

**MAKE YOUR**

# MOVE

MOVE  
MOVE  
MOVE

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BECOMING  
MIGHTY

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CHRISTIANITY  
& CREATIVITY

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DIVIDED

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# REBUILT

TO LIVE A GREAT STORY

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We're a global magazine with versions published in the USA, Southeast Asia, Amsterdam, and the Philippines.

Rebuilt Magazine is written, laid out, and printed by young adult who love Jesus and want to write about God, life, and college. We hope this magazine is helpful, challenging, and thought-provoking while also encouraging you to pursue a strong relationship with Jesus.

## CONTRIBUTING LOCATIONS:



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Philippines



Netherlands



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# One girl's TRUE STORY

## Asking God to Trade My Self-Focused World For His Greater Plans

*This testimony is from Nikita, a Christian from  
India now living in the USA*

**H**i, I'm Nikita. I've had the privilege of knowing about Christ since childhood. I was born to believing parents and practically grew up in church. My childhood and youth were all about Sunday school, events at church, and church friends. This was my world. You could call me the "church girl". For all the hours I spent at church I should have known the Bible by heart. But in reality I did not know Jesus.

I had fun with friends, wanted to wear the best clothes, and loved to be praised for my talents. My pride was constantly being fed and it made me feel so good. I never realised I was sinning since I was not seeking God's glory but basking in mine. I wasn't a disobedient daughter to my parents but still disobedient to God without my knowledge. I read only the psalms, but not every day. I prayed just for blessings. My relationship with God was to run to Him when I was in trouble and ask Him all my wants and needs. I thought of myself as "God's little princess".

Things turned around when I was 22. My family and I had to leave Vizag and move to Hyderabad, which meant leaving

my beloved church. Loneliness was one of the first realities I faced. It struck me that I should renew my relationship with God so I began listening to a lot of gospel music. I tried to learn every trending gospel song regardless of what the lyrics were really saying. My spiritual life was running on emotions. If it was a fast song I felt joyful, and if it was slow I cried and sang. During all of this my core remained the same. I could see anger, jealousy, selfishness and pride in myself.

I got married to a man thankfully after God's heart when I turned 24. I moved to the US to be with him, which meant moving away from mom who was my best friend. During that time I felt like I was nothing because my mom used to be my support system. I depended so much on her. I finally opened my Bible and started reading. I sincerely asked God to talk to me. I began to see the sin in myself. I realised I was nothing because I did not have Jesus in my life. I needed Him.

**"I STILL STRUGGLE WITH CERTAIN THINGS SPIRITUALLY BUT I KNOW THAT HE WHO HAS BEGUN A GOOD WORK IN ME WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION FOR HIS GLORY ALONE."**

The institution of marriage humbled me. My husband and I are two very different people, but Jesus was the only subject we agreed on. Then we had Isaac. He was born with some serious health conditions, but God's presence was with us. I saw my husband submitting to God's will. He only prayed asking to heal Isaac according to His will, which confused me, but God in all his grace brought us out of it. Isaac is healed now!

God's will is a new concept I was introduced to. The church I attended and still attend taught everything in the view of God's will and sovereignty. The women from my discipleship group prayed by putting their petitions at God's feet and asking for His will to be done. It became clearer to me that God wills for the eternal good of His chosen ones and eternal blessings are what we should be after.

Now I know that knowing Jesus is not just a feeling or an emotion. It is more truth. I'm still learning more about Him every day directly from the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is His word that has changed me and taught me more of His holiness and unconditional grace and mercy towards me through His sacrifice on the cross.

I still struggle with certain things spiritually but I know that He who has begun a good work in me will bring it to completion for his glory alone. He is still updating my testimony. Now I believe that He is the "King of my heart".

- Nikita



# One girl's TRUE STORY

## DISCOVERING THAT EVEN SICKNESS CAN BE USED BY GOD

*This testimony is from Atheena, a Christian in the Philippines.*

**W**hen I was younger, I was always afraid that at any moment I would end up lying in a hospital bed again. I have a low immune system, so I easily got coughs and colds. I also have asthma, and it triggered my gastritis to the point that my parents would bring me to the hospital maybe two or three times a year. It caused me to question why I had to go through this pain all the time.

