

YOUR STORY ISN'T OVER.

The Author isn't finished yet.

From childhood trauma to hidden shame, from brokenness to redemption, Jennifer shares an honest testimony of God's unwavering faithfulness.

Through every chapter, Scripture reveals the hope, healing, and redemption found only in Jesus Christ.

*If you feel weary...
If you carry shame...
If you're wondering whether
God can redeem your story...*

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN FOR YOU.

Walk with a fellow traveler and discover that the darkest chapter is never the final chapter when Jesus Christ is the Author of your story.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Clayton has walked through the deep valleys of trauma and the life-changing hope found in Jesus Christ. Through childhood abuse, loss, brokenness, PTSD, family struggles, and seasons of overwhelming pain, she discovered that God never stopped writing her story.

Today, Jennifer's passion is to encourage fellow travelers to place their trust in Jesus Christ, whose grace is greater than every failure, every wound, and every fear. Her prayer is that readers will not simply know her story—but through it, come to know the Savior who changes lives.

Hope grows as faith grows.

♥ To God alone be the glory.



FROM VICTIM to VICTOR ♥ JENNIFER CLAYTON

A BIBLE STUDY WRAPPED IN A TESTIMONY
OF GOD'S REDEEMING GRACE

FROM VICTIM to VICTOR

*A Journey of Healing
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

He found me.
He forgave me.
He redeemed me.
He made me new.



NO SHAME
IS TOO GREAT.
NO STORY IS
TOO BROKEN.
NO LOVE IS
TOO STRONG.
Jesus Redeems.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began
a good work in you will carry it on to completion
—until the day of Christ Jesus.—"

— PHILIPPIANS 1:6 —

JENNIFER CLAYTON

From Victim to Victor
A Journey of Healing
Through Jesus Christ

Jennifer Clayton

"He found me.

He forgave me.

He redeemed me.

He made me new."

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:6

Theme Scriptures

These are the Scriptures that have anchored my life. They are woven throughout this book because they remind me that God's Word is always true, even when life is difficult.

God's Faithfulness

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28

God's Presence

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

Trust

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5–6

Hope

*"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run
and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah*

40:31

Grace

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made
perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9*

New Life

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The
old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*

2 Corinthians 5:17

God's Promise

*"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a
good work in you will carry it on to completion until the
day of Christ Jesus."*

Philippians 1:6

Freedom

For you were called to be free, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Without You, there would be no story worth telling.

You found me when I was broken.

You loved me when I felt unlovable.

You pursued me when I wandered.

You forgave me when I confessed.

You carried me through every valley.

You never abandoned me.

Every page of this book is a testimony to Your faithfulness, Your grace, and Your redeeming love.

May every reader who opens these pages come to know You more deeply and discover that true hope is found in You alone.

To my husband, Chad.

Thank you for loving me with patience, extending forgiveness with grace, and pointing me toward Christ through every season of our journey together. Your steadfast love has been one of God's greatest gifts in my life.

To my children and our family.

Thank you for loving me through my imperfections and reminding me daily that God's grace is sufficient. I pray this book leaves a legacy of faith that points each of you to Jesus Christ.

To every fellow traveler.

If these pages have found their way into your hands, my prayer is simple.

May you discover that your deepest wounds do not have the final word. Jesus does.

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Chapter One

Who Am I?

Theme Scripture

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:6

Dear Fellow Traveler,

I'm so glad you're here.

I don't believe you picked up this book by accident.

Maybe someone handed it to you.

Maybe you saw the title and thought, That sounds like me.

Or maybe your heart is simply tired, and you're searching for hope.

Whatever brought you here, welcome.

Before we go any further, I want you to know something about me.

I'm not writing this book because I have all the answers.

I'm not writing because I've lived a perfect life.

I'm certainly not writing because I've always gotten everything right.

In fact, just the opposite.

I'm writing because I've discovered that Jesus Christ is faithful in every season of life.

This book isn't about how strong I became.

It's about how faithful God has been.

We Are Fellow Travelers

As you read these pages, you'll notice that I call you my fellow traveler.

I chose those words intentionally.

We're all traveling through this life together.

Some of us are walking through beautiful mountaintops where the sun is shining, our prayers seem to be answered, and joy fills our hearts.

Others are walking through deep valleys where grief, fear, depression, anxiety, trauma, addiction, loss, or broken relationships make each step feel heavy.

Many of us have experienced both.

No matter where you are today, I want you to know this:

You are not walking alone.

I have walked through valleys I never would have chosen.

I've experienced abuse.

I've carried shame.

I've made sinful choices that I deeply regret.

I've struggled with PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

I've struggled with suicidal ideation.

I've watched addiction nearly destroy my family.

I've buried secrets.

I've wrestled with questions.

I've cried more tears than I can count.
Yet through every chapter, one truth has remained constant.
God has been faithful.

This Is Not a Book About Me

As you read my story, I hope you'll remember something.

I am not the hero.

Jesus is.

If all you remember after reading this book is my testimony,
then I will have failed.

But if my story causes you to open your Bible...

If it causes you to trust Jesus more deeply...

If it reminds you that God has not abandoned you...

Then these pages will have accomplished their purpose.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

*"For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus
Christ as Lord." 2 Corinthians 4:5*

That is my desire.

Not to make my name known.

But to make His Name known.

The Story God Was Writing

There were many years when I couldn't see what God was
doing.

I looked at my life and saw only broken pieces.

I wondered why certain things had happened.

I questioned whether healing would ever come.

I struggled to understand why God allowed so much pain.

Perhaps you've asked those same questions.

Maybe you're asking them today.

One of the verses that has anchored my life is Romans 8:28.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

Notice what that verse doesn't say.

It doesn't say everything that happens is good.

Abuse isn't good.

Rape isn't good.

Addiction isn't good.

Mental illness isn't good.

Sin isn't good.

But God...

God can redeem what sin has broken.

Only He can take shattered pieces and create something beautiful.

Only He can write redemption into chapters that seem beyond hope.

Looking back now, I can see His fingerprints everywhere.

Even when I couldn't see His hand, He never stopped working.

Hope Grows as Faith Grows

One phrase has become part of my life.

Hope grows as faith grows.

Hope isn't pretending life doesn't hurt.

Hope isn't denying reality.

Hope is choosing to trust God's character when we don't understand His plan.

I've learned that faith doesn't remove every storm.

It reminds us that Jesus is in the boat.

Some days my faith has been strong.

Other days I've simply whispered,

"Lord, help me."

He has never failed to answer.

Sometimes He changed my circumstances.

Sometimes He changed me.

Both were acts of His grace.

My Prayer for You

As we begin this journey together, I have one prayer.

I pray you won't compare your story to mine.

Pain cannot be measured.

Every wound matters to God.

Whether your scars are visible or hidden, Jesus sees them.

He knows every tear you've cried.

He knows every question you've asked.

He knows every burden you've carried.
And He invites you to bring it all to Him.
This book won't fix your life.
I can't do that.
But I know the One who can bring hope into the darkest places.
His name is Jesus.
My prayer is that as we walk together through these chapters,
you'll begin to trust Him more deeply than ever before.

Before We Continue...

To understand how God redeemed my story...
I need to take you back to where it all began.
Not so you'll feel sorry for me.
But so you'll see just how far His grace can reach.
Because every story of redemption has a beginning.
This is mine.

Meet With God

Read

- Philippians 1:6
- Romans 8:28
- Psalm 23
- Proverbs 3:5–6

Reflect

- What brought me to this book?

- Where in my life do I need hope today?
- Am I willing to trust that God is still writing my story?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for bringing me to this moment.

You know every chapter of my life—the joyful ones, the painful ones, and the ones I wish I could erase.

Help me believe that You are not finished with me.

As I read this book, open my heart to Your Word.

Teach me to trust You more deeply.

Heal what has been broken.

Strengthen my faith.

And let my hope grow as I come to know Jesus more fully.

I place my life into Your hands.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Chapter Two

My Innocence Was Stolen

Theme Scripture

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Before I tell you this part of my story, I want you to know why I'm sharing it.

I'm not writing these pages to relive my pain.

I'm not asking for sympathy.

I'm writing because I know there are others who carry wounds they have never spoken aloud.

If that's you, I want you to know from the very beginning that you are not alone.

More importantly, you are not beyond the reach of God's love.

A Childhood That Looked Normal

I was blessed with parents who loved me.

They worked hard.

They took me to church.

They wanted the very best for me.

When I look back on my childhood, I see parents doing everything they knew to do.

There was one thing they didn't know.
For about five years, I was sexually abused by a cousin.
Even now, writing those words is difficult.
I was just a little girl.
I didn't understand what was happening.
I didn't know how to explain it.
I didn't even have the words.
Children often don't recognize abuse for what it is. They only
know that something feels confusing, frightening, or wrong.
That's where I was.
Confused.
Afraid.
Silent.

The Silence

People sometimes ask why children don't tell.
I can't answer for every child.
I can only answer for the little girl I once was.
I didn't know how.
I didn't understand.
I didn't want to cause trouble.
I was scared.
So I stayed silent.
That silence lasted far longer than the abuse itself.
The abuse eventually stopped because my grandfather
witnessed what was happening.

For that, I will always be grateful.

But he never told my parents.

Because they didn't know, they couldn't help me heal.

I don't believe my grandfather intended harm. I believe he simply didn't know what to do.

But silence has consequences.

The abuse ended.

The confusion remained.

The fear remained.

The shame remained.

The Lies That Took Root

The abuse stole more than my innocence.

It distorted the way I saw myself.

Without realizing it, I began believing lies.

I thought something must be wrong with me.

I believed I was somehow damaged.

I carried shame that never belonged to me.

The enemy has always been a liar.

When he cannot destroy us outright, he often tries to define us by our wounds.

For years, I allowed what had happened to me to shape how I saw myself.

But here's what I know today.

What happened to me was never my identity.

I was never defined by another person's sin.

My identity has always belonged to the One who created me.

Looking Back

One of the blessings of growing in Christ is that you begin to see your story differently.

As a little girl, I thought I had been forgotten.

As a woman who has walked with Jesus for a time, I know I never was.

God saw every tear.

He heard every silent cry.

He knew every question I couldn't ask.

Even when I couldn't feel His presence, He was there.

That truth doesn't erase the pain.

But it changes everything.

Because if God was with me then, He has been with me every step since.

What I Wish Every Child Knew

If I could sit beside every child who has experienced abuse, I would hold their hand and tell them this:

This was not your fault.

You are not dirty.

You are not ruined.

You are not unlovable.

God is not ashamed of you.

He loves you more deeply than you can imagine.

And what someone else chose to do does not change your value in His eyes.

Those words would have meant everything to the little girl I once was.

Maybe they are words someone reading this book needs to hear today.

God Was Already Preparing Me

There is something beautiful about looking back through the eyes of faith.

Long before I understood God's love, He was already pursuing me.

My parents faithfully took me to church.

Bible stories filled my childhood.

Seeds of truth were being planted in my heart.

I didn't realize it then, but God was preparing me for a day when those seeds would grow into faith.

Even in my darkest chapter, the Great Shepherd had not lost sight of one little lamb.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe your story is different from mine.

Maybe your wounds have different names.

But pain has a way of making all of us ask the same questions.

"Does God see me?"

"Does He care?"

"Can He really heal someone like me?"

I have asked those questions.

Today I know the answer.

Yes.

He sees you.

He knows you.

He loves you.

And He is able to redeem what this broken world has tried to steal.

Your deepest wound is not beyond His reach.

Your story is not over.

The Author is still writing.

Meet With God

Read

- Psalm 34:18
- Psalm 139:1–18
- Isaiah 43:1–4
- Matthew 19:13–15

Reflect

- Have I believed lies about my worth because of something that happened to me?
- What does God say about my identity?
- What burden have I been carrying that belongs in Jesus' hands?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for seeing every part of my story.

Thank You that nothing has ever been hidden from You.

For every reader carrying wounds from childhood, draw near with Your comfort and Your truth.

Replace shame with the assurance of Your love.

Replace fear with Your peace.

Help us believe that our identity is found not in what has happened to us, but in who we are in Christ.

Teach us to trust You with the chapters we do not understand, knowing that You are the Author who never leaves His children.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Chapter Three

Another Childhood Wound

Theme Scripture

"Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved."

Psalm 55:22

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Sometimes life doesn't wound us just once.

