enough to wake up and attend church, but something was missing. When my family and I started attending a new church in 2021, I started to see myself blooming and growing my faith. I had attended two churches, but I wasn't much involved in things.

I started to see a change happen for the first time when I got to see my sister get baptized back in March of 2021. Seeing her grow further as a Christian changed me in a way that I wanted to be next to get baptized. I wanted to further grow as a Christian as well. I wanted to feel His presence like she did. So six months later on September 26, 2021, I decided to get baptized myself, which had changed me. I remember during that time, I came out of the water crying but didn't know why. After talking to someone about it, it was explained to me that the "something missing in my Christian life" was purpose. My parents then gifted me my first ever Bible, called "The Epic Bible." The Epic Bible is almost the whole Bible but in a comic book form, so it's more like an action bible. The Epic Bible was easier for me to read and has visuals of what was happening in those Bible stories. Sometime later, I started attending a bible study group called "Young and Alive." There, I learned a lot about the Lord.

By getting more serious about my relationship with God, I have seen myself grow a lot, and I still want to keep on growing. Before, I was a shy kid who kept more to herself, but now I am confident being the me that God has designed me to be. I can now say I have people whom I can trust to talk to and learn about our Lord and Savior with. Now, I

have done more in church like helping out with my church's nursery. I like how I now see myself participating in worship.

Not only was I becoming more social, but my physical body was healed as well. I had started experiencing panic attacks after I passed out at a doctor's appointment. Since that checkup, I continued having panic attacks for eight months. I would cry and felt odd but didn't know how to explain it. A few months after the panic attacks started, my dad had passed away and the attacks got worse. Crying from missing my dad would trigger me. I would start off getting warm, then it would progress to panicking. My mom told me that I was feeling this way not only from my dad passing but from two other family members that had passed away as well. She said I was probably holding in my feelings and that after my dad passed away, my emotions overflowed.

In March of 2023, our church had a men's takeover service. They had us come up and worship with them. That day, I wasn't having a good day. My mom prayed for me, and since then I have been healed from having panic attack episodes. I didn't see a full change right away, but I had another person pray for me at one of our young adults meetings. I cried and cried that day, and since then I have never had another panic attack. I no longer deal with that mess.

Thank You, Lord, for saving me from those panic attacks and those lies of "I'm not okay." All in all, I was okay. I was just sad due to missing my dad and the other family members I had lost.

One final victory is that I am now taking a discipleship class with a friend. I still want to grow as much as I can with God. I can't wait to see what the future has in store for me!

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Judgement Day

The Bible promises us a final judgement:

“And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and sky fled away, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God; and The Books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in The Books, each according to the deeds he had done. The oceans surrendered the bodies buried in them; and the earth and the underworld gave up the dead in them. Each was judged according to his deeds. And Death and Hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death—the Lake of Fire. And if anyone’s name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”

Revelation 20:11-5

At the judgement, books are opened. The Books contain every good or bad deed of every person. The book of Life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

When God judges you, will you be found guilty or innocent? Will you spend eternity (forever) in Heaven or Hell?

To read more “Real Life Stories,” go to the next page. For the next truth; skip to page 56.

CHAPTER 15

You Have a Choice!

I was exposed to alcohol, drugs, pornography, theft, violence, and more...

I recall many a morning waking up after a blackout...

Everything was a reason to get blitzed...

I managed to get multiple DUIs...

My license was rightfully revoked...

I was very disrespectful to my parents...

I sat in my backyard with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. God said to me loudly inside, "You have a choice!"

When I was young, I remember going to church plenty of times before I was 10 years old. We stopped going. I don't know why. I recall a time I saw a picture of Jesus at church, and I can still see that picture today. That stuck with me. I would ask my mom questions about Him all the time. Who is He? What did He come to do? My grandparents were steadfast on attending services at another church, yet my brother, my sister, and I did not attend with them. I have memories of my parents often telling us to do to others as we would have done to us. Unfortunately, much of my life early on did not embrace these values.

In my teens and even slightly before, I was exposed to alcohol, drugs, pornography, theft, violence, and more. Come high school, I got interested in sports and was pretty good at a variety of them. I met some kids in track who were born again. This relationship opened the door in greater measure for me to encounter Jesus. I was converted and began going to church. I turned in to a zealot - very much deeply desirous to see others know Him and being quite vocal about this to others. However, soon enough, my friends graduated and went to college. I got injured in sports and was looking for direction from God on what to do. With a lack of believers around me and a lack of a deep relationship with God, I took a 180. I remember experiencing His presence for the first recognizable time when I was waiting to go do drugs with a friend

that first time. I knew He was urging me not to go with them. I disobeyed and grieved Him. I fell headfirst back into pursuit of sinful living. I turned back to the things I had left except now it was far worse. Yet, I knew God was very much real and did not want any of this for myself. I decided to sign up for the military since I was going into my senior year and knew my path and options for college were dwindling.

Thinking my life would straighten up in the Navy, I found many others running from something back home who also joined the military. I fell into substance abuse in greater depth while in the military, and my life grew darker. I recall many a morning waking up after a blackout and being a complete and utter mess - laid out on the side of the road, not even knowing how I got there. I was very surprised at times I was still alive. After four years, I managed to get out with an honorable discharge. I really believe this was God's grace 110%. I moved back home, and the substance abuse got worse. I was living with my family and knew that my extreme life was far too much for their home. Many a morning, my dad would be up when I got home very early before the sun was up. I hated seeing my dad like this and tried not to show my face or talk much, as I was quite embarrassed. I remember him pulling me out of my car after I had passed out highly intoxicated in it. The alarm was going off, and he had to disconnect the battery to not wake the entire neighborhood. I honestly don't know how long the alarm was going off. This was very disrespectful to him and my mother. We never talked about these things, and I continued to get wasted at just about any opportunity I had. I was very disrespectful to my parents during these times, and they helped me get places and resolve things in so many ways. I am grateful to God for both of them. Everything was a reason to get blitzed (celebration, someone died, bar specials, etc.). Only by the hand of God was I able to get a job, and over time I earned multiple college degrees. However, I managed to get multiple DUIs as well! My license was rightfully revoked.

For some time, I did not drive. The courts required me to go to AA, and I tried that briefly. I got my license back and lost it shortly after because of a drinking incident that was reported to the driver's license appeal board by the police department that gave me the public intoxication ticket. I recall stumbling back from bars praying that God would give me an opportunity to change before I died because I did not want to go

to hell. At times, I had moments of clarity where it was very clear that any amount of my life with Him not as my Lord was an utter mess. No substances, human praise, relationships, or anything else could be a substitute for Him!

Then came the backyard experience. I knew the Lord was referring to getting sober, but I was terrified to go back to an AA meeting. Even more terrifying was the prospect of going to a church where I would be judged. I realized years later that was me judging them before I gave them a chance. So, I started going to meetings the day after. After about a week of daily meetings, I felt prompted to pour out all the alcohol I had at home. I was in disbelief at what I was doing. After these various acts of obedience to God, other things were removed. I could no longer drive the vehicle because I was concerned I might hurt someone while driving illegally. So, I started riding my bicycle and carpooling with a friend. I was severely out of shape. Those were hard times for a season, but I was grateful to God for His great grace and mercy upon me. Music, pornography, and so much more was uprooted. He directed me to take action. When I did, I received more freedom. I started reading the Bible again and experiencing God in fresh new ways! I remember regularly words popping off the pages as I read the Bible. I remember coming across the verse of pray for your enemies, so I did. I was honest with God. He already knows our hearts, but I would state I am praying for these people because You tell me to. After a brief amount of time, the Holy Spirit showed how my heart had changed towards them. I was truly praying for them to come to know Him and for good in their life versus from a position of anger and ill will towards them. Another time, I was having wicked nightmares. It concerned people who I had prayed and forgiven. I was praying for them in silence. The Lord led me to some content on spiritual warfare, and I recognized this was spiritual in nature. So, I renounced those relationships and prayed for goodwill towards those people, all vocally out loud. The tormenting nightmares ceased. My relationship with Him was alive and vibrant, and I had not even started going back to church yet. However, He was still cleaning house, and I was learning to yield to Him!