As a child, my mother always reminded me to have time with God and pray, and my father would drag me out of bed to go to church. In grade school I was taught Christian values, and I kept being reminded that God plays a big part in our lives. However, my relationship with Him was so unsteady. I knew God existed, but that was it. I did not truly believe in Him. God always reached out to me, extending His help, but I did not respond because I doubted Him a lot and kept complaining about the state of my life.

When I was 15, I was really sick and in deep pain, and the doctor told my parents that I should just stay at home. When I got back from the doctor's office, I found myself crying aloud to God because I was at the lowest point I had ever been. Then suddenly I heard my mother sing like she always does whenever I am sick, singing her heart out praising God. I had a different feeling this time, as if God was talking to me through those songs. She sang, "God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see. He will make a way for me..." and "Heal me, oh Lord, and I will be healed. Save me, and I will be saved..." Those lines hit me deeply. It was very comforting and overwhelming. I stopped whining and started talking; I opened up to Him and described how I felt. I continued crying that night and felt something was holding me tight. It was so amazingly indescribable.

All this time I thought I was just physically ill and didn't realize that I was also spiritually ill. The moment I let God into my life

and accepted Him as my Lord and Savior, everything went upside down. My ailing soul was longing for Him, and I found that in Christ Jesus I am healed. He might do things in a painful way from the human perspective, but it is one of the ways He shows me that I need Him and should rely on Him. And when I did, I was finally assured that I am not forsaken; He always has my back.

It's amazing how things changed from the moment I put my faith in Him. Since then, I am healthier physically and spiritually, and I no longer need to go the hospital routinely. Though I still get sick easily, I am not the same, frail person anymore. I used to get anxious easily whenever I faced problems, mainly when things wouldn't turn out the way I expected them to. For example, during my third year of college studying architecture, things were getting out of hand. Even though I worked hard to finish my schoolwork before the deadlines, my grades were still not good, and I received discouraging comments from my instructors. God's word in Philippians 4:6 helped me through this time: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (NIV). Instead of being crushed by it, I asked for God's help and leaned on Him to guide me through it.

Today I am 21 years old preparing for an apprenticeship after graduation. I am so grateful for everything that has happened, including the trials, because I worry less now that I have witnessed how God works through things when you just ask Him and let Him be in control of your life. I am still working on my relationship with God and praying that I will always consistently seek Him.