Sometimes one painful chapter is followed by another.

As children, we aren't equipped to process what we see or experience. We simply carry it.

Some burdens come from what is done to us.

Others come from what we witness.

Neither belongs on the shoulders of a child.

Looking back, I realize I spent much of my childhood carrying burdens I was never meant to bear.

A Place That Should Have Been Safe

A couple of years after the abuse ended, my mother enrolled me in a daycare operated by one of her relatives.

To everyone else, it probably looked like a safe place.

It was a house filled with children.

Parents dropped us off each morning believing we would be cared for.

My mother loved me. She had no reason to think otherwise.
She trusted people she believed she knew.
Looking back, I have no anger toward her. My heart hurts for her. She would have done anything to spare me the abuse.
She could not protect me from something she never knew was happening.

Memories That Never Left

The memories are still vivid.
There were somewhere between twelve and fifteen boys and girls there.
At nap time we would all lie on the floor together in one large room with our blankets and pillows.
Everything seemed quiet.
Then my aunt would come into the room.
She would quietly take one of the little girls away.
After a while the little girl would return.
She was always crying.
She would lie back down, clutching her pillow tightly between her legs.
Then another little girl would be taken.
The same thing happened again.
And again.
I was still just a child.
I didn't understand everything.
But somewhere deep inside, I knew something wasn't right.

I didn't know what to do.

I didn't know how to tell anyone.

I only knew I felt helpless.

After about two months, I started school and never went back.

But those memories never left me.

Carrying Someone Else's Burden

For years, I carried guilt over what I had witnessed.

I wondered if I should have done something.

Should I have told someone?

Could I have stopped it?

Those questions stayed with me long into adulthood.

As I grew in my relationship with Christ, I finally realized something.

I had spent decades expecting a little girl to do what only an adult could have done.

That little girl was never responsible.

She needed protection.

She needed someone to speak for her.

She needed someone to rescue her.

The guilt I carried was never mine to bear.

The Enemy's Lies

Satan has a way of taking painful experiences and turning them into lies.

He whispered that I had failed.
That I should have been stronger.
That I should have somehow saved those girls.
But Jesus speaks differently.
He reminds us that children are precious to Him.
When the disciples tried to keep children away, Jesus said,
*"Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them,
for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."*
Matthew 19:14
Jesus doesn't place impossible expectations on children.
He welcomes them.
He protects them.
He loves them.
That truth has brought tremendous healing to my heart.

Learning to Let Go

One of the hardest lessons God has taught me is learning to release burdens I was never created to carry.
For many years, I believed strength meant carrying everything by myself.
I thought if I just tried harder, prayed harder, or understood more, I could somehow fix what was broken.
But Jesus never asked me to carry the weight of the world.
He simply asked me to come to Him.
Little by little, I began placing those childhood memories into His hands.
Not because I forgot them.

But because I finally trusted the One who is able to carry what I cannot.

God Was Preparing My Heart

At the time, I couldn't see God's hand.

I only saw pain.

Now, looking back through the lens of faith, I see something different.

God never abandoned me.

He was quietly planting seeds of truth through faithful parents, church, and His Word.

He knew there would come a day when I would need to know that He is close to the brokenhearted.

He knew there would come a day when I would understand that He alone could carry the burdens I had carried for so long.

Even when I couldn't see Him, He was preparing my heart for the day I would meet Jesus.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've spent years carrying something that was never yours to carry.

Maybe it's guilt.

Maybe it's shame.

Maybe it's responsibility for choices that belonged to someone else.

Can I gently remind you of something that God has had to teach me?

Burdens do not belong on our shoulders.

Burdens belong at the feet of Jesus.

He never asked you to carry what only He can bear.

Today, you can begin laying those burdens down.

One memory.

One fear.

One prayer at a time.

And as you do, you'll discover what I have discovered.

His shoulders are much stronger than ours.

Meet With God

Read

- Psalm 55:22
- Matthew 11:28–30
- Matthew 19:13–15
- 1 Peter 5:7

Reflect

- What burden have I been carrying that God never asked me to carry?
- Am I holding myself responsible for something that was beyond my control?
- What would it look like to place that burden into Jesus' hands today?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for inviting me to bring every burden to You.

Forgive me for trying to carry alone what You have lovingly offered to carry for me.

Help me release guilt that does not belong to me.

Heal the places in my heart that still ache from childhood.

Teach me to trust You more deeply each day.

Thank You for loving me, protecting me, and reminding me that I have never walked alone. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Chapter Four

Looking for Love

Theme Scripture

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

1 John 3:1

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Every human heart longs to be loved.

We long to be accepted.

To belong.

To be chosen.

To know that someone sees us and says, "You matter."

God placed that desire within us because He created us for a relationship with Him.

But when sin entered the world, everything became distorted.

Love became confused.

Acceptance became conditional.

Worth became tied to performance.

For me, those distortions began at a very young age.

Growing Up Too Fast

After years of childhood abuse and witnessing things no child should ever see, I entered my teenage years carrying wounds I didn't understand.

No one had explained what had happened to me.

No one had helped me process the confusion.

The abuse had awakened curiosity about sex long before I was emotionally mature enough to understand it.

That curiosity wasn't something I asked for.

It was part of the damage left behind.

As I grew older, I confused sexual attention with love.

I thought if someone wanted me, then maybe I had value.

I believed lies that had quietly taken root in my heart.

Looking back now, I can see that I wasn't really searching for sex.

I was searching for love.

I was searching for acceptance.

I was searching for someone to tell me I mattered.

Anger Became My Companion

The older I became, the angrier I became.

I didn't always know why.

I just knew there was something inside me that never seemed to settle.

I often felt misunderstood.

Sometimes I pushed people away before they could hurt me.

Other times I desperately wanted someone to notice the pain I worked so hard to hide.

Trauma has a way of making us build walls around our hearts.

Those walls may protect us for a season.

Eventually, they become prisons.

I was surviving.

But I wasn't living.

Searching in All the Wrong Places

As I look back now, I realize I was asking people to fill a place in my heart that only God could fill.

I looked for acceptance.

Approval.

Affection.

Identity.

None of those things were wrong to desire.

But I was looking in the wrong place.

Every relationship eventually disappointed me.

Not because people are bad.

Because people were never meant to become my savior.

Only Jesus could carry that weight.

Pornography Addiction

As I moved through my teenage years, my confusion about sex and love continued.

My curiosity about sex turned into looking at pornography wherever I could find it. Remember the old 1-900 commercials? I called those numbers. You can only imagine what I heard. More lies. More attempts to meet needs in a false way—not through the One who wanted my heart. Eventually, the phone

bill came. Needless to say, my parents weren't happy. I had four brothers growing up, and my parents were shocked that it was their only daughter. They didn't know about my scars or the reasons behind my behavior. They couldn't have. That story has been told at family gatherings and even at my dad's funeral. It still stings every time I hear it. It is a painful reminder of a girl who needed Jesus. The pornography became a full-blown addiction that continued for years.

God's Design Is Good

For many years, I misunderstood God's commands.

I thought they were rules designed to keep me from enjoying life.

Now I see them differently.

God's commands are acts of love.

He designed intimacy to flourish within the safety of a lifelong covenant between a husband and wife.

He wasn't holding anything good from me.

He was protecting something beautiful.

His commands are not chains.

They are guardrails.

Every one of them points us toward life.

I remember when my son Joshua was little, he asked if he could go swimming at a friend's house across the road from ours. I was busy doing yard work and couldn't go with him. I asked Josh whether his friend's parent would be outside supervising. His reply was, "No, ma'am." I explained that an adult needed to supervise them to keep them safe. Since an adult was not available, he had to stay home. Of course, he didn't like my

answer. Parents establish boundaries to keep their children safe. It is no different with God. His commandments are meant to protect us from what lies outside His will for our lives.

Identity

One of the greatest battles I have fought has been the battle for my identity.

Was I what someone else had done to me?

Was I the mistakes I had made?

Was I the shame I carried?

The world offers many identities.

Victim.

Failure.

Addict.

Broken.

Rejected.

God offers one identity that changes everything.

Child of God.

That identity cannot be earned.

It cannot be taken away by another person's sin.

It is a gift received through faith in Jesus Christ.

When I finally understood this truth, everything began to change.

My husband, Chad, and I served with our church at Talladega Motor Speedway with Alabama

Our part of Alabama Raceway Ministries was called “VAL Girls,” which stands for Valued, Accepted, and Loved by God. The purpose of the ministry was to pray and help keep people safe in an environment where danger could arise. We prayed throughout the campground at night and relied on God to show us where we were needed. One night, He led us to a teenage girl running through an unlit part of the campground and screaming for help. A man was chasing her, and all she could tell us was that she didn’t know him. God placed us there to help protect that young girl. It was one of the first times I recognized God leading me toward His purpose for my life.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe you've spent years trying to earn love.

Maybe you've confused attention with acceptance.

Maybe you've looked for your worth in relationships, accomplishments, appearance, or success.

Can I tell you something that changed my life?

You don't have to earn the love of God. You already have His invitation.

Before you accomplish another thing...

Before you fix another mistake...

Before you become "good enough"...

God has already demonstrated His love through Jesus Christ.

You are not valuable because someone chooses you.

You are valuable because your Creator made you in His image and loved you enough to send His Son to die for you.

Nothing this world offers compares to that kind of love.

Meet With God

Read

- 1 John 3:1
- Psalm 139:13–18
- Romans 5:8
- Ephesians 2:1–10

Reflect

- Where have I searched for love or acceptance apart from God?
- What lies have shaped my identity?
- What does God's Word say about who I am?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for loving me before I ever knew You.

Forgive me for searching for acceptance in places that could never satisfy my heart.

Help me believe that my worth is not determined by my past, my failures, or the opinions of others.

Teach me to find my identity in Jesus Christ alone.

Fill the empty places in my heart with Your perfect love.

Help me walk each day as Your beloved child.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Chapter Five

A New Beginning

Theme Scripture

"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Proverbs 16:9

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Have you ever wished you could start over?

I think most of us have.

Sometimes we imagine that if we could just move to a different place...

Find a different job...

Meet different people...

Or leave our past behind...

Everything would somehow be different.

I know that feeling well.

There came a point in my life when I desperately wanted a fresh start.

I wanted purpose.

I wanted direction.

I wanted to become someone different.

Looking back, I realize that while I was making plans, God was directing my steps.

Joining the Air Force

One of the biggest decisions I ever made was joining the United States Air Force.

To me, it represented a new beginning.

I hoped it would be the fresh start my heart longed for.

It gave me structure.

Responsibility.

Adventure.

It gave me the opportunity to serve my country.

More than anything, it gave me hope that my future could look different from my past.

For the first time in a long while, I felt like I was moving toward something instead of simply running away from something.

I didn't realize then that God would use those years in ways I never expected.

Learning Independence

Military life challenged me.

It taught me discipline.

Responsibility.

Perseverance.

I met people from different backgrounds and cultures.

I learned to adapt.

I learned that I was capable of more than I had believed.

Those years helped shape me in many positive ways.

But even while I was growing on the outside, my heart still carried wounds that no amount of success could heal.

You can wear a uniform and still feel broken.

You can accomplish goals and still carry shame.

You can appear confident while quietly hurting inside.

That was me.

Looking for Purpose

Serving my country gave me purpose.

But it didn't answer my deepest questions.

Who was I?

Why had so many painful things happened?

Would I ever feel whole?

Could anyone truly love me?

Those questions quietly followed me wherever I went.

Changing my location hadn't changed my heart.

I was learning something that many of us eventually discover.

A new environment cannot heal an old wound.

Only Jesus can do that.

God's Quiet Provision

One of the beautiful things about looking back is recognizing God's hand in places where I never noticed Him at the time.

Even before I knew Him personally, He was providing for me.

He placed good leaders in my path.

He gave me opportunities to grow.

He surrounded me with people who encouraged me.

He protected me in ways I will probably never fully understand until heaven.

God's providence often works quietly.

We usually recognize it only after we've walked through the season.

I didn't see His fingerprints then.

I see them now.

When God Is Preparing Us

There are seasons when we think we're simply beginning a new chapter.

Later we realize God was preparing us for chapters we couldn't yet imagine.

The Air Force became one of those seasons for me.

It wasn't just a career decision.

It became part of God's preparation.