Some time went by, and I began looking at how to get my license back. Was it possible? With God, all things are possible! I went to my first appeal board, and against recommendations given to me, I told the truth

about everything. I told the board how I had lied to them in the past. I was denied my driver's license. I appealed to the circuit court, and they said go back to the board. I was again denied at the board. On my return to circuit court, I was given the privilege to drive again. It turned out better than I could have imagined because I listened to the Lord and did what He said, which was to be honest through the whole process.

Shortly after, I met my wonderful blessing from God in my wife. We got married, and I went from one to three, as she already had two precious daughters. We ended up having two precious boys, for quite a full household of 6! My relationship with the Lord has grown deeper on a daily basis. Each day, I seek Him first thing in the morning. I've seen so many people delivered, healed, and set free that I seriously cannot count or remember them all. He is truly alive and fully active in the world. If you don't know Him, Jesus Christ is knocking on the door of your heart right now. He wants to come in and transform your life. I remember thinking I knew what peace looked like, all while fighting depression and suicidal thoughts, seeking peer approval, etc. I realized I had no idea until I allowed the Prince of Peace in to rule over my life. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Call on Him today!

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions about Him or for me. What He will do for one person, He will do for another. Be blessed, you are loved!

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CHAPTER 16

I Felt Lost

I tried to kill myself...

My past consumed me...

I was at my lowest...

I did not want to live...

I just wanted to escape...

I escaped to the other side of the world...

Although I was in a different place, the depression, anxiety, and feeling of being alone were still there...

I was born into a failing marriage. My mother hated me because I looked like my father. It was a time when a family chose to keep secrets rather than expose them to the world. My father was my world. I did not form a bond with my mother, but the bond I had with my father was strong. I knew that he would never fail me. My mother kept me in a play pen, out of the way and out of her way. My father would rescue me from that play pen as soon as he would get home. This infuriated my mother, and our bond made her jealous. He was a very proud Ojibwe man who fought for his country in the Marines, but, due to a heart condition, had to come home from Vietnam. He worked very hard to try to keep my mother happy. However, when I was one year old, she packed us up while he was at work and took me away from my daddy. We went to her mother's, my grandmother (Maw Maw). Maw Maw became my caretaker and my person. Maw Maw introduced me to Jesus and taught me how to pray. It's this introduction that saved my life later. We lived with Maw Maw for four years until my mother met my stepdad and married. When I was five years old, my mother packed us up and we moved further away from my father to a small town in Indiana with my new stepdad. However, my father did not fail me. He never missed a weekend even though he had to drive many miles.

From the first day of moving in with my stepdad, his attention toward me was unusual. This made my mother mad. So, my new bedroom

became my play pen, out of sight and out of the way. When my mother would leave, my stepdad would rescue me from my room and let me watch television shows that I was not supposed to be watching, eat food that I was not supposed to be eating, and do things that I was not supposed to be doing. I was too young to understand that my stepdad was grooming me. He would tell me, "Remember, don't tell our secret because your mother will not let you see your dad and she will send you to an orphanage." So, I kept the secret until the advancements started to escalate. I planned to tell my father, and I prayed like Maw Maw taught me. Before I could tell my father, my father had a massive heart attack and died. He was shoveling his driveway trying to get to me. My mother told me that because I was selfish, I murdered my father. I carried this for a very long time. After my father's death, my stepdad's abuse escalated to molestation. When I was 14, I tried to kill myself with pills. It failed, and this led to me telling my mother. I prayed that she would help me. I prayed that she would protect me. She didn't. She called me a whore and threatened to send me away to live in one of those orphanages like Annie.

The abuse stopped, but life became even harder. I had no counseling and felt lost and unworthy. I was taught that to be loved, you had to give yourself and make whoever you are with happy. I barely made it through high school. None of my teachers or counselor ever asked why I slept in class or why I looked so bad and dirty all the time. When it came to going to college, no one believed that I would get into any college with my low GPA or not flunk out the first semester. But God!!! Due to my father's VA and his Native American ethnicity which made me Native American, Ball State accepted me on probation. My earthly father and my heavenly Father, once again, from the heavens, did not fail me. I graduated with a Special Education degree and went on to get two other Masters. Life, however, was not easy. I remembered what Maw Maw taught me. So when I had my three boys, I got into church and really tried to make my second marriage work. There was something inside of me that kept a darkness over my soul. As time went on, more and more of my past consumed me. It eventually ruined my second marriage. My boys and I left, and I was now a single mom trying to do the best I could for my sons. However, I failed them, and I failed me. I made many mistakes, and my boys paid the price for my past demons. I had many bad abusive relationships that took a toll on me and my boys.

Eventually, the boys were either grown and moved out or went to live their father. I tried to kill myself two more times. Each time, something stopped me. I was at my lowest. I had been assaulted and raped many times. I did not want to live, and I failed the only real loves of my life, my boys. I just wanted to escape.

In 2014, I escaped to the other side of the world. I had a friend who was a principal at an American school in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. I left all behind, but the demons followed me. Although I was in a different place, the depression, anxiety, and feeling of being lost and alone were still there. In my apartment one night, I fell to my knees and prayed for the pain to go away. In my prayers, I heard, "Find a church." I was in the Middle East. I asked God where I was going to find a Christian church. I heard, "Trust me." The next day at work, one of my colleagues asked me if I wanted to go to a church she found. On the next Friday (Holy day is Friday in the Middle East), I went with my friend to a church that met in a cinema. The name of the church was Corner Stone. The minute I walked in, I felt peace. It was a cinema. It smelled like popcorn and was dark, but the light that came from the people was beautiful. The pastors were friendly, and the love of the Lord just beamed from their words, their actions, and their character. I was immediately accepted into the church and met many people. The sermon that day was on grief and pain. The scripture was 2 Corinthians 7:10 *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."* This pierced my soul. All my pain, all my grief had been caused through others but allowed by me because I was depending on worldly entities to fix me. I continued to go to this church, made many friends and connections, and attended outings and small groups. I accepted Jesus back into my life in a cinema in the Middle East, a Muslim country. God did not fail me. He met me in my pain, despair, and at the bottom of my pit to raise me up and make me whole.

In 2017, I came home from the UAE. It was time for healing; healing in the relationship with my boys, emotional healing for me, and healing in my spiritual walk with God. I knew I needed a church that brought the same connection as Corner Stone. I found a church home. Since that time, I have been delivered from my past demons, have grown in my relationship with Christ, and am discipling others on their journey. I

never dreamed that the little girl who was abused, lost, and torn apart by the world would be ministering to others. I still have a way to go in my relationship with my boys, but God is answering prayers. I know that one day, I will have my boys and my grandchildren back in my life. I have not reached the peak of my mountain, but I am off that plateau. Do not ever give up. Keep fighting, find your place, and find your people. Most of all, find God. He will not fail you.

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Standing on the Fence

I was standing on a fence, and there was an incredibly large group of people assembled around it.

On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side of the group stood another man, Satan. Separating them, running through the group, was the fence I was standing on.

Both Jesus and Satan began calling to the people in the group and, one by one, each having made up his or her mind, each went to either Jesus or Satan.

This kept going on, and eventually Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowds, as did Satan. But I joined neither group. I stood on the fence. Then Jesus and his people left and disappeared. So too did Satan and his people.

And I was left alone, standing on the fence.

As I stood there, Satan came back. He appeared to be looking for something that he'd lost. I said, "Have you lost something?"

Satan looked straight at me and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me."

"But," I said, "I stood on the fence. I chose neither you nor Him."
"That's okay," said Satan. "I own the fence. You belong to me."

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 65 for more truth.

CHAPTER 17

A Second Chance

My dad disappeared...

I felt abandoned...

I started cutting myself around the age of 8...

I was dealing with anxiety, fear, and depression...

I felt alone...

I was constantly feeling like I was going to die...

I would have had panic attacks...

I thought I was going crazy...

I was born and raised in Northwest Indiana. I was the third of nine children. My father liked to party a lot, so I grew up around a lot of alcohol, drugs, and loud music. It wasn't unusual to see people at my house rolling joints, getting high, and drinking. One time, my mom caught me playing with baby powder and a nail file pretending to cut a line of coke. I was about 5 years old. As kids, we were free to roam around as long as we were home by dark. I lived in a two-story building, and when the kids upstairs wanted to play a new game I said sure. They wanted to show me a game they had learned, but we had to play this game in private. So they took me to the garage and began doing things to me. It continued all summer. One time, the garage was locked so they decided it was ok to do it outside of the garage in the yard. That's when one of the neighborhood kids came through our backyard and saw what was going on. Startled and ashamed, I ran inside to finally tell my mom what happened. Before she could respond, I ran inside the bathroom to hide from the shame and fear. When I finally came out of the bathroom, my mom never mentioned it. In fact, we never talked about it, ever. I lived in torment that the kid was going to tell everyone what he saw. It was the summer before I started kindergarten, and I didn't want to go to school. I was so full of anxiety that I would throw up every day before school and at school. This added to my anxiety because I was known as that weird girl who was always sick and throwing up.