- Atheena



# THE DEATH ROW

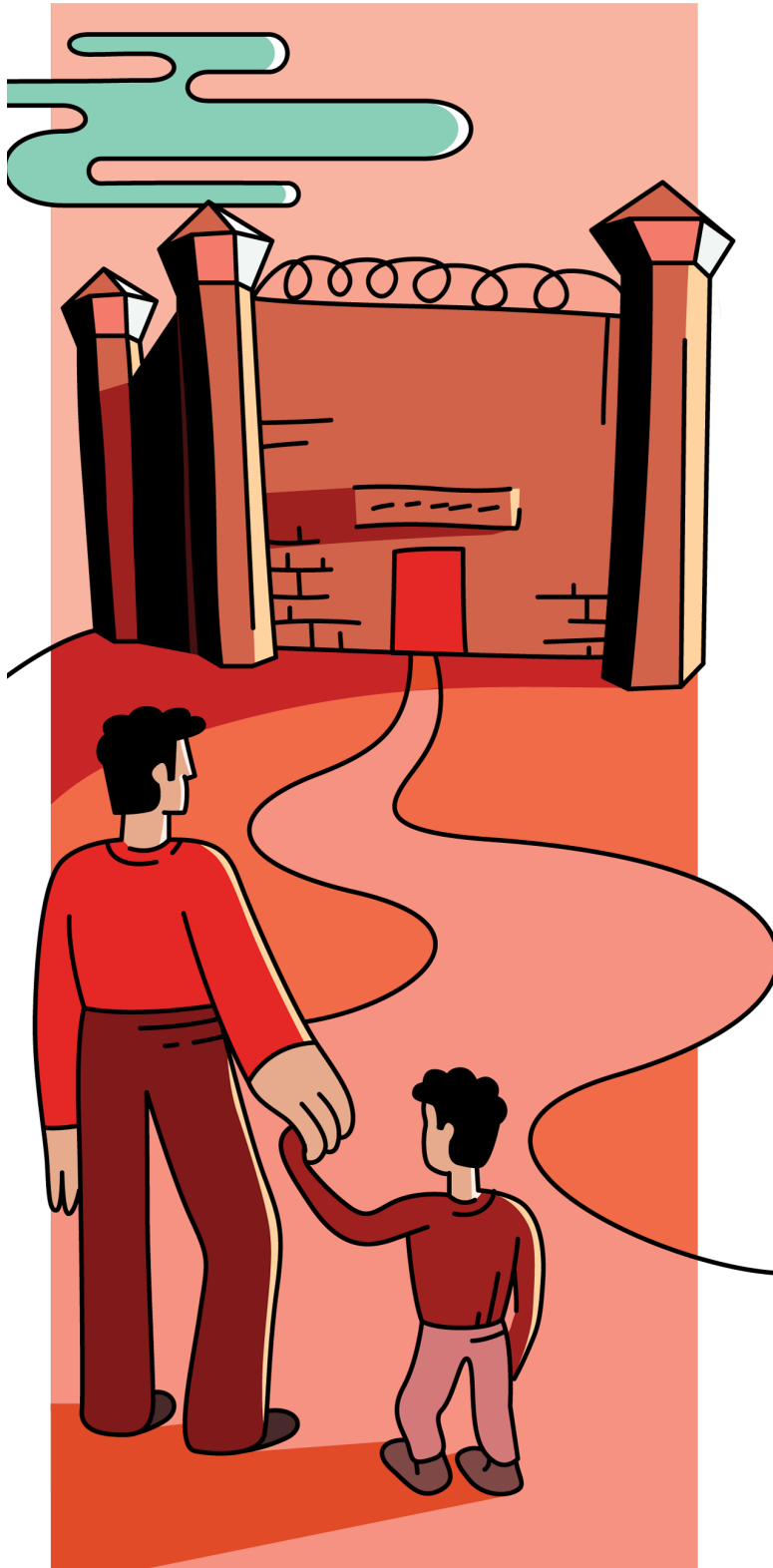
## *Exchange*

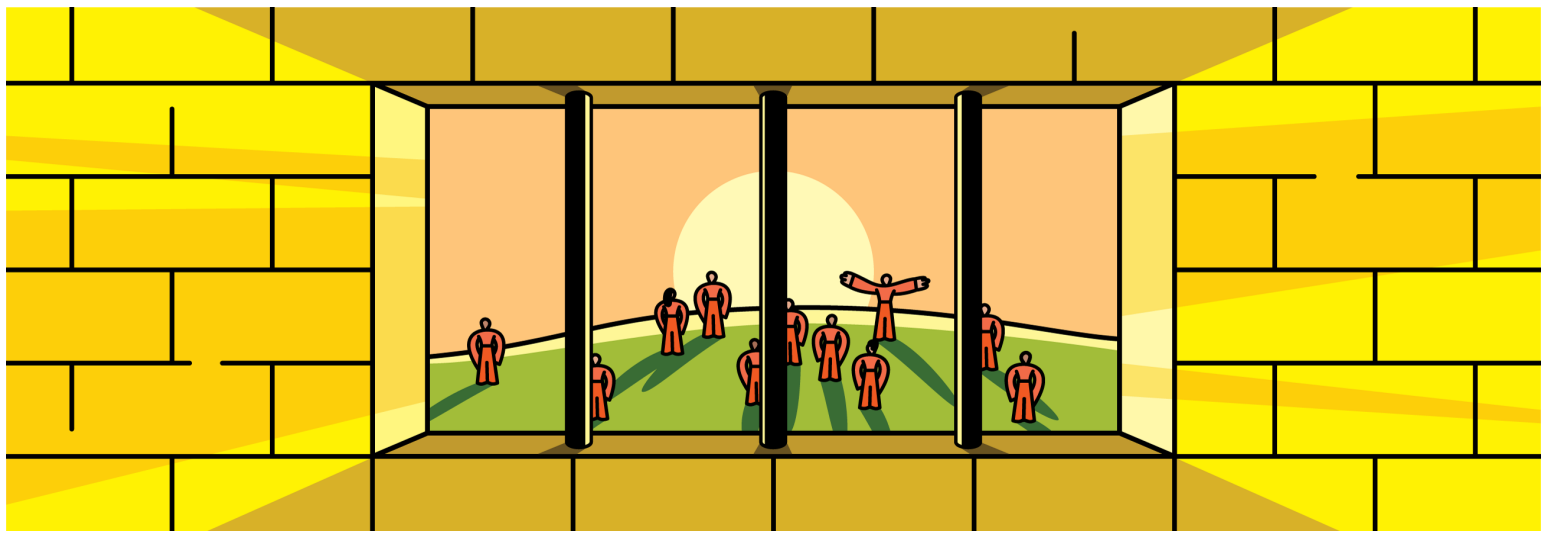
### ONE SON SETTING THE CAPTIVES FREE

The wind sent a chill down the neck of the father's spine as he helped his son out of the car. He never meant for this trip to be necessary and yet here they were, outside the front doors of the state penitentiary. The boy had been quiet for most of the drive, knowing full well the plan for the day only had one outcome.

"Do we really have to do this, Dad?" the boy stopped to ask. "Isn't there another way?"

The father could do nothing but kneel down and embrace his son. *If only*, he thought. Tears filled his eyes as he felt his father shake his head. This was the only way. Though he didn't understand fully in that moment,





the strength of his dad's arms around him assured the boy that somehow, some way, everything really would be alright. The father grabbed his boy's hand and up the steps they went to the red door that waited at the top.