He was teaching me discipline.

He was building resilience.

He was placing people in my life.

He was reminding me that my story wasn't over.

Although I didn't know it at the time, He was patiently leading me toward the day I would finally surrender my life to Christ.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you're standing at the beginning of a new season.

Maybe you've started a new job.

Moved to a new city.

Entered a new relationship.

Or simply decided that life has to change.

Those fresh starts can be wonderful gifts from God.

But I've learned something important.

Real transformation doesn't begin with changing our surroundings.

It begins when God changes our hearts.

If you're looking for a new beginning today, don't place all your hope in a new place or a new plan.

Place your hope in Jesus.

He is the only One who can make all things new.

And when He begins a work in your heart, He is faithful to finish it.

Meet With God

Read

- Proverbs 16:9
- Jeremiah 29:11–13
- Philippians 1:6
- Isaiah 43:18–19

Reflect

- Have I been looking to circumstances instead of Christ for a fresh start?
- Where can I see God's hand preparing me, even if I didn't recognize it at the time?
- What new beginning might God be inviting me into today?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for guiding my steps, even when I could not see where You were leading.

Help me trust that Your plans are greater than my own.

Teach me not to place my hope in changing circumstances but in Your unchanging character.

As You continue the work You have begun in me, give me the courage to follow wherever You lead.

May every new season draw me closer to Jesus.

In His precious name, Amen.

Chapter Six

Another Wound

Theme Scripture

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned." Isaiah 43:1-2

Dear Fellow Traveler,

There are moments in life that divide our story into "before" and "after."

You remember where you were.

You remember how you felt.

You remember how life was never quite the same.

This chapter tells the story of one of those moments in my life.

I have prayed about whether to include it because I never want pain to become the focus of this book.

But I also know there are many people quietly carrying wounds like this.

If that's you, I hope you'll hear something much louder than my story.

I hope you'll hear the voice of Jesus.

Life Was Moving Forward

The Air Force had given me purpose.

For the first time in years, I believed my life was moving in a better direction.

I had responsibilities.

Friendships.

Dreams.

I thought I had finally escaped the darkness of my childhood.

I couldn't have known that another painful chapter was about to begin.

Life has a way of reminding us that brokenness doesn't disappear simply because we've changed our surroundings.

The Night Everything Changed

During my second year in the Air Force, after underage drinking, I was sexually assaulted.

Even now, those words are difficult to write.

I fought.

I tried to stop him.

I remember feeling powerless.

Confused.

Afraid.

But one of the deepest wounds came afterward.

Not everyone believed me.

That disbelief cut almost as deeply as the assault itself.

When someone questions your truth after you've experienced trauma, it can leave you feeling invisible.

It makes you question yourself.

It makes you wonder if anyone will ever understand.
For a long time, I carried those questions alone.

Questions Without Answers

After that night, my heart became filled with questions.

"God, where were You?"

"Why did this happen?"

"Why didn't You stop it?"

I yelled those questions to the top of my lungs many times.

Those are honest questions.

Questions many hurting people ask.

For years, I searched for answers.

I wanted God to explain everything.

Instead, He slowly taught me something that would become one of the greatest lessons of my life.

Faith doesn't always begin with understanding.

Sometimes faith begins with trusting the heart of God when we cannot understand His plan.

That lesson didn't come overnight.

In fact, it only came once I started walking with Him.

God's Quiet Presence

When I look back now, I can see God's hand in ways I couldn't recognize at the time.

He placed compassionate leaders in my life.

He gave me a few close friends who believed me and stood beside me.

They couldn't erase what had happened.

No one could.

But through them, God reminded me that I wasn't completely alone.

I've learned that one of the ways God comforts His children is through the people He places in their lives.

Sometimes His comfort comes through Scripture.

Sometimes through prayer.

Sometimes through a faithful friend who simply stays.

Those gifts are reminders that He has never abandoned us.

The Lies That Followed

Trauma has a way of planting lies and Satan will confirm them time and time again.

I began believing I was damaged.

Broken beyond repair.

Too wounded to ever live a normal life.

The enemy whispered that my future had been stolen.

But God had another story.

Even though I couldn't see it yet, He was already writing a chapter of redemption.

The enemy saw an ending.

God saw a beginning.

Looking Back Through Grace

Today, when I think about that young woman in the Air Force,
my heart aches for her.

She was trying so hard to be strong.

Trying to keep moving.

Trying to pretend everything was okay.

If I could sit beside her today, I would tell her this:

"You are not alone."

"This is not your identity."

"God has not turned His face away from you."

"There will come a day when your pain will no longer define
your story."

I couldn't see that then.

But I see it now.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've experienced something similar.

Perhaps your wound has a different name.

Abuse.

Betrayal.

Violence.

Loss.

Whatever it is, I want you to hear this clearly.

God did not stop loving you.

He has never looked away.
He has never abandoned you.
The people around you may not have understood.
Some may not have believed you.
But your Heavenly Father knows the truth.
He sees every tear.
He hears every silent prayer.
He is near to the brokenhearted.
And one day, He will make all things new.
That promise has carried me through many dark nights.
I pray it will carry you too.
Because the darkest chapter is never the final chapter when
Jesus is the Author of your story.

Meet With God

Read

- Isaiah 43:1–2
- Psalm 34:18
- Romans 8:38–39
- Hebrews 13:5–6

Reflect

- Have I believed that my wounds define me more than God's Word does?
- Where have I questioned God's presence because of my pain?

- What does today's Scripture reveal about God's faithfulness?

Prayer

Father,

There are wounds that only You fully understand.

Thank You for being near to the brokenhearted and for never abandoning Your children.

For every reader carrying the weight of abuse, violence, or betrayal, surround them with Your love and truth.

Replace fear with Your peace.

Replace shame with the identity found in Christ.

Help us trust that even when we cannot understand our suffering, You remain faithful.

Thank You for promising never to leave us or forsake us.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Note

As I reread this chapter, I realized something that changes how I see my own story.

For years I thought this chapter was about another tragedy.

Now I believe it's about something else.

It's about the relentless faithfulness of God.

Even when I couldn't feel His presence...

Even when I questioned Him...

Even when others doubted me...

He never stopped pursuing me.

One day I would discover that the Shepherd had been walking beside me all along—even when I couldn't yet recognize His footprints. That realization has changed the way I read every chapter of my life.

Chapter Seven

Building a Life Without Jesus

Theme Scripture

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Proverbs 14:12

Dear Fellow Traveler,

There are moments in life when we believe we have everything under control.

We make plans.

We build careers.

We start families.

We chase dreams.

From the outside, everything can appear perfectly fine.

But appearances can be deceiving.

That was true in my life.

I learned how to survive.

I learned how to smile.

I learned how to keep moving.

What I had not learned was how to surrender.

I was building a life.

But I was building it without Jesus at the center.

Going Through the Motions

My parents faithfully raised me in church.

For that, I will always be grateful.

I knew the stories of the Bible.

I knew who Jesus was.

I believed He died on the cross.

If someone had asked me if I was a Christian, I probably would have answered, "Yes."

But looking back, I realize there is a difference between knowing about Jesus and belonging to Him.

Church was something I attended.

Jesus had not yet become the Lord of my life.

I was trying to direct my own steps instead of following His.

Building a Family

As life moved forward, I married and became a mother. I married a good man. We were young.

God blessed me with two beautiful children.

Motherhood changed me in ways I could never have imagined.

I loved my children deeply and wanted to give them the stability and security I had longed for myself.

Yet even as I cared for them, there were places in my own heart that remained unhealed.

I had learned to function.

I had not learned to be free.

Many people around me probably would have said I was doing well.

Only God knew how restless my heart really was.

This was also the time God gave me my best friend. She was a go-getter who taught me to trust relationships again. She became my confidant and consistently showed me love and grace. She is part of almost every memory I have from my adult years. No distance seemed too far as long as we had a working phone. Eventually, she accepted an assignment in Italy, where the phone service was terrible. We could no longer talk every day as we had grown accustomed to doing, but the distance only made our friendship stronger. For once, I had a relationship in which we both gave and received. God's timing was perfect, even before I knew Him personally.

Running Instead of Healing

One lesson I have learned is:

Unhealed wounds don't stay in the past.

They quietly follow us into the future.

They influence the way we think.

The way we love.

The way we trust.

The decisions we make.

Without realizing it, I carried my childhood pain into my marriage.

I carried fear into relationships.

I carried shame into every room I entered.

I kept hoping that if I stayed busy enough, worked hard enough, or loved deeply enough, the emptiness would eventually disappear.

It never did.

Because the deepest need of my heart wasn't another accomplishment.

It wasn't another relationship.

It wasn't another fresh start.

It was Jesus.

My Greatest Regret

While I was deployed to Saudi Arabia, I made decisions that still grieve me today.

I entered into an adulterous relationship.

That relationship resulted in a pregnancy.

Fear consumed me.

Afraid of the consequences.

Afraid of what people would think.

Afraid of what might happen to my military career.

Instead of turning to God, I leaned on my own understanding.

Out of fear, I chose to have an abortion.

Even writing those words is painful.

I cannot change what I did.

I cannot rewrite that chapter.

If I could, I would.

But I have learned that while we cannot rewrite the past, we can bring it to the One who redeems broken people.

Living With Hidden Shame

Afterward, I buried everything.

I buried the affair.

I buried the abortion.

I buried the guilt.

I buried the grief.

I convinced myself that if I never spoke about it, perhaps I could leave it behind.

But secrets have a way of growing in the darkness.

The enemy constantly reminded me of my failures.

He whispered that I was disqualified.

That God could never forgive someone like me.

That if people knew the truth, they would reject me.

For years, I believed those lies.

God blessed me with my third child, Hannah. Hannah is a perfect blessing from God. Her father and I never married.

The relationship ended when a military move relocated me from Colorado to Texas. I found myself alone with three children depending on me. God knew my needs, though. He placed Dexter and Melinda in my life. I had been stationed with them in Colorado, and He used their faithfulness to minister to me in my time of need. They invited me to church, where I met people and developed healthier relationships. God also placed

church leaders in my life who pointed me to Jesus—caring people who would shape my life for years to come. Jesus was faithful even then, although I still could not release my past. God also placed Joe and Anna, the grandparents of my beautiful Hannah, in my life. They showed me grace, welcomed me into their family, built a loving relationship with Hannah, and accepted me with open arms. How is that for God's grace?

The decision that ended my Air Force career

My next mistake was a serious one. I had begun going out with a friend to local clubs. At the time, I was an instructor stationed in Wichita Falls, Texas, and instructors were not allowed to fraternize with students outside the teaching environment. I make no excuses. I became involved in a sexual relationship with a student and was caught. You guessed it: court-martial. Once again, the path I had chosen to escape my past seemed ruined. I lost many of the relationships I had relied on, and people who had once been there to help me walked away. This is still difficult for me to write about. Dexter and Melinda continued to show up for me and demonstrate the love of the Lord. They will never know the extent to which God used them to carry me through that season. I remain good friends with both of them today. Of course, my best friend was also there every step of the way. She defended and supported me when almost everyone else bailed out.

As my court date drew closer, things became worse. I was scared, and I had every reason to be. Because of events taking place in the Air Force at the time, my case received media attention. The spotlight was on me, and that rarely works well. I eventually pleaded guilty, bringing the Air Force chapter of my

life to an end. My mom and dad loved me through it. My dad had suffered a massive heart attack about seven months before my trial was scheduled to begin, yet my parents still drove fourteen hours to be with me. My dad was given the opportunity to testify at my court-martial. My parents showed me so much grace, and I hope they knew how much that meant to me. My dad passed away in 2017, but I know he was proud of me despite my actions. I'm blessed to still have my mom, and I pray she knows how grateful I am for her. It is not a story I'm proud of, but I no longer allow Satan to use it to define my identity. I served honorably for twelve years, yet I allowed one mistake to define my entire career for far too long. God was still developing my story, even before I knew Him personally.

After my career in the Air Force ended, only God could have gotten me through the dark days of uncertainty that awaited. I was an unemployed, single parent of three children who relied on me for their every need. Looking back, I know it was the faithful hand of God that guided me through that time. He was still pursuing me.