I was also dealing with things at home that weren't too good. My dad was young and immature and wanted to be out. My mom would drag us to bars and other places looking for my dad. When I was nine, my parents got divorced. I was actually relieved because I was tired of the arguments and tired of seeing my mom cry. We moved, and my dad disappeared. He had started another family, and we were left to fend for ourselves. We would go weeks without seeing him, and we had no financial help from him. I felt abandoned, especially when I would see my dad with his new family. They lived only a few blocks away. The women he was with had a daughter, and my sisters and I felt replaced.

My mom struggled to raise us by herself. She would babysit, clean houses, and do whatever she could. Yet we still never had enough. It wasn't unusual for us to go without electricity and food. I remember being so hungry, and all we had was Nestle chocolate powder to eat. We lived in East Chicago Harbor Side at this time and around a lot of gangs. On many occasions, I recall looking out my window and seeing a gang shoot out. One time, we heard a shoot-out in the alley. I heard a boy crying, and I went out to see what was going on after they stopped shooting. It was a childhood friend of mine. He was dead, and I could hear his mom screaming at the other side of the alley. He was only 14 at the time of his death. I had a lot of anger and frustration with the gang lifestyle because it was taking one of my sisters in that direction. I wouldn't hide my frustrations, and my sister and I would get in terrible arguments and fights. We would go to blows with each other. I loved her and didn't want her to go in that direction, but our relationship grew apart.

Meanwhile, I was still battling anxiety and trauma. I started cutting myself around the age of 8. I couldn't handle going to school, so I started ditching school when I was in third grade. We lived in a big apartment building, and I would go in the basement or roam the halls hiding until it was time to get out of school. I would miss so much school, and it was hard to catch up. When I did attend school, I felt embarrassed because I was so behind. It was a snowball effect. My mom would get called to the school because I was missing so much, so they put me in school counseling. I would see the school counselor once a week, but that didn't seem to help the emptiness I had inside.

The anxiety and depression I carried with me continued through high school and beyond. I never told anyone how bad I was dealing with anxiety, fear, and depression. I kept it hidden and bottled up. I didn't know how to speak up and ask for help, so I felt alone. I ended up quitting school and getting my GED because the anxiety was intensifying. I was scared to be around anyone. I would hide in my room all day and only go out at night because I didn't want to be noticed or seen. My mom would call me a vampire because that was the only time anyone would see me. I would stay up all night watching TV by myself just to avoid going to sleep and waking up to deal with another day. When I would lay down at night, I would pray and beg God to help me change. I would cry myself to sleep, hoping that when I would wake up, I would be normal.

At the age of 19, after doing nothing with my life, I got the courage to go get a job. Now I know it was God that was hearing my prayers, but then I didn't make the connection. I started working and felt better about being able to help my mom out. I still dealt with the anxiety, but I started to hide it better. I was making friends and living a life outside my bedroom. I started partying and going out a lot. My young adult life was kind of a blur. When I was 22, I met a man that would become my husband. At the age of 23, I got married. It all happened really fast. While we were dating, he started to change. He wasn't the same guy I met. He said he was going to church now and wasn't going to do any of the old bad habits he used to do. Out of curiosity, I decided to check out this church. Honestly, I was kind of upset that this Jesus was taking him away from me. Well, the joke was on me because I fell for Jesus too. I started attending church on a regular basis, and we got married.

I felt a lot better in some ways, but there was still a strong anxiety that I had. It was starting to turn into phobias. I was afraid to drive or even be in a car. I was constantly feeling like I was going to die. The fear of death was so bad for me that it would play over and over in my mind. I avoided going anywhere but work and church. At the age of 26, I became pregnant. I felt like I needed to learn to drive in case of an emergency. I reluctantly learned to drive and still did everything with fear on my back. My pregnancy, work, driving, and going out to eat took every ounce of energy to fight to get through it. Sometimes I would have to pull over on the road and catch my breath because I would have bad

panic attacks.

Two years later, I was pregnant again. When I delivered my second baby, I went home with extreme post-partum. I remember I didn't sleep for two days. I thought I was going crazy. I was also experiencing really bad pain in my neck. My neck was so stiff that I could barely move it. I was now a mother of a two-year-old and a two-week-old baby. My husband was at work, and we were home alone. All of a sudden, I started feeling really weird. My thumb started twitching, and I just felt something so weird I knew I needed to call 911. While on the phone with the operator I started slurring my speech and couldn't get my words out. Something bad was happening. My kids were in the house by themselves, and I couldn't communicate this to the operator. I unlocked the door and went to sit on the porch to wait for the ambulance. Thank God, the neighbor came out, and told them I had kids in the house. When I got inside the ambulance, I heard a voice say, "Don't close your eyes." Over and over, it was saying, "Don't close your eyes." When I got to the hospital, they said I was having a stroke. By this time, I couldn't see out of my right eye, talk, or move. Within an hour, I had another stroke. They decided to send me to a better equipped hospital in Chicago. When I got there, they said my two arteries in my neck dissected. The doctor told my husband to call my family in to say goodbye to me. I had many doctors in and out of my room. They said my case was so rare that they had only seen it in one other patient, and he was decades older than me.

I remember thinking that what I feared the most came to me. I knew I had to fight because I was fighting for my babies now. I remember my husband would come visit and try to show me pictures or tell me how the kids were doing. I would refuse to look at the pictures or talk about them because I needed to stay strong and not break down. After performing a ton of tests, I was told I also had a heart valve problem. My older sister had passed away from a heart murmur, and I never realized I had a heart problem. It felt like every test they took, they kept on adding more sickness on me. I was eventually released from the hospital and was considered a miracle to the medical staff because I had survived.

The real hard part began when I had to go home to take care of a newborn. My husband worked different shifts and would help as much

as he could, but I was home alone most of the time. I wasn't feeling good. I was full of different meds. I was so sick all the time. Physically, I was also full of panic and anxiety that what happened was going to happen again. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I was in a dark depression, trying to fight my way out. I thank God that by this time I had my faith. I would pray, and every time I felt a wave of fear, I would trust God to bring me through. One day while talking to my doctor, I just broke down sobbing and told him about the battle I was having with anxiety. I was desperate. Thank goodness for good doctors that care. I was put on medicine. It did help me, but what really did it was the secret I was hiding was finally out and I was getting help. My church family was praying for me. I had a lot of people who stood with me in prayer. I wasn't fighting by myself like the enemy wants us to do. He wants us to be in shame and fear of getting help. I took every day with thankfulness that I was still here to see my babies grow. I stood on the word that told me. "It is the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fail not. They are new every morning: Great is thy faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23.

The days turned into years, and it's been 15 years since God gave me a second chance. I celebrate life. I'm still a work in progress, but I have comfort in Gods promise that every day is a blessing from Him.

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CHAPTER 18

I Died Twice

Money was everything...

I lived for working, making money, and partying...

I was living the American Dream to the extreme...

I grew up poor with an alcoholic mom that beat and cussed at us every day. At times, my sisters would have to ask the neighbors for food because we had none in the house. Around 12 or 13 years old, I moved in with my father for a better life. He also was a drunk, but he liked touching me. In my late teens, I got a girl pregnant. She had an abortion because we were too young to be parents.

Growing up, I heard about God but didn't know Him. I was programmed at an early age, by watching tv and music videos, that money was everything. With money, you had power, pride, women, cars, and homes. My goal in life was to make as much money as possible and live life my way. Most of my life, I went going from job to job. I lived for working, making money, and partying. My friend got me hired on with him working with an international pipeline company. The money was crazy. We worked in both the US and offshore platforms in the country and out of the country. I was living a single man's fantasy. I had money, booze, drugs, women (some bought), and partying at every place we'd go. I was living the American Dream to the extreme, just like I was programmed to do at an early age.