The guard inside led them down a maze of narrow halls, slowing down once they reached a hallway that felt heavier than all the rest. A harsh fluorescent light rested above each green door with a small window. The father looked into the windows of the cells as they walked. He saw men and women sitting alone. Some were quiet and some were talking aloud. Some came up to their windows, making a scene as they passed by. Some, it seemed, couldn't find it in themselves to lift their eyes. Most had been there months, others years, even decades. All were awaiting execution.

The farther they walked, the deeper the father's heart sank. Cell after cell, the father locked eyes with the people behind the bars. These inmates were the reason he had come, and nothing would change his mind. Despite what they'd done, he didn't see criminals. He saw individuals in need of freedom. Holding tight to his son, he knew it was time.

The guard opened the door to a cell at the end of the hall, and the boy stepped inside. His father let go of his hand and looked away without a word. The cell door clanked shut, then, *silence*.

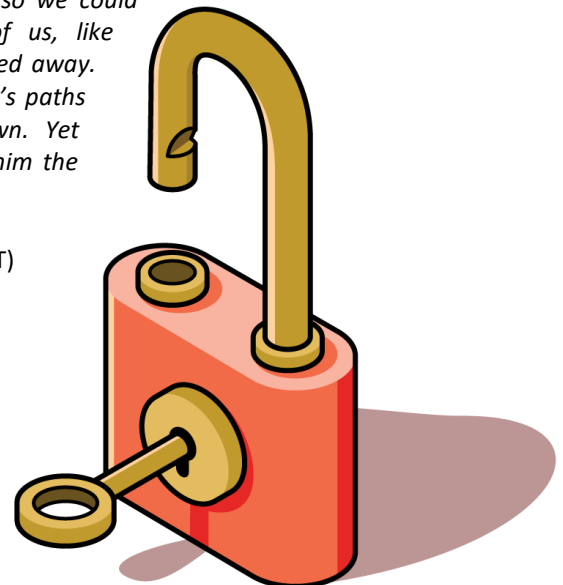
One by one, the guard unlocked the doors down the hall, and, one by one, the inmates stepped into the corridor. The reactions varied as the father turned to face them.