It took me five months to find a job after I left the Air Force. Nothing seemed to fit my need

to be there to raise my children. I was finally offered an office manager job from a friend at

church. I worked there for about five months before I decided to go to college. Looking back at

that time in my life, it was only God's grace that I graduated from college with a bachelor's degree

in accounting. God was lovingly putting the pieces of my life back together and mending my

wounds through His grace and mercy.

God Was Still Pursuing Me

What amazes me now is not how far I wandered.

It is how faithfully God pursued me.

Even when I was making decisions that broke His heart, He never stopped loving me.

He never stopped calling me.

He never stopped working behind the scenes.

I couldn't see it then.

But today I know He was preparing me for the greatest turning point of my life.

The Good Shepherd had not abandoned His wandering sheep.

He was coming to find me.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe you're carrying a secret.

Maybe there is a chapter of your life you hope no one ever discovers.

Maybe you believe your past has disqualified you from God's love.

I once believed that too.

But I've discovered something beautiful.

There is no sin so great that the grace of God cannot forgive it when we come to Him with genuine repentance and faith.

That doesn't erase consequences.

It doesn't pretend sin isn't serious.

But it does reveal something even greater.

The mercy of God.

If you're hiding today, I want you to know that freedom begins with bringing our darkness into the light of Christ.

His grace is greater than your greatest failure.

Meet With God

Read

- Proverbs 14:12
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 51
- Romans 5:8
- 1 John 1:9

Reflect

- Have I been trying to build my life without fully surrendering it to Christ?
- Is there a burden of guilt or shame I have been carrying alone?
- What would it look like to bring my hidden places into God's light?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for loving me even when I wandered far from You.

Thank You that Your mercy is greater than my greatest failures.

Forgive me for the times I trusted my own understanding instead of Your wisdom.

Help me walk in honesty, repentance, and faith.

Thank You that through Jesus Christ there is forgiveness, restoration, and hope.

Prepare my heart to receive Your grace more deeply each day.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Note

As I look back on this chapter, I no longer see only my failures.

I see the incredible patience of God.

While I was running from Him, He was running toward me.

I didn't know it yet, but the greatest day of my life was just around the corner.

The next chapter isn't about me finding God.

It's about God finding me

Because that's the beauty of the Gospel

Long before we seek Him,

He has already been pursuing us.

Chapter Eight

Jesus Found Me

Theme Scripture

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Dear Fellow Traveler,

The day I gave my life to Jesus Christ was the greatest day of my life.

But it was not the finish line.

It was the starting line.

The Day of Salvation

By this time in my journey, my children and I had moved to Alabama to be with my parents while my dad was sick. My family attended church, and I went with them, still going through the motions of a faith I had not yet truly surrendered to. I had not yet given my life to Jesus. Ironically, I decided to learn how to share the Gospel through our outreach ministry. While I was learning how to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, He found my heart ready. My friend Danielle shared the plan of salvation with me. I repented of my sin, put my faith in Jesus Christ, and received the free gift of salvation. How could the Father forgive a sinner like me, someone so desperately in need of a Savior? Not only did He save me that day, but He also blessed me with a wonderful group of friends who disciplined me and showed me love and kindness.

The greatest day of my life was not the day I finally became strong enough to fix myself. It was the day Jesus found my heart

ready, I repented of my sin, put my faith in Him, and received the free gift of salvation.

That was not the end of my story. It was the beginning of learning to walk with Jesus.

Chapter Nine

Learning to Walk

Theme Scripture

"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Philippians 1:6

Dear Fellow Traveler,

For many years, I thought becoming a Christian meant I would never struggle again.

I imagined my fears would disappear.

My questions would be answered.

My temptations would vanish.

Life would become easy.

It didn't.

Instead, I discovered something much better.

I discovered I would never have to walk alone again.

A Baby Doesn't Begin by Running

When a baby is born, no one expects them to get up and run.

We celebrate the first smile.

The first word.

The first step.

We understand that growth takes time.

Yet somehow, we often expect ourselves to become mature Christians overnight.

God doesn't.

Our Heavenly Father is far more patient than we are.

He knows we are learning to walk.

He knows we will stumble.

He knows we are growing.

That realization brought tremendous peace to my heart.

God wasn't surprised by my weaknesses.

He was faithfully teaching me to depend on Him.

His Grace Didn't End at Salvation

One of the greatest truths I have learned is that God's grace didn't stop the day He saved me.

His grace has carried me every day since.

There have been days when my faith has been strong.

There have been days when I could barely pray.

Days when fear felt louder than faith.

Yet every morning, God's mercy met me again.

I began to understand what Jeremiah meant when he wrote,

"His mercies are new every morning."

I didn't need yesterday's grace.

I needed today's.

And every day, God faithfully supplied exactly what I needed.

Wandering and Returning

Although I belonged to Christ, there were still seasons when I drifted.

Not because God moved.

Because I did.

Life became busy.

Responsibilities increased.

Sometimes I relied on my own strength instead of His.

Sometimes I allowed fear to become louder than faith.

Sometimes I wandered.

But every time I wandered, God lovingly called me back.

He never shamed me.

He never rejected me.

He simply welcomed me home.

The story of the prodigal son became deeply personal to me.

For years I focused on the son.

Now I find myself looking at the Father.

The son expected punishment.

The Father ran to embrace him.

That is the heart of our God.

The Still Small Voice

As I continued growing in my relationship with Jesus, I began recognizing something beautiful.

God never shouted.

Most often, He whispered.

Not an audible voice.

But the gentle conviction of His Spirit through His Word.

Over and over, I sensed Him saying,

"Jennifer...

Trust Me."

Trust Me when you don't understand.

Trust Me when you're afraid.

Trust Me when healing seems slow.

Trust Me when your prayers seem unanswered.

Trust Me with your future.

There were times I argued.

"Lord...why?"

But He kept bringing me back to Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all ways acknowledge Him and He will guide your path."

I realized that God wasn't asking me to understand everything.

He was asking me to trust Him.

Growing One Step at a Time

Healing wasn't one dramatic moment.

It was thousands of small moments.

Opening my Bible.

Praying when I didn't feel like praying.

Going to church.

Serving others.

Learning to laugh again.

Thanking God for ordinary blessings.

Looking back, I see that God wasn't only healing my heart.

He was teaching me how to live.

One faithful step at a time.

When I met my husband

I didn't know it at the time, but my life was about to take another dramatic turn. I met my future husband, Chad, at church. He was part of my circle of friends, and our group spent a great deal of time together. Our common thread was that we were all single. We had very different stories, but God brought us together to strengthen one another. Chad, who has now been my husband for fourteen years, eventually asked me on a date to the zoo. We spent the day together with our children in tow. Six weeks later, we married. We didn't tell anyone beforehand; we simply got married. Blending a family of seven is not for the faint of heart. God has blessed our marriage, but we have also faced many trials. God never promises an easy life after salvation. He promises to walk beside us as we endure the trials.

A year after we married, Chad adopted Hannah and she officially became a Clayton.

Hope Grows as Faith Grows

Somewhere along this journey, a simple phrase settled into my heart.

Hope grows as faith grows.

The more I learned about God's character...

The more I trusted Him.

The more I trusted Him...

The more hope filled my heart.

Not because life became easier.

But because I came to know the One who walks with me through every season.

Hope isn't pretending life is perfect.

Hope is knowing Jesus is faithful.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've recently given your life to Christ.

Or maybe you've known Him for years but feel discouraged because you're still struggling.

Can I encourage you?

Don't confuse struggling with failing.

The Christian life isn't about never falling.

It's about continually getting back up because Jesus is holding your hand.

You don't have to become spiritually mature overnight.

Keep reading His Word.

Keep praying.

Keep gathering with other believers.

Keep trusting Him.

One day you'll look back, as I have, and realize that while you were focused on how slowly you were walking...

God was faithfully growing you every step of the way.

Meet With God

Read

- Philippians 1:6
- Luke 15:11–32
- Lamentations 3:22–23
- Proverbs 3:5–6
- John 15:1–11

Reflect

- Am I expecting perfection instead of pursuing faithfulness?
- Where have I seen God's patience in my own spiritual growth?
- What small step of obedience is God asking me to take today?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for Your incredible patience.

Thank You for never giving up on me.

When I stumble, remind me that Your grace is still sufficient.

Teach me to trust You one step at a time.

Help me remain close to Jesus, knowing that You are faithfully completing the work You began in me.

May my hope continue to grow as my faith grows.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Note

As I look back over my Christian life, I no longer measure growth by how few mistakes I've made.

I measure it by something much simpler.

How quickly do I run back to Jesus?

The longer I have walked with Him, the more I realize that spiritual maturity isn't about becoming independent.

It is about becoming increasingly dependent on Jesus.

That is where true freedom is found.

And that is where hope continues to grow.

Chad's Addiction

Chad has suffered from kidney stones and migraines for years. He began seeing a pain-management doctor and was prescribed narcotic pain medication. Shortly after Chad adopted Hannah—just over a year into our marriage—we began our journey through addiction. If you have experienced addiction in your family, you know the powerful control it can have over a person. Chad did not intend to become addicted. He had been prescribed pain medication, and over time the medication took control. He hid the problem for a while, but God brings secrets out of hiding. Chad lost job after job. The family of a person struggling with addiction suffers greatly, too. For the next four years, addiction robbed our family of so much

of the husband and father we loved. Yet God shines His light on our sin not to shame us, but to gently draw us closer to Him.

heartbroken. I remember sitting on the porch with my dad recounting my conversation with Chad. I told my dad I was leaving Chad. I couldn't make myself pray. I was mad at God, more than mad, angry. My dad told me he was praying and needed to give me some advice. He said, "Jennifer, don't give up on Chad; don't give up on your marriage." My dad was very sick now.

He told me he would be able to help me right now but wouldn't be there in couple of months. My dad passed away from cancer 2 months later. I took his advice and am thankful Chad and I have, only through God's strength and grace, weathered all our storms together. Rock Bottom

Sometimes God allows us to reach the end of ourselves before we discover that He is enough.

It's not until we reach the end of our rope that God takes over.

In 2017, our family reached that place.

That same year, my father passed away from cancer.

Grief settled over our family while addiction continued to tighten its grip.

I finally reached a point where I could no longer pretend everything was okay.

One day I looked at Chad and gave him an impossible choice.

Our family...

Or the drugs.

At that moment, he chose the drugs.

As painful as it was, I asked him to leave.

It remains one of the hardest decisions I have ever made.

I loved him deeply.

But love sometimes requires difficult boundaries.

The Children Were Watching

One of the hardest parts of that season was realizing how deeply our children were affected. My oldest daughter, Kaitlyn, quietly took on responsibilities far beyond what a young person should have to carry.

She helped with the house.

She helped with her siblings.

She stepped into places that should have belonged to the adults.

As her responsibilities increased, so did her frustration.

Looking back now, my heart hurts for all of our children.

Children often carry burdens they never asked for.

I know that because I was once one of those children.

It reminded me all over again how desperately families need Jesus.

I remember crying out to God.

"Lord, I don't know what else to do."

For the first time in a long time, I truly understood what it meant to surrender someone I loved into God's hands.

Chad's victory over addiction

Rock bottom has a way of stripping away every illusion.

After leaving home, Chad reached his own breaking point.

By God's grace, something changed.

He realized he didn't want addiction to write the rest of his story.

He cried out for help.

He made the courageous decision to stop.

He quit taking the pills.

It wasn't easy.

Recovery rarely is.

There were difficult days.

There were moments when trust had to be rebuilt.

Healing didn't happen overnight.

But every small step became another reminder that God specializes in impossible situations.

Today, Chad has remained free from those pills.

Every day of sobriety is another testimony to God's sustaining grace.

Our next storm begins

My storm with night terrors, flashbacks, depression, anxiety disorder and anger were now out of control. I could finally relax, yet I couldn't. Four months after Chad's addiction, I was diagnosed with complex PTSD, bipolar depression, and severe anxiety.

At the time I was finally diagnosed with complex PTSD, I had already been mentally ill for years during Chad's addiction. I was out of control and self-admitted to the hospital at the VA hospital for treatment for suicidal ideation.

What is Complex PTSD?