One day at work, I thought I was having a heart attack. My friend took me to the local hospital in town. I remember telling the receptionist, "I think I'm having a heart attack." After that, everything went black. I do remember feeling air against my body. During my blackout, I had a dream. I saw my brother waving at me, so I started waving back. Something felt strange in my dream. My eyes closed very slowly. When they opened again, my mom was in the same spot as my brother, waving at me. For some reason, I told my mom I wasn't ready and took off running. After the dream, I woke up from a three-month coma. I was told my aortic valve had exploded. My leg had to be amputated above

the knee because of complications during the surgery. After long months of rehabilitation, I was finally released from the hospital.

My wife and family got together one day to discuss everything that had happened to me in the hospital. The doctors had given me the nickname "The Miracle Man" because they could do nothing more for me but wait. I was also told I had been life flighted from the local hospital to the medical center in Houston. That explained the air I felt after everything went black. My sister also told me that I had died twice. I was surprised because that was the first I had heard about that. One day at home, I started thinking about me dying twice and seeing my two family members that died way before my incident. I started to research on Google and You Tube to see what had happened to me. I came across many videos of people that die and go to Heaven. They are sent back to Earth because it is not their time, or they choose to come back. They are instructed to tell everyone how beautiful Heaven is and how much God loves us. Others die and end up going to hell because of the type of lifestyle they live. These people were tortured, burnt alive, and ripped to pieces by demons. Their suffering is forever. The people in hell would cry out the name of Jesus Christ and then be returned to Earth. They immediately changed their lifestyle and shared their testimony of how horrible hell was. I learned that I had a near death experience (NDE) and that God was found in Heaven and Hell.

Learning that God was in Heaven and Hell, I started my journey into finding out who God and Jesus Christ truly were. I learned that God is real, the maker of everything and everyone. His love for us is never ending. I learned that Jesus Christ loves us, died for our sins, and is the only way to the Father. Along the way, I also learned about the Holy Bible and Ten Commandments. One day while watching videos, I came across Mr. Ray who was on the streets comparing people's lives to the Ten Commandments. He said that Jesus says hating someone is the same as killing them and lusting for woman (porn) is the same as adultery in our hearts. I went to the Bible for confirmation because I had never heard of these two commandments. I found in the Bible that Ray was telling the truth, and suddenly I was worried about dying and going to hell. I was really scared now because I had broken all Ten Commandments and had another major surgery coming up. I started wondering, "What do I do now?"

As always, Father God heard me. I came across a video of Mr. Gab, another street preacher, telling the world that our way of living is against God. He said we need to get on our hands and knees and cry out to God for forgiveness. For some reason, I felt like he was talking directly to me, and I felt something in my chest. So, I got on my hands and knees, begging and crying out to God for His forgiveness. I literally passed out on the floor like a drunk man from all the begging and crying I did. I woke up still laying on the floor and felt peaceful and lighter. I didn't understand it, so I went to the Bible for answers. I learned that the old me had passed and a new me was born again in Christ. My wife and family asked what happened me you because of my changes.

I was now an 80/90% believer who wanted physical proof, something that I could actually see that proves the Bible is true. Again, God heard and answered me with videos from Mr. Wyatt who found the real Noah's Ark on the mountains of Mt Ararat. He also found Sodom and Gomorrah, where real sulfur balls can be found to this day. Mr. Wyatt found the real blood of Jesus Christ, Mt. Sinai (God's Mountain), and many more Bible locations. He also explains the mark of the beast and Saturday being the true Sabbath, not Sunday. I spent three months researching, trying to disprove Mr. Wyatts findings, and could not do it! A WOW dazed feeling came over me once I realized that God, Jesus the Christ, and everything in the Holy Bible were true. So, at that moment I told God, "I give myself to you." I am now a 100% Bible thumper that loves God and Jesus with all my heart. I read my Bible every morning and pray throughout the day. I tell my story to everyone I can and let them know we must be born again to enter Heaven. I am at peace now. I now understand why I am still alive after so many things that I've done in the past. No more drinking, drugs, cussing, or watching things I shouldn't. I know God loves us and gave us a free will that decides where we go, Heaven or Hell. There is no sin too big that God cannot forgive. He hates the sin but not the sinner. It is up to us to call on God. He will not force Himself on us. Small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life. Only a few find it. You must be born again to see the Kingdom of God. Because of the love and glory of God... we are!

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Day of Redemption

Jesus gave His Blood, His Life, so all your sins could be forgiven. Jesus paid your penalty for sin; in full.

Now it's up to you to accept or reject what Jesus has done for you.

God is inviting you into a personal relationship with Him as your Heavenly Father and Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus came to show you the way because you are passionately loved and wanted. Jesus, before He was resurrected, said to His disciples, "...*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*" *John 14:9*

If you repent for breaking God's Law and put your trust in Jesus, when God looks at you, He will not see a liar, a thief, an adulterer, or a law breaker but he will see a person that Jesus has redeemed from the curse of the Law, one that Jesus paid the full penalty for their sin. God will see the Blood of Jesus that has washed you as white as snow. Only through Jesus can you be right with God.

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 72 for more truth.

CHAPTER 19

Heartbroken

I found myself disconnected...

I faced challenges in my own strength...

I lacked peace of mind...

I thought that a day would come when I would crumble...

I am eternally blessed to have been raised by Christian parents. They taught me how to form an everlasting relationship with a loving God. As far back as I can remember, I've always felt loved and protected in His presence. To this day, it's a constant truth I continue to rely on. The only time I ever felt lost in my purpose and future is when I stopped nurturing my relationship with God at the age of 17. It was my senior year of high school, and I was curious to see what all the hype was about partying. In just a few months, I found myself disconnected from my family and God. I didn't even find joy in the experience. Instead, I experienced anxiety and loneliness. It detoured me from the path God perfectly designed for me.

I graduated high school and started dating my husband, Jose. I focused all my attention on my relationship with him, college, later my career, and the two lovely daughters we were blessed with down the road. Life was good, but a part of me missed the close relationship I once had with Jesus. I faced challenges in my own strength, and it took a toll on me, my family, and my marriage. I lacked peace of mind, direction, true joy, and a connection with God that I leaned on when I was much younger. I remember attending a church service with my sister Debbie. She asked if I wanted to rededicate my life to God and said that she would accompany me to the altar call. I told her no thanks and that I was fine. I thought I meant it, but a couple minutes later I started walking by myself towards the altar in tears. At that moment, I could no longer ignore God's gentle tug at my heart letting me know how much He missed me. I asked God to forgive me for my sins, for walking away from His presence, and for thinking I could live life without His friendship, love, and protection. I instantly felt whole again. It's a feeling I have never found in any other thing or person. Now that I was

an adult, a wife, and a mother, I wanted to rediscover God's heart and His purpose for my salvation. I read and studied the bible and started attending weekly church services. One of my favorite memories was getting baptized. I remember feeling seen. It still baffles me how in a world of 7 billion people, God reaches out to me. Challenges continued to rise up, but this time I was empowered to be resilient, to persevere, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome any scheme and attack from the enemy. A few years later my husband rededicated his life to Jesus as well. It happened just in time before we entered a season in his life where he would need God the most; when our entire family would need God the most.

On December 4, 2023, our significantly close-knit family of four faced the most heart-breaking challenge of our entire lives. My husband was admitted into ICU due to respiratory issues. When my husband and I arrived at the ER, the doctor intubated Jose within a couple of minutes. I was in disbelief at the events that were unfolding and cried out to Jesus. I remember having a reoccurring thought "Bring it all to peace." I made a few calls and immediately my family, my husband's family, my pastors, and members of my church rushed to my side to support me and my daughters.

On December 5, 2023, my husband was embraced by the arms of God. The doctors were baffled on how Jose survived the extent that he did even though both of his lungs and the right side of his heart were fatally damaged. Jose was a walking miracle. Twelve-and-a-half years beforehand he was diagnosed with Sjogrens disease, an autoimmune disease that attacks vital organs. His life expectancy was three to five years, but God anointed him to live close to thirteen years after his diagnosis. The Lord was Jose's breath of life and the pulse of his heart. God's mercy sustained Jose physically, mentally, and spiritually until it was time for him to Rejoice in Paradise. My daughters and I were heartbroken to have to tell him "See you again when we reunite in heaven," but we understood it was time for his health struggle to be over and for him to be healed and made whole in heaven.

As we left the hospital, I wondered how I would live my life without the person who has been the love of my life and best friend for the past 30 years. Jose and I made decisions together for our marriage, family, finances, and household. In an instant, all the responsibilities we equally

shared were now going to be solely on my shoulders. For the past 10 months, I have lived my life with a God who hears my every sigh, who delivers me from the pit of sorrow, and whose heart is moved to continually renew me with His strength, peace, wisdom, and guidance. During the first month after Jose entered heaven, I would curl up and sob.

At times, I walked around confused, thinking I was living someone else's story. I thought that a day would come when I would crumble as I finally and truly realized the depth of losing Jose. I would cry out to Jesus because He knew how deep it hurt. He knew the desperation in my thoughts and the ache in my soul. In every single one of those moments, an overwhelming peace would wash over me and soothe me. I experience peace in talking with Jesus, I experience hope in reading His word, and I experience comfort in worshiping Him. I also experienced how God's provision arrives at the time you need it the most. As I grieved, it hurt tremendously to see my daughters in emotional pain. I feared not finding a way to pay for the funeral arrangements. I feared losing our home and anything else I could no longer afford on my sole income. But miraculously God blessed our family with financial stability and prosperity. All the funeral arrangements were generously donated by all our family members, our friends, our coworkers, our church family, and Pastors from several churches. My church family came together and blessed us with a meal train, my daughter's college loans were dissolved, and my mortgage was paid in full. When my mind could not contemplate a possible plan, God took care of it in His own thoughtful and generous way. During this journey, as God continues to mend my heart, He has appointed my daughters, my immediate and extended family, pastors, friends, church family, and a grief support group (Grief Share) to encourage me and help me navigate an entire new way of life.

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CHAPTER 20

Early, Ready, and Prepared

My dream was to be a stay-at-home wife and mother...

I was expecting a little girl named Abby. She suddenly died just days before her due date...

I lost my self-confidence. I went through a deep depression...

I had no energy, no enthusiasm, and no joy for anything in life...

I was raised Catholic, the fifth of six children. My parents took us to church every week and sent us to Catholic school. They taught us to not to take God's name in vain, to be kind, and to work hard. I tried to be a good girl, but I had some secret sins that I wouldn't dare to tell anyone about. I lived my life in fear that someone would find out my awful secrets. When I was 12 years old, I went to a slumber party and played a very bad game that dabbled in the occult. Afterwards, I began having terrible nightmares. They became so bad that I was afraid to go to sleep. I didn't know what to do, but Jesus did. He sent my older sister, Anne, home from college, where she had recently rededicated her life to the Lord. One night, she told me to brush my teeth and then come downstairs because she had something to tell me. I enthusiastically brushed my teeth and went downstairs. When I walked into the kitchen, she and my mom were talking about a hypnotist who performed at my sister's university. My mother explained that participating in that kind of activity can open a door in your soul to the devil. At this point, I told them about the game I had played at the party and asked if that could be the reason that I was having all those nightmares. "Yes," they both said in unison.

My sister told me that I needed to repent and tell Jesus that I was sorry for participating in that game even though I had not led it. My sister said that I needed to ask Jesus to be my Savior and Lord. She led me in a simple prayer. After the prayer, I felt good. It was bedtime, and my sister and I shared a room and a bed, so we went to sleep. That night, I had another nightmare. I woke up frozen with fear, and I couldn't move. The Lord Jesus woke my sister up, and she said, "Regina, are you okay?"

“No,” I replied, and told her about the nightmare.

My sister flipped on the light, opened her Bible to Philippians 4:6-7, and said, “Read this out loud.”

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” As I read these verses, the fear vanished and was replaced by peace. I wasn’t afraid, and I was able to go back to sleep. I had heard the Bible all of my life, but this was the first time that it actually meant something to me. It was applicable to my life and I understood it. From that day on, I began to read the Bible every day. I began getting up early each morning to read the Bible and talk to Jesus.

As soon as I accepted Jesus as my Savior, I began to be teased for being a Christian. I learned to forgive those who were persecuting me and to pray for them. When I was seventeen, I spent a year in Colombia. There, I learned that it was a blessing to work hard and serve others, just like Jesus did. When I returned to the States, I didn’t know who to trust or how to make major life decisions. I wanted to do the will of God, but I didn’t know how to determine what His will was. I was faithfully serving God, but I tended to procrastinate and get everywhere late, rushed, worried, and unprepared. These flaws eventually led to extreme anxiety and a mental breakdown. With help from a godly Christian counselor and from my family, I was able to come out of my depression and live a responsible adult life complete with a full-time job and buying my first home.

At age 28, I met my husband, David. He was kinder to me than any man had ever before been in my life. We got married and soon were expecting a little girl named Abby. Then suddenly, she died just days before her due date. While I grieved, I experienced Jesus’ promise, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The Lord Jesus eventually gave us another little girl, Eden. I finally got to live my dream of being a stay-at-home wife and mother. Unfortunately, the grief from my first daughter’s death returned, and I had another mental breakdown. My husband and family surrounded me with prayers and encouragement, but I lost my self-confidence and was very unsure of

myself and my mothering abilities for the next decade. Over the years, I struggled with keeping a sound mind, with worry, and with a sense of not really fulfilling the calling of God on my life. One good thing that I began to do was to pray and intercede for others, learning to be persistent and continue praying for days, months, or years until the Lord answers. The Lord has used that for His glory. He has welcomed me into His presence and has allowed me to enjoy the sweetness of friendship with Him. Recently, I went through a depression so deep that I wanted Jesus to take me home to Heaven. I had no energy, no enthusiasm, and no joy for anything in life. The Lord never abandoned me during this time but gave me dreams and tiny flashes of inspiration that gave me ideas about things that I could do for the Lord. This worked. I looked long and hard at Jesus and decided that I wanted to make Him happy; that I would do whatever was necessary to be that confident, capable, wise woman that He desired me to be. I decided to seek His face with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength, with the determination of an Olympic athlete. The Lord has rewarded me with joy. I no longer worry about anything but take every need to Him in prayer. He has taught me to always be early, ready, and prepared and to give thanks and worship Him in everything. He has taught me to live for the day when He returns and I get to see Him face to face. He has taught me to believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He is always good, even when things seem to be falling apart. I hope you choose to follow Jesus. He loves you intensely and wants the BEST for your life. My dear friend, please: LOVE HIM. TRUST HIM. DO WHAT HE SAYS. It will be the best decision you've ever made, and when you are standing before His Throne on the Day of His Return, you will be glad that you pursued Him with your all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. See you at the Throne!

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Day of Salvation

How do I get saved from the curse of the law? How do I get saved from being forever separated from God? How do I get saved from the Fires of Hell?

1. Admit that you have broken God's Law.
2. Ask God to forgive you.
3. Confess Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Confess that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.
5. Confess that Jesus arose from the dead.

The Bible says:

“For salvation that comes from trusting Christ --- which is what we preach --- is already within easy reach of each of us; in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths. For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect; they all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”
Romans 10:8-13

This is GOOD NEWS!

For more “Real Life Stories,” turn to next page. To get saved, go to page 79.

CHAPTER 21

Do Not Tell Anyone

Children are to be seen and not heard...

You can't do anything right...

Stupid...

My world was crashing down...

Feelings of being unloved and unwanted came over me...

Life was sad and lonely...

Why am I so unlovable...

I grew up in a dysfunctional home. My mom worked full-time and was the sole provider. My dad stayed home with us three kids. My dad, Frank, was home in the physical sense. He was an authoritative figure only. There were no hugs, no smiles, no encouragement, and no security that a father should bring to his children. During my childhood years, I remember words and phrases spoken to me. "Children are to be seen and not heard." "You kids would make a preacher cuss." "Stupid!" "You can't do anything right."

Growing up, I always felt different, odd, and out of place. Being teased and made fun of in elementary school only increased my poor self-esteem. I'll never forget being called stupid and poor by a student from class. Words hurt, especially for a 10-year-old girl. Sexual abuse by a male family member started around that age too. That led to feelings of sadness, shame, fear, and feeling dirty. Those emotions and being told "Do not tell anyone!" haunted my already confused mind. I held onto that secret until adulthood.

At the age of 12, my dad was moving out and no longer wanted to be with us. I remember holding onto him and begging him not to leave, pleading, "Daddy, don't go."