C-PTSD shares many symptoms with PTSD, including flashbacks, hypervigilance, difficulty regulating emotions,

negative feelings about oneself, interpersonal difficulties, and memory problems. C-PTSD is associated with long-term and repeated trauma, particularly when it occurs during childhood. My first counselor, Dr. Lynn, used an illustration to explain PTSD that I hope my fellow travelers will find helpful. She described the brain as having shelves that store our memories. With PTSD, it can feel as though those memories fall from their shelves and come crashing down. Memories, thoughts, and feelings become twisted and tangled like multiple sets of Christmas lights. Managing those symptoms can drain tremendous energy. C-PTSD is a mental-health condition I have learned to live with, and I am still learning how to cope during flare-ups. I have experienced multiple flare-ups since my diagnosis and treatment. Jesus is my source of strength in all things, and He has blessed me beyond measure with a team of physicians who care for me.

An Illustration

Illustrations often help when understanding PTSD. My pastor used a story in a sermon about setting traps (no animals were harm, just property removal) As he tries to release or remove the animal, it resists the help

The animals fought every attempt to help them.

From the outside, it looked as though it was resisting rescue.

But it wasn't resisting rescue.

It was responding out of fear.

How often are people like that?

The hurting often push away the very people trying to help them.

Not because they don't need love.

Because they've forgotten what love feels like.

Jesus patiently rescues hearts.
He never gives up on us.
Instead, He gives rest to the weary

Looking Beyond Behavior

Living with PTSD taught me something I never expected.
Pain often disguises itself.
Sometimes it looks like anger.
Sometimes addiction.
Sometimes isolation.
Sometimes perfectionism.
Sometimes sarcasm.
Sometimes silence.
We often judge what we can see without asking what lies underneath.
Jesus always looked deeper.
I want to learn to do the same.
I continuously pray to see people through Jesus.
Jesus patiently untangles hearts.
He never gives up.

Chapter Ten

The Truth Sets Us Free

Theme Scripture

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9

Dear Fellow Traveler,

There is something exhausting about carrying a secret.

It becomes a weight you never put down.

You smile while hurting.

You worship while hiding.

You pray while wondering if God could ever truly forgive you.

You convince yourself that if no one ever finds out, life will somehow be easier.

But hidden sin has a way of quietly stealing our joy.

I know.

Because I carried mine for years.

The Weight of Shame

Although I had surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, there were still chapters of my past that I kept hidden.

I had confessed my sins to God. I knew He had forgiven me.

Yet there was still one person who didn't know the whole story.

My husband.

For years, I convinced myself that telling him would only cause unnecessary pain.

I told myself I was protecting him.

Looking back, I realize I was also protecting myself.

I was afraid.

Afraid he would leave.

Afraid he would never look at me the same way again.

Afraid my past would destroy the life we had built together.

Fear has a way of keeping us in prison.

Jesus came to set captives free.

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

As I continued growing in Christ, I learned there is a difference between guilt and shame.

Guilt says,

"I have sinned."

Shame says,

"I am my sin."

One leads us to repentance.

The other keeps us imprisoned.

The Gospel speaks a different message.

In Christ, I am not defined by my worst decision.

I am defined by His greatest sacrifice.

The cross speaks louder than my past.

That doesn't excuse my sin.

It magnifies His mercy.

Conviction Is an Act of Love

One of the greatest differences between condemnation and conviction is this:

Condemnation pushes us away from God.

Conviction draws us toward Him.

As I continued growing in my relationship with Christ, the Holy Spirit gently began dealing with my heart.

Not with anger.

Not with shame.

With love.

Over and over, I sensed Him saying,

"Jennifer...

Walk in the light."

It wasn't because God wanted to embarrass me.

It was because He wanted me to experience freedom.

The more I resisted, the heavier the burden became.

Eventually, I knew I could no longer hide.

Telling Chad

That conversation is one I will never forget.

I was terrified.

I had imagined every possible outcome.

Most of them ended with my marriage falling apart.

I told Chad about the affair.

I told him about the abortion.
I told him about the pornography addiction.
I told him the truth I had carried for so many years.
Then I waited.
I expected anger.
I expected rejection.
I expected condemnation.
Instead...
I experienced grace.

A Glimpse of the Gospel

That day, God taught me something beautiful.
Chad's response wasn't perfect because he was perfect.
It was gracious because Christ had been changing his heart too.
He listened.
He grieved.
He asked honest questions.
And then he forgave me.
His forgiveness didn't erase the pain.
It didn't remove the consequences of my choices.
But through his gentleness, God allowed me to see a glimpse of the Gospel.
I realized that if an imperfect husband could extend such grace, how much greater is the grace of my perfect Savior?
Jesus had already paid the price for every sin I confessed.
His forgiveness wasn't reluctant.

It was purchased at the cross.

Confession Brings Freedom

For years I believed confession would destroy my life.

Instead, it became one of the greatest gifts God ever gave me.

James writes,

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another; that you may be healed." (James 5:16)

Healing doesn't come because confession earns God's forgiveness.

Forgiveness was purchased by Jesus.

But confession brings hidden things into the light, where healing can begin.

The enemy works in darkness.

Jesus calls us into the light.

That doesn't mean every confession will receive the same response I received from Chad. Some relationships have been deeply wounded, and rebuilding trust can take time. Some people may respond with hurt, anger, or distance.

But regardless of how others respond, we can trust that God is faithful to forgive the repentant heart and to walk with us through the consequences of our choices.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've been carrying something you've never told another soul.

Maybe it's a secret.

A failure.

A regret.

A chapter you hope no one ever discovers.

Can I encourage you?

Jesus already knows.

And He still loves you.

The cross is sufficient.

His mercy is greater than your greatest sin.

His grace is deeper than your deepest shame.

Don't spend another day living in the darkness.

Step into His light.

You may be surprised by the freedom waiting there.

Meet With God

Read

- 1 John 1:5–9
- James 5:16
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 51
- Romans 8:1

Reflect

- Is there an area of my life I have been hiding from God or others?
- Am I living under condemnation instead of embracing God's forgiveness?
- What would it look like to walk more fully in the light of Christ?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for Your amazing grace.

Thank You that because of Jesus Christ, my sins can be forgiven and my shame removed.

Give me the courage to live honestly before You.

Help me trust You enough to bring every hidden place into Your light.

Teach me to extend the same grace to others that You have shown to me.

May my life never point people to my failures, but always to the cross where mercy triumphed over sin.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Note

For many years I thought my greatest testimony was that God forgave me.

Today I realize it is even greater than that.

He didn't simply forgive me. He transformed me.

The woman writing these words is not the same woman who carried those secrets for so many years.

Not because I became stronger.

But because Jesus kept His promise.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

My fellow traveler, if you are in Christ, that promise is yours too. Your past may explain part of your story, but it no longer defines who you are. Your identity is found in the One who loved you, gave Himself for you, and is still writing your story.

Jesus Is the Greater Redeemer

I've often thought about the story of Ruth.

Boaz became her kinsman-redeemer.

He protected her.

He provided for her.

He gave her hope.

Through the years I've sometimes thought of Chad as my Boaz because of the grace he has shown me.

But even Chad would tell you he is not my redeemer.

Jesus is.

Only Jesus could pay the debt of my sin.

Only Jesus could cleanse my heart.

Only Jesus could give me a new identity.

Every act of forgiveness we extend to one another is simply a reflection of the forgiveness we have first received from Him.

Living in the Light

That conversation with Chad changed something inside me.

Not because my past disappeared.

But because its power over me did.

Secrets lose their strength when they are brought into the light of God's grace.

For years I believed confession would destroy my life.

Instead...

It became the beginning of a deeper freedom.

There is peace in having nothing left to hide.

There is joy in knowing that the people who truly love you now love the real you.

More importantly...

There is incredible freedom in knowing that God already knew everything about me—and chose to love me anyway.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe you've convinced yourself that your secret is too great.

Too shameful.

Too painful.

Too unforgivable.

Can I lovingly tell you something?

The cross is greater.

Jesus already knows what you're carrying.

He isn't waiting to condemn you.

He is inviting you to come home.

Repentance isn't about earning God's love.

It's about turning toward the God who has already demonstrated His love through Christ.

Don't stay in the darkness.

Walk into His marvelous light.

There is freedom there.

There is healing there.

There is Jesus there.

Meet With God

Read

- 1 John 1:5–9
- Psalm 51
- Romans 8:1
- James 5:16
- Luke 15:11–32

Reflect

- Is there an area of my life that I am still trying to hide?
- Do I believe God's grace is greater than my greatest failure?
- What does it mean to live honestly before God and others?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You that nothing in my life is hidden from You.

Thank You that through Jesus Christ I am forgiven, loved, and made new.

Give me the courage to walk in the light.

Help me trust You with every part of my story, even the chapters I wish I could erase.

Teach me to receive Your grace fully and to extend that same grace to others.

May my life point not to my failures, but to the mercy of my Savior.

In the precious name of Jesus,

Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

For years I thought confession would cost me everything.

Instead, it gave me something I had never truly experienced.

Freedom.

Not because I deserved it.

Not because I had earned it.

But because Jesus had already paid for it.

If there is one truth I hope every fellow traveler remembers after reading this chapter, it is this:

There is no sin so great that the grace of God cannot forgive it when we come to Him with a humble, repentant heart.

That is the beauty of the Gospel.

That is the hope that changed my life.
And that is the hope I pray changes yours.

Chapter Eleven

God Redeems

Theme Scripture

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28

Dear Fellow Traveler,

There are certain verses in Scripture that become more than words on a page.

They become lifelines.

They become anchors.

They become promises you cling to when everything around you seems to be falling apart.

For me, that verse has always been Romans 8:28.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." Notice what Paul does not say.

He doesn't say all things are good.

Abuse isn't good.

Rape isn't good.

Addiction isn't good.

Mental illness isn't good.

Death isn't good.

Sin isn't good.

But our God is so powerful, so loving, and so sovereign that He can take even the darkest chapters of our lives and weave them into a story that displays His glory and His grace.

That has become the testimony of my life.

A Marriage of Two Broken People

When Chad and I married, neither of us understood how much baggage we were bringing into our relationship.

We loved one another.

We wanted a good life together.

But love alone cannot heal wounds that only Christ can heal.

I carried years of unresolved trauma.

Fear.

Anxiety.

Depression.

Shame.

Chad carried burdens of his own.

Like many couples, we were trying to build a healthy marriage while still learning how to become healthy people.

God loved us enough not to leave us there.

Redemption Looks Different Than We Imagine

When I was younger, I thought redemption meant getting my old life back.

Now I understand something much deeper.

God doesn't simply restore what was lost.

He transforms it.

Our marriage isn't stronger because we avoided hardship.

It's stronger because we walked through hardship and discovered that Christ was faithful in the middle of it.

We learned to pray together.

To forgive.

To communicate honestly.

To depend on God's strength instead of our own.

Our scars did not disappear.

But they became reminders of God's healing instead of symbols of defeat.

The Verse That Carries Me

Romans 8:28 has never meant more to me than it does today.

God didn't cause our suffering.

He didn't delight in our pain.

But He refused to let suffering have the final word.

Only God can take abuse and grow compassion.

Only God can take addiction and produce a ministry of hope.

Only God can take broken marriages and display His faithfulness.

Only God can take shattered lives and write stories of redemption.

Looking back, I can honestly say this:

I would never choose those painful chapters again.

But I would never trade what I have learned about God's faithfulness through them.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps your family feels like it's falling apart.

Perhaps someone you love is battling addiction.

Perhaps you're standing where I once stood, wondering if there is any hope left.

Can I encourage you?

Don't confuse God's silence with His absence.

He is still working.

Sometimes His greatest work happens underground, where no one can yet see it.

Keep praying. Keep trusting.

Keep loving with wisdom.

Keep placing your family into His hands.

The same God who met us in our darkest season has not changed.

He is still in the business of redeeming broken people.

And He is still writing beautiful stories.

Meet With God

Read

- Romans 8:28–39
- Genesis 50:20
- Psalm 46
- James 1:2–4

Reflect

- Where have I struggled to believe that God can redeem painful circumstances?
- What relationships have I been trying to carry instead of surrendering to God?
- How have I seen God's faithfulness in difficult seasons?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for being the God of redemption.

Thank You that nothing in my life is beyond Your ability to restore according to Your perfect will.

Help me trust You when I cannot see what You are doing.

Strengthen families who are walking through addiction, grief, conflict, or brokenness.

Teach us to surrender those we love into Your faithful hands.

May our lives become testimonies of Your grace, Your mercy, and Your power to redeem. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

For years I thought Romans 8:28 was a verse to memorize.