He grabbed me by my shoulders, looked into my face and said, "I am not your father, go talk to your mother." Those words were heartbreaking words. Even though things were dysfunctional, that's all

I knew. I didn't want him to leave. After having life altering conversations with my mom, we learned that Frank had adopted the three of us. We were not his biological children. Learning that our biological father also wanted nothing to do with us was devastating. My world was crashing in. Not one but two fathers abandoned me. Why? Feelings of being unloved and unwanted came over me. Mom still had to work, so we were left with babysitters. Going into my teen years with no father figure and Mom always working was sad and lonely.

My high school years were filled with insecurities and wanting so badly to fit in. To be heard, noticed, liked, and wanted was my plea. "Why am I so unlovable?" I would ask myself. By this time, my mom remarried. My stepfather would make hurtful, sexual remarks to me. Between that and being an already broken girl, I felt disgusting. High school was even more miserable. At the age of 17, I was pregnant. My boyfriend, the father of my baby, my one and only, left me. Scared, hurt, and angry I cried out, "Why? Why do people leave me? Why am I unlovable?" When I was 9 months pregnant, my mom and I attended church one Sunday. The pastor said if there was anyone that was hurt, sad, or wanted Jesus to come into their life and be saved, to come up to the front. I remember crying and walking up, feeling so desperate and unworthy. The pastor placed his hand on me and prayed over me. I remember crying out, asking for forgiveness, and believing all the pastor said to be true about this Jesus. The next thing I knew, I was falling backwards, ever so gently, like a feather, lying on my back on the floor. My lips were moving, and I was speaking a language that I did not recognize. I literally had no control over my body. Opening my eyes, I saw my mom and others staring down at me. Never did I feel such peace.

Afterwards, a week later, I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl. At the age of 20, I married an abusive alcoholic. This led to three years of sexual, mental, and physical abuse. Finally, after enough courage and strength, I was able to leave him and get much needed counseling. At the age of 26, I married my husband Bill on August 16, 1997. Life was great! My family and I were happy, and my daughter was thriving. After suffering two miscarriages, Bill and I had our daughter in February of 2000. Our family was complete. Life to me was good. The summer of 2001 is when I felt something was off. I wasn't quite sure what to think of it all. I was finally happy and couldn't understand this feeling that something was missing. After multiple attempts at trying to fill this void

by working out, getting a part-time job, and extracurricular activities, I still felt a piece was missing. I was sharing my struggles with a few ladies, and one asked me if I had prayed about it. I thought that was such an odd question to ask, and I quickly changed the subject. A few weeks passed since this conversation, then September 11, 2001 happened. Like many of us, it started out as a normal, typical day. Bill went to work in Chicago, our oldest daughter went to school, and I was at home with our one-and-a-half-year-old. After watching the horrific chain of events unfold on tv, I received a phone call from my daughter's school, explaining that she was in a school bus accident. Everyone was fine; however, parents could not pick up their children due to the lockdown and not knowing the severity of September 11. Unable to get ahold of my husband, I then heard on the news that the power plant he was working at was evacuated. Not knowing if my husband was safe or not, I fell to my knees with my baby in my arms and cried out to God. I was praying to Him that I desperately needed Him. I didn't know if I were to die that day, if myself or my family would go to heaven or hell. That scared me! Later, when we all were finally together at home, I told my husband that we needed to go to church. With that being said, I thought going to church was all that there is. Wow! I was wrong. With not knowing much, not knowing what questions to ask or what to look for, our church journey was overwhelming. After visiting a church a few times in our area, we left feeling more confused than when we walked in. After sharing this with a friend, she invited us to her church in 2002. That is where we learned about Jesus, having a relationship with Him, and the love of others. I then volunteered in the children's ministry. Teaching the kids and learning myself filled my heart with so much joy. Now I understood the missing piece that I so longed for. All I need is Jesus! Through time and more healing, healing that only Jesus can do, I have a heavenly father that loves me unconditionally and will never leave. Jesus has healed my fears, insecurities, anxiety, people pleasing, guilt, and shame. He has given me a voice and has spoken truth over me. I am loved, I am purposefully and wonderfully made, I am forgiven, I am chosen, I am a child of God!

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CHAPTER 22

I Just Wanted to Feel Accepted

I just wanted to feel accepted, to fit in, and to be part of the group...

I tried cigarettes to fit in...

I tried alcohol to fit in...

Today, my life is full and complete, and I fit in perfectly...

I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. I can always remember being in church. In fact, at age 13, I was saved at church. I liked going to church. I always felt it was the right thing to do. I also liked feeling accepted and being part of a group. I had a “good girl” image, and I wanted to live up to that. Being a “good girl” meant going to church. The world also had some things to offer. If cigarettes meant being popular, I tried cigarettes. If drinking could get me accepted, I tried drinking. There was always that fear of letting someone down. That someone was first of all God, then my family.

My father worked in a car factory, and my mother was a housewife. I had an older sister and a younger brother. My father was very strict, so I definitely did not want to get caught doing anything wrong. I had an aunt who lived in another town about 12 miles away. My sister and I used to love to stay at her house. My aunt and uncle would let us stay a couple of weeks in the summer or sometimes, the whole summer. They would spoil us, and we loved it.

The summer I turned 13, I was staying at my aunt’s when I met Jim. We liked each other and hung out together over the summer. When school started back up, we broke it off. Two years later, Jim called to invite me to a post-prom picnic. I went, and we started dating. Dating was difficult because we went to different schools. We saw each other on weekends and when there was no school. Then we made a big mistake. We became sexually active. I remember at first I didn’t want to do it. I was so mad at myself when I gave in. I knew I couldn’t take it back. We had to sneak

around to be together because once we started, we couldn't stop. In 1972, I was 15 years old. My dad had been diagnosed with cancer. On September 23, 1972, my father died of cancer at the age of 41. Jim and I continued to date, and a year later we got engaged. Jim was two years older than I, and in 1973 he graduated from high school. He was enrolled at a computer school in Pittsburgh. He had relatives who lived in Indiana who worked at the Steel Mills. They raved about how much money they were making. So, Jim decided to go to Indiana for the summer and make some money. Once he got to Indiana, he liked it and decided to stay. After he was out there for a while, he got homesick and wanted us to get married sooner. I only had one year of high school left, and I wanted to. He asked me to marry him, saying I could finish school in Indiana. I was scared. I didn't know what to do. I gave in and said, "Yes."

Over the next year, I went through many emotions about marrying Jim because I was saved and he was not. I knew I had been pretty wishy-washy about being a Christian, but I still was concerned about marrying a non-believer. Jim found a church in Indiana that would marry us. That was hard, not only because I was saved and he was not, but also because we came from two different faiths. We were married on June 22, 1974. Before we got married, I told myself that I would pray and believe, and that in a short while Jim would be saved. That short while turned into a long 19 years! A couple of years after we got married, I got serious about being a Christian. I still wanted to be that good girl and do the right things. I am glad that I never got addicted to alcohol or cigarettes. I would smoke and drink on and off to try to fit in, but I always felt guilty. Eventually, with the help of God, I quit smoking and drinking and never went back to it. Jim, on the other hand, was a drinker and a smoker. He went out with his friends a lot. Sometimes, he wouldn't come home until 4 or 5 in the morning. We started a family after we were married 7 months. I did go to school here in Indiana, and I graduated. I became focused on our children and continued praying for Jim to get saved. Jim and I had four children - one daughter and three sons. I raised them in church. Jim never kept us from going to church. I praise God for that. At times it was hard, because I didn't think he would ever get saved. I remember once in 1980, he went out drinking and didn't come home for

two days. After that, he quit drinking and smoking. It was amazing, but he still didn't get saved. The church I was attending started standing and agreeing with me for Jim to be saved. There were times when I would get on his case about being saved, and I knew I was just pushing him away. I tried to reach him by my lifestyle. I did that by being the kind of wife and mother that God wanted me to be. That helped me to see that I didn't need to seek man's approval any more. I only needed to have God's approval. Finally, on March 21, 1993, Jim was saved. Praise God. I do praise God for saving my husband, and for getting me on track.