Today, I know it is a promise to live.

When I look back over my life, I don't see a series of unrelated tragedies.

I see the faithful hand of God, patiently weaving together every joy, every sorrow, every failure, and every victory into a story that points not to me—but to Jesus Christ.

My fellow traveler, don't judge your whole story by one chapter.

The Author hasn't finished writing yet.

Chapter Twelve

The Shepherd Never Left

Theme Scripture

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." Psalm 23:1–4

Dear Fellow Traveler,

If there is one chapter in the Bible that has comforted me more than any other, it is Psalm 23.

I memorized it long before I understood it.

When I was in high school, our band director had the entire marching band recite Psalm 23 every

Friday night before football games.

At the time, it was simply something we memorized.

I had no idea that years later, those same words would become an anchor for my soul.

Isn't that just like God?

Long before we know we'll need His Word, He begins planting it deep within our hearts.

He was preparing me for valleys I hadn't yet seen.

The Valley

Life has taught me that everyone walks through valleys.

Some valleys are short.

Others seem to stretch on for years.

I've walked through valleys of abuse.

Valleys of shame.

Valleys of depression.

Valleys of PTSD.

Valleys of grief.

Valleys where my marriage felt fragile.

Valleys where addiction touched my family.

Valleys where I questioned everything.

If you've lived long enough, you've walked through valleys too.

Perhaps you're walking through one right now.

The Promise Isn't the Mountain

For many years, I misunderstood Psalm 23.

I thought the goal was to reach the mountaintop.

To finally arrive at a place where life was easy.

Where prayers were always answered the way I hoped.

Where suffering disappeared.

But David never promised that.

He didn't say God would help us avoid the valley.

He said,

"Even though I walk through the valley... You are with me."

The miracle isn't that valleys disappear.

The miracle is that the Shepherd walks with us through them.

That truth changed my life.

Mountains and Valleys

One day God gave me a picture that I have never forgotten.

Think about a mountain.

The view from the top is breathtaking.

You can see for miles.

It feels like victory.

But look closely.

Most mountaintops are rocky.

Bare.

Very little grows there.

Now think about a valley.

The valley is different.

Streams flow there.

Trees take root there.

Flowers bloom there.

The soil is rich.

Life grows there.

Spiritually, I've discovered the same thing.

The mountaintops remind me to praise God.

The valleys teach me to depend on Him.

It has been in the valleys that my faith has grown the most.

Not because I enjoyed the pain.

But because I discovered the presence of my Shepherd in ways I never would have known otherwise.

The Shepherd Knows the Way

One of the beautiful things about sheep is that they don't have to know where they're going.

They simply follow the shepherd.

The shepherd knows where the green pastures are.

He knows where danger is.

He knows where still waters can be found.

He knows the safest path.

I've realized that's exactly how my relationship with God works.

For years I wanted Him to explain every chapter of my life.

Instead, He gently reminded me,

"Jennifer...just follow Me."

I don't have to understand every twist in the road.

I don't have to know why every painful thing happened.

I simply need to stay close to the Shepherd.

He Restores My Soul

There have been many times when I felt emotionally exhausted.

PTSD has a way of draining your strength.

Anxiety can leave you weary before the day even begins.

Depression whispers lies that hope is gone.

Yet over and over, God has restored my soul.

Sometimes through His Word.

Sometimes during prayer.

Sometimes while running.

Sometimes while swimming.

Sometimes on a pickleball court laughing with friends.

Sometimes in complete silence.

I've learned that restoration often comes quietly.

One verse.

One prayer.

One sunrise.

One conversation.

One faithful step at a time.

He Never Left

Looking back over my life, I can now see something I couldn't see while I was living it.

There was never a chapter where God abandoned me.

Not during the abuse.

Not during the sexual assault.

Not during my poor choices.

Not during my shame.

Not during Chad's addiction. Not during my porn addiction Not during my PTSD.

Not during the darkest nights.

There were certainly times I couldn't feel His presence.

But feelings are not the measure of God's faithfulness.

His promises are.

Jesus promised,

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

He has kept that promise every single day of my life.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe today you're standing in a valley that feels impossible.

Perhaps you've prayed the same prayer a hundred times.

Maybe you're wondering if God still hears you.

Can I encourage you?

Don't measure God's presence by your feelings.

Measure it by His promises.

The Shepherd has not wandered away.

He has not forgotten your name.

He has not stopped loving you.

If you cannot see the path ahead, simply stay close to Him.

He has never lost one of His sheep.

He won't start with you.

Meet With God

Read

- Psalm 23
- John 10:11–18
- Hebrews 13:5–6
- Isaiah 41:10

Reflect

- What valley am I walking through today?
- Where have I experienced God's presence in past valleys?
- Am I asking God to explain everything, or am I learning to trust my Shepherd?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for being my Good Shepherd.

Thank You for never leaving me, even when I couldn't feel Your presence.

Teach me to trust You in every season.

When I walk through valleys, remind me that You are walking beside me.

Restore my soul when I grow weary.

Help me keep my eyes on Jesus, knowing that He always leads with wisdom, love, and faithfulness.

Thank You that one day every valley will give way to eternity with You.

Until then, help me keep following wherever You lead.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

For years I thought the goal of the Christian life was to reach the mountaintop and stay there.

Now I know something better.

The Shepherd is just as present in the valley as He is on the mountain.

If I could remove every valley from my life, I probably would.

But if I had never walked through those valleys, I would never have known the Shepherd as intimately as I do today.

My fellow traveler, if you're in a valley today, don't lose heart.

Keep walking.

The Shepherd is not behind you.

He is not far ahead of you.

He is walking beside you.

And because He is with you, you can take the next step. Then the next. And one day, you'll look back and realize what I have learned:

God never wasted a single valley.

Chapter Thirteen

Trust Beyond Understanding

Theme Scripture

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5–6

Dear Fellow Traveler,

If there is one lesson God continues to teach me, it is this:

Trust Me.

Not when life is easy.

Not only when prayers are answered the way I hoped.

Not only when everything makes sense.

Simply...

Trust Me.

For someone who has experienced trauma, that isn't always easy.

Trauma leaves us asking questions.

"Why?"

"Where was God?"

"Could I have done something differently?"

"Will life ever feel normal again?"

For years, I believed peace would come after I understood everything.

Instead, God taught me something far more beautiful.

Peace comes when we trust the One who understands everything.

The Need to Understand

Looking back, I realize I spent much of my life trying to solve mysteries that only God could answer.

Why did the abuse happen?

Why didn't someone stop it sooner?

Why was I raped?

Why did my family experience so much pain?

Why PTSD?

Why addiction?

Why loss?

Every answer seemed to create another question.

Eventually I realized something.

If my peace depended on understanding everything, I would never have peace.

God wasn't asking me to understand every chapter.

He was asking me to trust the Author.

The Still Small Voice

There have been many times when I desperately wanted God to shout.

Instead...

He whispered.

Not with an audible voice.

But through His Word.

Through prayer.

Through the gentle conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Again and again I sensed Him saying,

"Jennifer...trust Me."

Trust Me with your fears.

Trust Me with your marriage.

Trust Me with your children.

Trust Me with your PTSD.

Trust Me with tomorrow.

Trust Me with what you cannot change.

Sometimes I argued.

"Lord, I don't understand."

He lovingly reminded me,

"You don't have to understand Me to trust Me."

That lesson has changed the way I walk with Him.

The Teddy Bear

One day the Lord gave me an illustration that I have never forgotten.

Picture a little child holding a worn-out teddy bear.

Its fur is matted.

Its seams are torn.

One eye may even be missing.

To everyone else, it's just an old toy.

But to that little child, it represents comfort.

Security.

Familiarity.

Now imagine a loving father kneeling beside that child.

Behind his back, he is holding a brand-new teddy bear.

It's larger.

Softer.

Beautiful.

He gently asks his child,

"Will you give Me your old teddy bear?"

The child hugs the old bear tighter.

Why?

Because that's the one they know.

They can't see what their father is holding behind his back.

How often have I done the same thing with God?

I held tightly to my fear because it was familiar.

I held tightly to shame because I had carried it for years.

I held tightly to my own plans because I thought they would protect me.

All the while, my Heavenly Father was gently saying,

"Jennifer, trust Me. I have something better." Sometimes what He gives isn't what I expected.

Sometimes it isn't easier.

But it is always better because it comes from His loving hand.

Learning to Pray Differently

There was a time when nearly every prayer I prayed sounded the same.

"Lord, fix this."

"Lord, change that."

"Lord, make this easier."

Those are honest prayers, and God welcomes our honesty.

But over the years, something changed.

Instead of always asking God to change my circumstances, I began asking Him to change me.

Instead of praying,

"Lord, tell me why."

I found myself praying,

"Lord, help me trust You."

That simple prayer has transformed my relationship with Him.

His Plans Are Better Than Mine

There have been many times when I thought I knew exactly what God should do.

I had my own plans.

My own timeline.

My own solutions.

I'm grateful God didn't always answer those prayers the way I wanted.

His plans have always been wiser than mine.

Sometimes His answer was "yes."

Sometimes it was "wait."

Sometimes it was "no."

Looking back, I can honestly say every one of those answers was an expression of His love.

A good Father doesn't always give His children what they ask for.

He gives them what they truly need.

Faith Is a Daily Choice

Trust isn't something we decide once.

It's something we choose every day.

Some mornings trust comes easily.

Other mornings I have to remind myself of God's promises before my feet ever touch the floor.

I open His Word.

I pray.

I remember His faithfulness yesterday.
Then I choose to believe He will be faithful today.
One day at a time.
One step at a time.
One promise at a time.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,
Perhaps you're waiting for answers.
Maybe you've been praying the same prayer for years.
Maybe your heart is weary.
Can I encourage you?
Don't wait until you understand everything before you trust
God.
You'll never know everything.
Neither will I.
But we know the One who does.
That is enough.
When life doesn't make sense...
Trust Him.
When fear whispers...
Trust Him.
When tears fall...
Trust Him.
When tomorrow feels uncertain...

Trust Him.

He has never failed you.

And He never will.

Meet With God

Read

- Proverbs 3:5–6
- Isaiah 55:8–9
- Psalm 37:3–7
- Philippians 4:6–9

Reflect

- Where am I struggling to trust God because I don't understand His plan?
- What "old teddy bear" am I holding onto instead of surrendering to Him?
- How has God proven Himself faithful in the past?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for being completely trustworthy.

Forgive me for the times I have relied on my own understanding instead of Your wisdom.

Help me release every fear, every unanswered question, and every burden into Your hands.

Teach me to trust You with all my heart.

Even when I cannot see the road ahead, remind me that You already know the destination.

Thank You for always giving what is best, even when I don't yet understand.

Help me keep my eyes on Jesus and faithfully follow wherever He leads.

In His precious name, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

As I have grown in Christ, I've realized that trust isn't the absence of questions.

Trust is choosing to believe God's character even when my questions remain unanswered.

One day, in heaven, I believe many of my "whys" will finally make sense.

Until then, I have learned something even better.

I don't have to know every answer.

I simply have to know my Shepherd.

And that has become enough.

My fellow traveler... don't judge your whole story by one chapter.

The Author is still writing.

Chapter Fourteen

My Thorn

Theme Scripture

"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

2 Corinthians 12:9

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Have you ever prayed the same prayer over and over, hoping God would remove something from your life?

I have.

There have been seasons when I pleaded with God to take away my anxiety.

To heal my PTSD.

To remove my depression.

To quiet the thoughts that often seemed louder than peace.

I believed that if God would simply remove those struggles, life would finally become easier.

Instead...

He taught me something much greater.

He taught me to depend on Him.

Paul's Thorn

One passage of Scripture has become especially meaningful to me over the years.

The Apostle Paul speaks about what he called a "thorn in the flesh."

Three times he pleaded with God to remove it.

God's answer wasn't what Paul expected.

Instead He said,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

The Bible never tells us exactly what Paul's thorn was.

I don't claim that my struggles are the same as his.

But there are days when my PTSD feels like my own thorn.

It reminds me that I cannot walk this journey alone.

It reminds me that I need Jesus every single day.

Looking back, I can honestly say that some of my deepest moments of intimacy with God have come through seasons of weakness.

Not because weakness is good.

But because weakness has taught me dependence.