The hardest part of the story is that I committed all of these sins after I was saved. That bothers me so much, especially the premarital sex. I did repent, and I know I was forgiven because I John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I kept feeling guilty until I allowed Jesus to completely set me free. I was forgiven, but Satan tried to convince me that I wasn't. Satan is a liar. Two years after we were married, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and it felt like God opened up my head and poured love through me. That really ushered me to a place of wanting to be set apart for God. It was a continuous process that brought me to where I am today. Life is full and complete with Jesus as my Savior. I do not want to live without Him. It is only because of Him that I am where I am. He is my everything. I love You, Jesus. I thank You, Jesus. I praise You, Jesus.

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It's Time to Pray

If you have already confessed your sins and cried out to God, you are saved. If you have not, it's time that you do. Pray this right now:

Dear God,

I acknowledge You as the Creator of all things. I admit that I am a sinner, and I deserve the Fires of Hell. I kneel at Your feet and ask for Your mercy and forgiveness of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your son. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and I believe that You raised Him from the dead. Jesus, please come into my heart and fill that place in my heart that belongs only to You. Jesus, I declare You Lord of my whole life today. I ask you to show me my life purpose, plan, and destiny for which I was born. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and with all the gifts you have for me. I will confirm my salvation by telling others what You have done for me. Thank You for saving me and giving me abundant life!

Now that you are a child of God, pray this prayer to your Father Daily!

My Father in Heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done.

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

Give me this day my daily bread.

And forgive me my trespasses,

As I forgive those who trespass against me.

And lead me not into temptation,

But deliver me from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(Matthew 6:9-13)

For more "Real Life Stories," go to the next page. To find out what to do now that you're saved, go to page 86.

CHAPTER 23

“Free Gift”

Why am I here?

What is life about?

Is it possible to live just to die?

What good is financial success when we must die?

Many years ago, my wife and I settled down to raise a family. My wife met some great people at the church where we were married, and I believe this was the start of my receiving a “Free Gift.”

Over the years our family grew. We had four wonderful children, a fantastic marriage, financial success, and many good friends. Sounds good, doesn't it? Even though it was good, I had many questions.

Why am I here? What is life about? Is it possible to live just to die? What good is financial success when we must die? Why do it? Why even be here? Why do I feel so confused? What is the answer? Why, when I have so much, do I have a feeling of emptiness?

For 19 years, I strongly believed that my family was the only thing that mattered, and I set out to provide for my family with everything the world had to offer. Almost everything I did was geared towards providing for my family and the generations of family to come. During this period of time, I searched high and low, trying many things, to fill the emptiness or void I felt: playing softball with the guys and drinking after the games, playing racquetball and drinking after the games, buying campers, snowmobiles, new cars, houses, etc. I tried working extra hours to make more money, buying more worldly possessions, starting a business, investing in and buying real estate, etc., etc., etc. All of these things gave me a very short-lived pleasure or happiness that would not last! It would leave as quickly as it came.

Fortunately for my family, while I was providing for their worldly life, my wife, Carla, was building the foundation for our eternal life. I have always believed there was a God, and I would occasionally pray when things were so far out of my control that I could not fix them. A couple things come to mind - like when my daughter was only weeks old and we had to put her in the hospital, and I feared for her life; when my son lay in the hospital with a staph infection; and when my wife was very sick and had an infection in her blood system - the doctor told me that my wife only had a 50/50 chance of survival. The most recent time was when a friend called for our support when his father was ill. Carla helped our friend while I stayed home with the kids.

As I laid there in bed that morning, I told God that I felt my friend's father was still needed in this world and that there was much good he could do by teaching God's word to people like me that still needed help. I asked God to please save my friend's father and to give him the opportunity to help others like myself. In return, I promised to try to follow his path, starting with attending church that coming Sunday.

The following Sunday, I attended church with my wife. It was a very peaceful feeling. The people at church all seemed so happy and full of life that it made me want to return the next Sunday. As the service was ending on my second visit, I felt very relaxed and was in no hurry to leave. After searching for the answers to my earlier questions, I came to the conclusion that we could not possibly live just to die. There was no other answer or reasoning to my problems and questions other than believing in God and having enough faith to accept His Son Jesus Christ in my life, so I did!

The love I saw in all the people "hit me." It was like nothing else I have ever felt in my life. At that time, I was not sure if it was Jesus filling the empty place in my heart or just all the love of the people reaching me. Whatever it was, I hoped it would never stop.

Looking back, I know that the Lord was with me every step of the way. The path He was leading me down was to teach me about the values of the world and temporary happiness versus complete and total joy and

the values of the Lord. The Lord blessed me and my family by enabling us to make the right decisions in regard to my investments. I have always based my decisions on what I called my “gut feeling,” but now I know it was my inner spirit leading me to worldly prosperity so that I would someday be able to testify that the things of the world are temporary and that worldly happiness will slip away very quickly. Even though I was blessed with prosperity before being blessed as a Christian, being a Christian means more to me than anything the world has to offer.

If you have any of the questions or problems I had, don't try to weather the storm on your own. Come in out of the rain, and let the Son of God, Jesus, meet your every need. Let Him lead you and guide you, through the Holy Spirit, from now to eternity. Since the writing of this testimony, the empty place in my heart has been filled with the Love of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God our Father.

In 1990 I had to quit my job of almost 20 years due to a rare blood disease. The doctors did not know what caused it and said they could do nothing for me. In January of 1994 the Lord told me He was going to heal me of that rare blood disease. In March of 1994, I took the same blood test that had led to the diagnosis that I had the rare disease. This time the results were negative! My blood had been cleansed by the Blood of My Savior. By His stripes, I was healed. Praise God! God can meet your every need and will if you do your part. I urge you to read God's word daily, pray daily, and praise the Lord's name daily.

“If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” John 15:7

Receive the “FREE GIFT!”

God Bless You:

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CHAPTER 24

Empty Inside

I was a good girl...

I never desired to drink, smoke, or do any kind of illegal drugs...

I respected my elders and loved my parents dearly...

I was handed the world on a silver platter...

But I still remember feeling empty inside...

I was raised a devout Catholic. We would dress up and attend mass every Sunday. In addition, I attended Catholic grade school as well as an all-girl Catholic High School. I would go to mass periodically throughout the week as well. I was baptized (sprinkled with water) as a baby and later received all the sacraments, including the First Holy Communion and the Confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

I was a good girl. I never desired to drink, smoke, or do any kind of illegal drugs. I did everything I was taught and told to do. I respected my elders and loved my parents dearly. I grew up in a very loving home. As an only child, I was handed the world on a silver platter. I seemingly was doing everything right and had everything I wanted or needed. However, by the time I reached the age of 12, I remember feeling empty inside. I got to the point where I didn't see the sense of going to mass anymore. I never got anything out of it. It was senseless to me. I found myself like that of a robot just going through the motions of standing, sitting, and kneeling. I felt as if I was in a co-pilot type mode, reciting all the verbal responses that were prewritten in a book, so I didn't even have to think for myself. The only thing I remember clinging to was the praise songs. Doing this same routine week after week became draining to my soul.

My mom's brother was recovering from an injury to his back. One day, he attended his seminary school's football game. Later that day, he came home thrilled with excitement and quickly announced to us that he had been healed! He was completely physically made whole! With great excitement, he explained that a stranger from the opponent's team saw

that he had been hurt and asked him if he would like prayer. During that prayer, my uncle felt a hand on his back. He turned to see who it was praying with them, and no one was there. At that very moment, he was healed completely, as if nothing ever had been wrong! My uncle quickly got further information from the gentleman who prayed for him as to what church he attended and more about how this miracle took place. The guy taught him about the tangible, loving presence of Jesus Christ and what it meant to be “born-again.” My uncle spent the rest of the evening with us, teaching us more of this beautiful revelation. Jesus is known as The Way, Truth, and the Life. There is no other way to the Heavenly Father but going through Jesus Christ.

From that evening onward, I just couldn't hear enough about what God did for my uncle that day. I was very excited, and my heart became filled with hope. My soul became hungry for this new truth about God. It was something that I'd never known or even really heard of before. All the years prior, hearing the priest read from the gospels about all the miracles of healing that Jesus did, was now reality for my uncle and family!

Soon after that miraculous day, my family started attending the non-denominational Christian Church that the guy told my uncle about. There, I heard the gospel preached in a brand new, very refreshing, and revelatory way. It was as if the gospel that the priest always read about was now coming to life.