Daily Bread

Jesus taught His disciples to pray,

"Give us this day our daily bread."

For years, I thought that verse was only about physical provision.

Now I understand it differently.
God gives me today's grace.
Today's strength.
Today's peace.
Today's wisdom.
He doesn't usually hand me enough grace for the next ten years.
He gives me enough for today.
Then tomorrow...
He gives it again.
Living by faith means trusting Him one day at a time.
Sometimes one hour at a time.
Sometimes one breath at a time.
And every time I have needed Him...
He has been faithful.

God Restores in Ordinary Ways

One of the things God has used in my healing journey is movement.
Exercise has become an important part of my recovery.
There is something about running that clears my mind.
There is something peaceful about swimming.
I love being outdoors where I can see God's creation and be reminded of His greatness.
And then there is pickleball.
Who would have thought God could use a paddle, a plastic ball, laughter, and good friends to bring joy back into my life?

Yet He has.

Sometimes healing comes in extraordinary moments.

Sometimes it comes while watching a sunrise.

Sometimes it comes through the encouragement of a friend.

Sometimes it comes after a walk, a run, or a game that reminds us we are still alive and that joy is still possible.

Every good gift comes from the Father.

Hope Grows as Faith Grows

Somewhere along my journey, a simple phrase became part of my heart.

Hope grows as faith grows.

The more I learned about God's character..

The more I trusted Him.

The more I trusted Him...

The more hope filled my heart.

Hope doesn't mean life suddenly becomes easy.

Hope means believing that God is still faithful even when life is hard.

Every answered prayer strengthened my faith.

Every unanswered prayer deepened my trust.

Every valley reminded me that my Shepherd never leaves His sheep.

Hope wasn't something I manufactured.

It grew naturally as my faith grew.

Victory Looks Different

The world often defines victory as the absence of problems.

God defines victory differently.

Victory isn't pretending I don't struggle.

Victory is getting out of bed on difficult mornings and choosing to trust Jesus anyway.

Victory is opening my Bible when my mind feels overwhelmed.

Victory is praying when I don't have the words.

Victory is praising God through tears.

Victory is asking for help when I need it.

Victory is believing God's promises even when my emotions tell me something different.

The enemy once convinced me that weakness meant failure.

Now I know weakness can become the very place where God's strength shines the brightest.

Until Heaven

There are still days when PTSD reminds me that I live in a broken world.

There are still days when anxiety knocks at the door.

There are still moments when grief catches me by surprise.

Following Jesus has not removed every struggle.

But it has completely changed how I walk through them.

I no longer walk alone.

One day, every wound will be healed.

Every tear will be wiped away.

Every broken thing will be made new.

Until that day...

I will keep following Jesus.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've been praying for healing.

Maybe you've wondered why God hasn't answered the way you hoped.

Can I encourage you?

Never confuse God's delay with God's absence.

He may be doing a deeper work than you can currently see.

Sometimes He heals instantly.

Sometimes He heals gradually.

Sometimes He strengthens us while we wait.

Whatever season you're in today, His grace is enough.

Not because you are strong.

Because He is.

Lean into Him.

Rest in Him.

Keep trusting Him.

His strength has never failed me.

It will not fail you.

Meet With God

Read

- 2 Corinthians 12:7–10
- Isaiah 40:28–31
- Matthew 6:25–34
- James 1:17

Reflect

- Where have I mistaken weakness for failure?
- How has God met me in seasons when I felt I had nothing left?
- What ordinary gifts has God placed in my life that remind me of His goodness?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You that Your grace is sufficient for every weakness I face.

When I grow weary, remind me that Your strength never runs out.

Teach me to depend on You each day instead of relying on my own strength.

Help me notice the ordinary gifts You place in my life—moments of joy, laughter, friendship, and peace.

Thank You for carrying me through every valley and reminding me that I never walk alone.

May my hope continue to grow as my faith grows, until the day I see You face to face. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

For many years I asked God to take away every struggle.

Today, my prayer is different.

"Lord, whatever You allow into my life, don't let me waste it."

If my weakness causes me to cling more tightly to Jesus...

If my testimony helps one fellow traveler find hope...

If my scars point someone to the cross...

Then I can honestly say that God has redeemed even the hardest chapters of my story.

One day, when I stand before Him, I don't believe I'll thank Him for the pain itself.

But I believe I will thank Him for His faithfulness through it.

And I will finally understand what I have been learning all along:

His grace truly was sufficient.

Chapter Fifteen

God Sends People

Theme Scripture

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow."

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Have you ever noticed how often God answers our prayers through people?

Sometimes we pray for strength...

And God sends a friend.

Sometimes we pray for wisdom...

And He sends someone who has walked the road before us.

Sometimes we pray for encouragement...

And a simple conversation changes our entire day.

Looking back over my life, I can see that one of God's favorite ways of caring for me has been through the people He placed along my journey.

A Fresh Start

Several years into our marriage, Chad, our daughter Hannah, and I packed everything we owned and moved to Arizona.

Chad had been a truck driver for many years and had traveled all over the country.

He loved Arizona long before I ever saw it.

For me, moving across the country felt like stepping into the unknown.

We hoped for a fresh start.

Sometimes God allows us to begin again—not because we're running from the past, but because

He's preparing us for something new.

Looking back, I knew Arizona was God's final destination for my husband and I.

But I do believe He used that season to shape us in ways we never expected.

Learning to Live Again

Arizona introduced us to a different pace of life.

The beauty of God's creation surrounded us.

Brilliant sunsets.

Wide-open skies.

For the first time in a long while, I found myself slowing down enough to notice God's fingerprints in His creation.

One of the unexpected gifts of that season was discovering pickleball.

At first, it was simply a game.

A way to exercise.

A way to spend time together.

But before long, it became much more.

It became a place where we laughed again.

Where friendships began.

Where joy quietly returned after years of heaviness.

Who would have imagined that God could use a paddle, a plastic ball, and a group of ordinary people to help restore a weary heart?

Yet that's exactly what He did.

God's Provision Through People

As I look back over every season of my life, I realize something.

God has always sent people when I needed them most.
Sometimes they stayed for years.
Sometimes they were only part of one chapter.
Each one became part of God's provision.
Some encouraged me.
Some challenged me.
Some simply listened.
Others prayed with me.
Not all of them were followers of Christ.
Yet God, in His sovereignty, still used them to show kindness,
compassion, and encouragement.
That taught me an important lesson.
God's common grace often reaches us through people who may
not even realize He is using them.
At the same time, I learned another truth.
While we are called to love everyone, we should choose
carefully who influences our hearts.
Scripture reminds us,
"Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)
The people closest to us shape the direction of our lives.
That doesn't mean we withdraw from the world.
Jesus certainly didn't.
It means we intentionally surround ourselves with people who
encourage us to become more like Christ.

Community Is God's Design

There was a time when I believed strength meant handling everything by myself.

Trauma often teaches us to become fiercely independent.

We convince ourselves that needing people is weakness.

The Bible teaches something different.

From the very beginning, God said,

"It is not good that the man should be alone."

We were created for community.

We need people who will celebrate with us.

Cry with us.

Correct us.

Pray for us.

Point us back to Jesus when we lose sight of Him.

Some of the greatest encouragement I've received has come from ordinary conversations with faithful friends who reminded me that I wasn't walking alone.

Choosing Your Circle

One lesson I've learned is this:

You become like the people you spend the most time with.

If we're constantly surrounded by negativity, fear, gossip, or bitterness, those things begin shaping our hearts.

If we surround ourselves with people who love Jesus, pursue truth, and encourage us toward holiness, we grow stronger in our faith.

That doesn't mean we only spend time with Christians.

Jesus spent time with tax collectors, sinners, and those far from God.

But He was never influenced away from the Father.

Instead, He influenced others toward the Father.

That's the balance I want in my own life.

Love everyone.

Serve everyone.

But allow your closest circle to be filled with people who continually point you toward Christ.

God Never Left Me Alone

When I look back over my life, I don't just remember the difficult chapters.

I remember the people God placed in those chapters.

People who smiled when I needed encouragement.

People who prayed when I couldn't.

People who believed in me when I struggled to believe in myself.

None of them were perfect.

Neither am I.

But together, we became reminders that God often wraps His love in human hands.

Looking back, I see that every friendship was another expression of His faithfulness.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you're feeling lonely today.

Maybe you've convinced yourself that no one understands.

Can I encourage you?

Ask God to bring the right people into your life.

Then be willing to become that person for someone else.

Sometimes the answer to our own loneliness begins when we reach out to encourage another person.

God has a beautiful way of connecting weary hearts.

He knows exactly who you need.

He knows exactly who needs you.

Trust Him with both.

Meet With God

Read

- Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
- Proverbs 27:17
- Hebrews 10:24–25
- 1 Corinthians 15:33
- John 13:34–35

Reflect

- Who has God used to encourage me during difficult seasons?
- Am I allowing godly people to influence my life?

- How can I become an encouragement to someone else this week?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for never intending us to walk through life alone.

Thank You for every friend, mentor, family member, and fellow believer You have placed in my life.

Help me recognize those gifts with gratitude.

Give me wisdom to choose relationships that encourage me to follow Jesus more faithfully.

And make me the kind of friend who reflects Your love, Your grace, and Your truth to others.

Use my life to encourage fellow travelers who are walking through difficult seasons. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

When I first moved to Arizona, I thought I was simply changing my address.

Now I realize God was changing my heart.

He taught me that healing doesn't always happen in dramatic moments.

Sometimes it happens while watching a sunset.

Sometimes while laughing with friends.

Sometimes while playing a game.

Sometimes while sharing a meal.

Sometimes while sitting quietly with someone who simply reminds you that you are loved.

Looking back, I can see that God wasn't only restoring my joy.
He was teaching me something I hope you'll never forget:
One of God's greatest gifts is the people He places along the journey.
My fellow traveler...
If you're feeling alone today, remember this:
The Shepherd often sends other sheep to help us find our way.

Chapter Sixteen

When Others Don't Understand

Theme Scripture

"For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Hebrews 4:15

Dear Fellow Traveler,

One of the loneliest feelings in the world is being surrounded by people...

...and still feeling completely alone.

Not because people don't love you.

But because they don't understand.

If you've ever lived with PTSD, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, or invisible wounds, you probably know exactly what I mean.

People see you smiling.

They assume you're okay.

They don't see the battle taking place inside your mind.

Some days simply getting out of bed feels like climbing a mountain.

Other days your mind races while everyone else seems at peace.

There were times I wondered if anyone truly understood what I was carrying.

Then God reminded me of something that changed everything.
Jesus understands completely.

Invisible Wounds

Most wounds eventually heal where people can see them.

A broken bone gets a cast.

A cut leaves a scar.

People recognize those injuries.

Invisible wounds are different.

You can look perfectly healthy on the outside while fighting a tremendous battle within.

For years, I tried to hide my struggles.

I didn't want to appear weak.

I didn't want to become a burden.

I wanted people to think I had everything together.

The truth was...

I didn't.

And that was okay.

Because God never asked me to pretend.

He simply asked me to trust Him.

Family Doesn't Always Understand

One of the hardest lessons I have learned is that the people who love us most may not always understand what we are experiencing.

That doesn't mean they don't care.

Sometimes they simply don't know how to help.

Sometimes they become frustrated because they cannot fix what they cannot see.

Sometimes they say things that hurt, not because they intend to wound us, but because they don't fully understand.

I have experienced that.

Perhaps you have too.

For a long time, I expected people to meet needs that only God could meet.

Eventually, He gently taught me that while people may disappoint me, He never will.

Jesus Understands

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is found in Hebrews.

It reminds us that Jesus is not distant from our suffering.
He entered our broken world.
He experienced rejection.
He experienced betrayal.
He experienced grief.
He experienced physical suffering.
He experienced abandonment.
He understands what it means to hurt.
When I pray, I am not speaking to someone who is unfamiliar with pain.
I am speaking to my Savior.
That truth has comforted me more times than I can count.
When no one else understands...
He does.

Extending Grace

As my relationship with Christ deepened, He began teaching me something I wasn't expecting.
The people who misunderstood me were carrying burdens of their own.
Some had experienced pain I knew nothing about.
Some were fighting battles they had never shared.
Others had simply never been taught how trauma affects the mind and body.
God began softening my heart.
Instead of expecting everyone to understand me perfectly...