It was there at church one Sunday during service when the pastor said some things that really gripped my heart and soul. He talked about what it took to have this amazing unconditional love come to life inside of me. He then asked for anyone who didn't already have a personal relationship with Jesus to come forward to the altar. I knew of Jesus, but I wanted to know Him more intimately, so I went forward. The pastor then prayed with the group. Quickly, during that prayer, I felt something wonderful change inside my soul. I felt a love more real than I had ever previously known. I later learned that it was the Holy Spirit of Jesus coming up on me in a fresh way. He became a living being inside of me. I was instantly changed as I was filled with unspeakable joy, and I haven't been the same since!

If you are like I was when I felt empty inside, not having a hope of a brighter day, my desire is for you to get to know that same amazing, unconditional love. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus is not just some farfetched imagination or fable character in a book. He is very real, and He wants to come inside and rescue you from the despair of going to hell (the lake of fire and eternal damnation.) Not only that, He wants to heal you in every area of your life. All you have to do is surrender to Him. Repent of all your sins. Ask Him to forgive you and simply come into your life and change it. He will! The question is will you? It will be a prayer that will literally change your life from the inside – out! I am forever changed!

Sherry

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You Are a New Person

The Bible says:

“When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Say this:

I am a new person. I have a new life, a God centered life.

The Bible says:

“All these new things are from God, who brought us back to Himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

God bridged the gap of sin between you and Him by Jesus dying on the cross. He now has given you the honor and privilege of telling people how to find that same favor with God through what Jesus has done for them.

The Bible says:

“He died for all so that all who live — having received eternal life from Him --- might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

Jesus died so you could have eternal life with Him in Heaven. Jesus is calling you to now live for Him, doing only those things with your life that would please Him.

To learn more about what you should now do, go to page 92.

CHAPTER 25

Life Was Bad

Partying was normal...

I drank heavily...

Evolution and reincarnation...

Witches and warlocks...

Anxiety, Misfortune, Emptiness, and Nervousness...

I was confused...

I grew up in an atheist family. Evolution was revered, and reincarnation was a given. My parents were well educated and had good careers. My father worked for the government, and my mother was an executive for a movie company. I thought because of that, I was a good and valuable person and had a right future.

In my teenage years, I drank heavily and smoked a lot of pot. Both my parents did, so of course all the partying was normal. I didn't even question the fact that my mother's friends were witches and warlocks. My mother was also my drinking buddy. When I became an adult, I found myself to be a full-blown alcoholic, and my life was bad. I was full of anxiety, misfortune, and emptiness. My self-image was bad, and I was full of nervousness. I was also confused and couldn't understand how my life could have turned out so badly. At 30, I found myself in a long-term treatment center. It was there that a group of individuals introduced me to Jesus. I decided since I couldn't help myself, but maybe this Jesus could. Alcohol was hell itself, and I didn't want to stay there. The first thing He did was remove my crippling obsession with alcohol.

The second thing He did was show me that I was a valuable person with a lot of beauty and that life was worthwhile. Know that when you give Jesus a chance, you are going to be on an exciting journey. You will have a lot of experiences in the valley and mountain tops and the pathways in between. You are going to discover who you truly are and what you are capable of. Today, He has given me a peace that passes

understanding and a serenity that is with me in all situations. I can truly say that Jesus is the best thing that has ever happened to me. He wants you to be free of any shackles and to walk in freedom too. He wants you to soar.

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CHAPTER 26

Widowed and Divorced

Mom was sickly, quiet, and not affectionate...

Dad was anxious and angry...

My husband died of a massive heart attack...

I wished that I had never been born...

Age 4, Jesus visited me while I was playing in the backyard. I promised Him that I would be a missionary.

Age 8, I had a repetitive dream in color that disturbed me, and I asked God to take it away.

Age 10, I came forward in church as a believer to be baptized. A missionary came to speak, saying Christians were kidnapped, tied to stakes in a swamp, and eaten by alligators. I reasoned with God that He did not want me to be eaten by alligators. I decided I would be a psychiatrist instead.

Subscribing to a psychology magazine, I searched to figure out why people do not choose to be happy through their God-given freewill, but it was filled with humanism psychology.

Age 12, my grandfather died. I wished that I had never been born because I missed him awful. I had a little brother. Our parents both worked. Mom was sickly, quiet, and not affectionate. Dad was anxious and angry. Mom's dad said children should be seen but not heard. His dad's parents said children should not be seen or heard. His parents locked him in a dark closet. My brother was troubled and unhappy, bullied every day at school. My poor baby brother received no appropriate attention or affection. He suffers as a lifelong victim, a drug addict who is still bullied and beat up, living alone in the ghetto in the government system. He just wants to be high.

At 15, I met my husband who had the same twinkle in his eyes, smile,

and touch that my grandfather had for me. He smelled like coffee, beer, and cigarettes. I just wanted to be held by him and smell him every day. His love helped me stop crying for my grandfather. I sinned as a teenager, a young woman, and felt the distancing of God. I prayed every day, loved Him, and had faith. However, I was not living out of the bible, but rather, humanism. My sin separated me from Him.

At 24, Frank and I were married. We had a son three years later. He was mad at the church, so we did not share a church family. Before he died, our son had a girlfriend that moved in without asking, no discussion. She had a very troubled life, not church, no relationship with Jesus. I asked God to show me His love for her, to show me her heart, and He did. I will always love, weep, and pray for her, that she will experience inner healing through the love of Jesus.

At 53, my husband died of a massive heart attack. Our son married his girlfriend a couple years later, and they had a beautiful baby boy.

At 57, I married a “religious” man that was in church every day. We were not a good match because his family did not accept me. They say you should not make any major decisions within the first five years of being widowed. I wish I had listened to that advise.

Being widowed and then divorced, I grew closer to the Lord while my family and I became more distant. By then there were two beautiful grandsons who were hurt by the divorce from the “religious” man.

At 59, I met Bill, a fisherman friend of the family.

Age 61, I was suffering from all of the loss in my life. Jesus told me to get happy. I got a puppy, named her “Happy,” and started visiting nursing homes. Bill and I took her to puppy training and boot camp. Happy is now an AKC Canines Good Citizen and Canine for Christ Therapy dog. She loves visiting people.

Age 62, Bill and I married. Like dad, he was an orphan until age 5, a single child. He had an encounter with Jesus before the age of 5. We moved away because we don't have any close, immediate family

relations. Bill spent the day with me on my 60th birthday when no one in my family paid any attention to me.

Now we have two dogs and are both members of Canines for Christ. We even formed a small chapter. Bill evangelizes with me and watches out for me. While my eyes are closed in prayer, his are open. While praying with people, I found I needed to learn how to give them more of God. I was referred to a School of Ministry which has changed our lives.

Age 66, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit and received anointing of higher gifts of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the love of God in my sphere of influence.

In the dreams I had when I was four years old, I was in the main aisle of my church. It was filling up with pretty translucent bubbles of lights of sparkling colors, floating up and out of the church doors to the sky. While the bubbles were spilling out the front doors, I was seated on a magical carpet. Floating slowly away, I saw my family engrossed below, sitting on a blanket with a picnic basket on the green church front lawn. They were not concerned or looking for me.

The interpretation of God's dream for me is that I would be serving, and I am not to worry about my family. The power of God the Father and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ floors me every day. When in communion with Him, tears may flow down my face, dripping to the floor, washing my soul as I stand in awe of His power and glory. I'm thankful for my life. I'm living God's dream for me. Thank you for listening to my story. God hungers for relationship with us all.

Ruth Anne

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What Do I Do Now?

1. Get a Bible, and read it every day. (Start in the New Testament.)
2. Find a church, and attend every time the doors are open.
3. Attend Bible studies and other Christ-centered meetings.
4. Pray every day – morning, noon, and night.
5. Tell people what Jesus has done for you.
6. Write out your Real Life Story, your testimony, and give it to people.
7. Make a public profession of your faith by being baptized in water.
8. Shout. Yes, Shout! Friend, you have something to shout about. You've been set free. Death cannot hold you, and Hell can't have you. You belong to God. No matter what happens in this life, as long as you continue to walk with Him, you will be with Him in Heaven.

Church Outreach

Every member in every local church has a real life story (a testimony). One of the most effective ways to teach Christians how to share their faith is to get them to write out their testimony (real life story) and share it as part of their everyday lifestyle. Step By Step Ministries worldwide award-winning evangelism teachings are available on DVD and cover the topic of sharing your testimony plus many, many more effective ways to witness. For more information and resources about witnessing call, text, write, or email:

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