I began asking Him to help me love people more graciously.
Grace doesn't mean pretending hurtful words don't matter.
Grace means choosing compassion over bitterness.
It means remembering that every person we meet is fighting a battle we may not see.

Finding My Identity

For many years I allowed other people's opinions to shape how I saw myself.

If someone misunderstood me...

I questioned myself.

If someone criticized me...

I believed I had failed.

If someone rejected me...

I assumed I wasn't enough.

God slowly replaced those lies with truth.

My identity is not determined by another person's opinion.

It isn't determined by my diagnosis.

It isn't determined by my past.

It isn't determined by my worst day.

My identity is found in Jesus Christ.

I am His daughter.

That truth changed everything.

Loving People Anyway

One of the most difficult commands Jesus ever gave is also one of the most beautiful.

He told us to love one another.

Not only when people understand us.

Not only when they agree with us.

Not only when relationships are easy.

He called us to love as He has loved us.

That kind of love requires the Holy Spirit.

It requires humility.

It requires forgiveness.

Some relationships in my life have been restored.

Others remain difficult.

I have learned that obedience doesn't always guarantee reconciliation.

But I can still choose to honor Christ in the way I respond.

That is freedom.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Perhaps you've been carrying invisible wounds for years.

Maybe people have told you to "just get over it."

Maybe they don't understand why certain days are harder than others.

Can I encourage you?

Don't measure your worth by the opinions of people.

Measure it by the cross.

The cross tells you exactly how valuable you are.

Jesus willingly gave His life because He loves you.

When others misunderstand...

Remember that your Savior understands completely.

When others fail you...

Remember that He never will.

When others cannot carry your burden...

Remember that He invites you to cast every burden upon Him.

You are never alone.

Meet With God

Read

- Hebrews 4:14–16
- Psalm 139:1–18
- Matthew 11:28–30
- Romans 8:31–39

Reflect

- Have I been looking to people for something only God can provide?
- Am I allowing others' opinions to define my identity?
- How can I extend grace to someone who doesn't understand me?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for knowing every part of my heart.

Thank You for understanding my struggles even when no one else does.

Help me rest in my identity as Your child.

Teach me to extend grace to those who misunderstand me.

Guard my heart from bitterness.

Fill me with compassion.

And remind me every day that I am deeply loved, fully known, and never alone because of Jesus Christ.

In His precious name, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

There was a time when I desperately wanted everyone to understand my struggles.

Today, I realize something even better.

I don't need everyone to understand me.

I only need to stay close to the One who already does.

The closer I walk with Jesus, the less I depend on the approval of others and the more secure I become in His love.

My fellow traveler..

If you feel unseen today, lift your eyes to Christ.

The One who formed you, redeemed you, and calls you by name has never misunderstood you.

And He never will.

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." — Psalm 34:18

His understanding is perfect.

His love is constant.

His presence is enough.

Chapter Seventeen

Comforted to Comfort

Theme Scripture

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Dear Fellow Traveler,

For many years I asked God one question.

"Why?"

Why did You allow the abuse?

Why the rape?

Why PTSD?

Why depression?

Why addiction in our family?

Why so much loss?

Why so many valleys?

I spent years searching for answers.

Then one day, God gently changed my question.

Instead of asking...

"Why?"

I began asking...

"Lord, how can You use this?"

That simple change transformed the way I viewed my entire life.

Nothing Is Wasted

When I first came to Christ, I thought redemption meant God would erase my past.

Instead, I discovered He redeems it.

He doesn't waste tears.

He doesn't waste brokenness.

He doesn't waste suffering.

He doesn't waste failures surrendered to Him.

Every painful chapter became part of a much larger story.

Not because pain is good.

But because God is good.

Only He can take the darkest moments of a person's life and use them to shine the light of Christ into someone else's darkness.

That is redemption.

Comfort That Must Be Shared

There came a point in my journey when I realized something.

The comfort God had given me wasn't meant to stop with me.
He wanted me to share it.
Every lesson He taught me...
Every Scripture that carried me...
Every prayer He answered...
Every valley He walked with me through...
Became something I could now offer another weary traveler.
Not because I have all the answers.
But because I know the One who does.

God Doesn't Call the Qualified

Sometimes people tell me,
"I could never share my testimony."
"I've made too many mistakes."
"I don't know enough Scripture."
"I'm afraid."
Can I tell you something?
So was I.
God has never required perfection.
He asks for surrender.
Throughout Scripture He used ordinary people.
Moses doubted himself.
David failed greatly.
Peter denied Jesus.
Paul persecuted Christians.

Yet God used each of them because they were willing to let Him work through them.

The same is true today.

God doesn't need perfect people.

He delights in using redeemed people.

My Greatest Prayer

As I have written this book, people have asked me why I would share such personal parts of my life.

The answer is simple.

Because someone else is hurting.

Some young girl is carrying abuse in silence.

Some spouse is watching addiction destroy his/her family.

Some veteran is fighting invisible wounds.

Some mother feels overwhelmed.

Some father believes he's failed.

Some teenager is convinced no one understands.

Some person believes they have sinned too greatly to be forgiven.

If my story can help even one person look to Jesus...

Every difficult chapter will have been worth sharing.

We Are All Fellow Travelers

One of the reasons I call you my fellow traveler is because I don't see myself above anyone else.

I'm simply walking the same road.
Some parts of my journey may be behind yours.
Some parts may still be ahead.
But every one of us needs the same Savior.
None of us outgrow grace.
None of us become independent from Jesus.
The longer I follow Him, the more dependent I become upon Him.
That is not weakness.
That is discipleship.

The Great Commission

Before Jesus returned to Heaven, He gave His followers one final command.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

(Matthew 28:19)

He didn't say,

"Go tell everyone how wonderful you are."

He said,

"Tell them about Me."

That has become the purpose of my testimony.

I don't want readers to finish this book talking about Jennifer.

I want them talking about Jesus.

I want them opening their Bibles.

I want them praying.

I want them finding a church.
I want them sharing the Gospel.
Because this world doesn't need another inspirational story.
It needs the hope found only in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Changes Everything

If you've read this far, you've read about many chapters of my life.

You've seen brokenness.

You've seen failure.

You've seen trauma.

You've seen restoration.

But none of those things are the center of my story.

Jesus is.

He is the Hero.

He is the Redeemer.

He is the Good Shepherd.

He is the One who sought me when I wandered.

He is the One who forgave my sin.

He is the One who restored my marriage.

He is the One who carried me through PTSD.

He is the One who never abandoned me.

Everything good in my life traces back to Him.

From My Heart

My fellow traveler,

Maybe you've wondered whether your life still has purpose.

Can I lovingly tell you something?

If God still has breath in your lungs...

He still has purpose for your life.

Your testimony matters.

Not because your story is extraordinary.

But because your Savior is.

You don't have to have all the answers.

You don't have to know every verse in the Bible.

Simply tell people what Jesus has done for you.

Your story may become the very thing God uses to lead someone else to eternal life.

There is no greater privilege than that.

Meet With God

Read

- 2 Corinthians 1:3–7
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Psalm 40:1–3
- 1 Peter 3:15

Reflect

- How has God comforted me through difficult seasons?
- Who in my life may need encouragement today?

- Am I willing to let God use my testimony for His glory?

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for every way You have comforted me.

Help me never keep that comfort to myself.

Open my eyes to the people You place in my path each day.

Give me courage to share my testimony with humility and love.

May every conversation point people toward Jesus Christ.

Use my life—not for my glory—but for Yours alone.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Jennifer's Reflection

As I look back over every chapter of my life, I no longer ask God why He allowed me to walk through so many difficult seasons.

Instead, I thank Him for never wasting one of them.

He has taken my deepest wounds and turned them into places where His grace shines brightest.

If there is one thing I hope every fellow traveler remembers after closing this book, it is this:

Your testimony is not ultimately about what happened to you.

It is about what Jesus Christ has done for you.

May your story, like mine, always point people to the Savior who still heals broken hearts, forgives repentant sinners, restores weary souls, and calls ordinary people to extraordinary purposes.

To God alone be the glory.

APPENDIX The Greatest Story Ever Told

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

My fellow traveler,

If you've read this far, thank you for allowing me to share my story with you.

But as important as my story is, it is not the greatest story.

The greatest story ever told is the story of Jesus Christ.

Everything I have written points to Him.

Everything God has done in my life has been because of Him.

Now I would like to share His story with you.

We Were Created for a Relationship with God

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

He created mankind in His own image to know Him, love Him, and walk with Him.

Genesis 1:27

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

God's design was perfect.

Sin Changed Everything

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, sin entered the world.

Every person born since has inherited a sinful nature.

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin separates us from God.

No amount of good works can remove that separation.

The Cost of Sin

God is holy.

Sin must be judged.

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Throughout the Old Testament, God instructed His people to bring a spotless lamb as a sacrifice.

The innocent died in the place of the guilty.

Every sacrifice pointed forward to Someone greater.

Jesus Is the Perfect Lamb

God Himself provided the final sacrifice.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth.

He lived the perfect life we could never live.

He never sinned.

John the Baptist declared,

John 1:29

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus willingly went to the cross.

He took our punishment upon Himself.

The Cross

Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was born,

Isaiah 53:5

"But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed."

Jesus died for our sins.

He was buried.

Three days later...

He rose again.

He conquered sin.

He conquered death.

He is alive today.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4

"Christ died for our sins... He was buried... He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Salvation Is a Gift

We cannot earn salvation.

We cannot deserve it.

We simply receive it by faith.

Ephesians 2:8–9

"For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God, not a result of works lest anyone can boast."

Repent and Believe

The Gospel is more than believing facts about Jesus.

It is responding to Him.

Jesus preached,

Mark 1:15

"Repent and believe in the gospel."

Repentance means turning away from our sin and turning toward Christ.

Faith means trusting Jesus alone to save us.

When we repent and believe, God forgives our sins, adopts us into His family, and gives us eternal life.

A New Creation

When you surrender your life to Christ,

He doesn't simply improve your life.

He gives you a new life.

2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

If You Are Ready

If today you realize your need for Jesus, you can call upon Him right now.

Salvation is not found in repeating perfect words.

It is found in a heart that truly repents and trusts Christ.

You might pray something like this:

Father,

I know I am a sinner.

I cannot save myself.

I believe Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose again.

Today I repent of my sin and place my trust completely in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

Forgive me.

Change me.

Help me follow You for the rest of my life.

Thank You for saving me through Your grace.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Now What?

If you have trusted Christ today...

Welcome to the family of God.

Here are your next steps:

1. Read the Gospel of John.
2. Begin praying every day.
3. Find a Bible-believing church.

4. Be baptized as an act of obedience.
5. Tell someone what Jesus has done.
6. Continue reading God's Word every day.

A 30-Day Journey for Fellow Travelers

Week One — Knowing Jesus

- John 1
- John 3
- John 10
- John 14
- John 15
- Luke 15
- Romans 5

Week Two — Learning to Trust

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 27
- Psalm 34
- Proverbs 3
- Isaiah 40
- Romans 8
- Philippians 4

Week Three — Walking with Christ

- Ephesians 2

- Ephesians 6
- Colossians 3
- James 1
- James 3
- 1 Peter 5
- Hebrews 12

Week Four — Living Victoriously

- Matthew 5
- Matthew 6
- Matthew 28
- Galatians 5
- 2 Corinthians 5
- Revelation 21
- Revelation 22

Prayers for the Journey

When You Feel Afraid

"Lord, remind me that You have not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind."

When You Feel Ashamed

"Jesus, thank You that my identity is no longer found in my past but in Your finished work on the cross."

When You Feel Weary

"Father, renew my strength. Help me mount up with wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not faint."

When You Feel Alone

"Thank You, Lord, that You will never leave me nor forsake me. Help me sense Your presence today."

Final Encouragement

My fellow traveler,

If you've reached the final pages of this book, I hope you haven't simply learned my story.

I hope you've seen the faithfulness of God.

My prayer has never been that you would remember my name.

My prayer is that you would remember the name of Jesus.

One day this book will sit on a shelf.

One day my story will be finished.

But the story of Jesus never ends.

Keep walking with Him.

Keep trusting Him.

Keep opening His Word.

Keep sharing the Gospel.

And when life becomes difficult, remember this:

Don't judge your whole story by one chapter.

The Author is still writing.