"Father," one woman cried, as she fell down before him. His hands met her face as he helped her to her feet.

An older man one cell down hovered at his door, unsure about what lay ahead. He had grown quite comfortable in his little concrete house. The father stepped toward him and led the way down the maze in reverse. All eyes were open wide as they walked further than they were used to after living their solitary lives. The first of the prisoners made their way to the red front door, hands reaching up to shield their eyes. The sunlight streamed through the windows, casting shadows around their feet. It had been too long since they'd seen the light. The father watched as one man closed his eyes, holding his arms out to welcome the warmth at the top of the steps. Streams of orange and gray flooded the steps as the prisoners arrived at the street below, and the father knew it was finally finished.

*Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.*

ISAIAH 53:4-6 (NLT)





# As A Matter Of Fact **WHAT IS PRAYER?**



**A**t times Christianity can be confusing. When you start to read the Bible there can be names of people and places you have never heard before. There will be words that have little to no meaning outside of the world of faith. And even more confusing, there are words that you do know, but when they are carried over to Christianity they have an even greater depth of meaning than you ever realized before. Knowing that navigating concepts within Christianity can at times be overwhelming, *Rebuilt Magazine* is going back to the basics to tackle common questions. These are questions that are not only integral for the new believer, but also for the seasoned Christian and anyone who is skeptical about the Christian faith. They are truths that you never graduate from. In this issue, we are going to discuss prayer.

**“WE WERE DESIGNED FOR A DEEP  
DEPENDENCE UPON GOD, AND  
PRAYER IS PART OF THAT INTIMACY.”**

## **MISCONCEPTIONS OF PRAYER**

Everyone has heard of it. Most have practiced some form of it. However, there is a lot of confusion surrounding prayer. Is it like a lucky rabbit's foot, an ultimate genie, a ritual item we check off our “Get Into Heaven” list, or is it just reciting some words we learned in confirmation class? And who do we even pray to? Is it Mary, one of the saints, or is it talking to an imaginary friend? The truth is, these perceptions obscure the fact that it is a lot simpler than we might believe. It is simply talking with and hearing from, God.

## **REAL DEPTH**

We were designed for a deep dependence upon God (John 15:4), and prayer is part of that intimacy. You can go to Him at any time, just like you might call one of your parents to tell them about your day. Have you ever noticed that sometimes in the Bible God refers to Himself as Father (Matthew 6:9)? Or refers to us as sons (Ephesians 1:5)? Prayer is an aspect of a relationship between a perfect Father (God) and an imperfect, sometimes rebellious, adopted kid (Christians). It's exclusive to those who have been, and continue to be, honest with God in confessing our wrongs (sin) and reaching out Him as the only One who can transform and redeem us. But it doesn't stop there. Prayer is like a phone call with God where the minutes never run out. It's not like we redial only when there is an emergency. God invites us to go throughout our day with Him (1 Thessalonians 5:17); thanking Him, worshiping Him, talking through life situations, asking of needs, etc. A lot of times we overcomplicate it, though. In simple terms, prayer is just part of the relationship; it's talking to God. Now the question is, are we willing to listen?

## **GOOD CONNECTION**

Prayer is not a means to a smooth, comfortable life. Admittedly, “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:14) does have that ultimate genie vibe at first glance. But, the key point of that verse is “in my name,” meaning in His will. The truth is, God's will isn't always smooth or comfortable (Jeremiah 7:27, Luke 9:58). But keep in mind, for Christians, God is both the King and Lord of our lives, as well as a close and personal Father who invites His kids into His presence. The thing is, real prayer doesn't mean we can't be honest with Him, nor does it mean we can't ask Him for our wants. The beauty of prayer is that we get to work through those life situations with God (Luke 22:41-44). We can go to Him trusting that He knows what is best, He takes care of his own (Romans 8:28), and He can do the impossible (Matthew 17:20). Prayer expresses not only our desperate need of God, but that we actually want God actively involved in our lives and in the lives of those around us. That's true prayer. It's a part of the deep and real relationship with the One who we were created for.



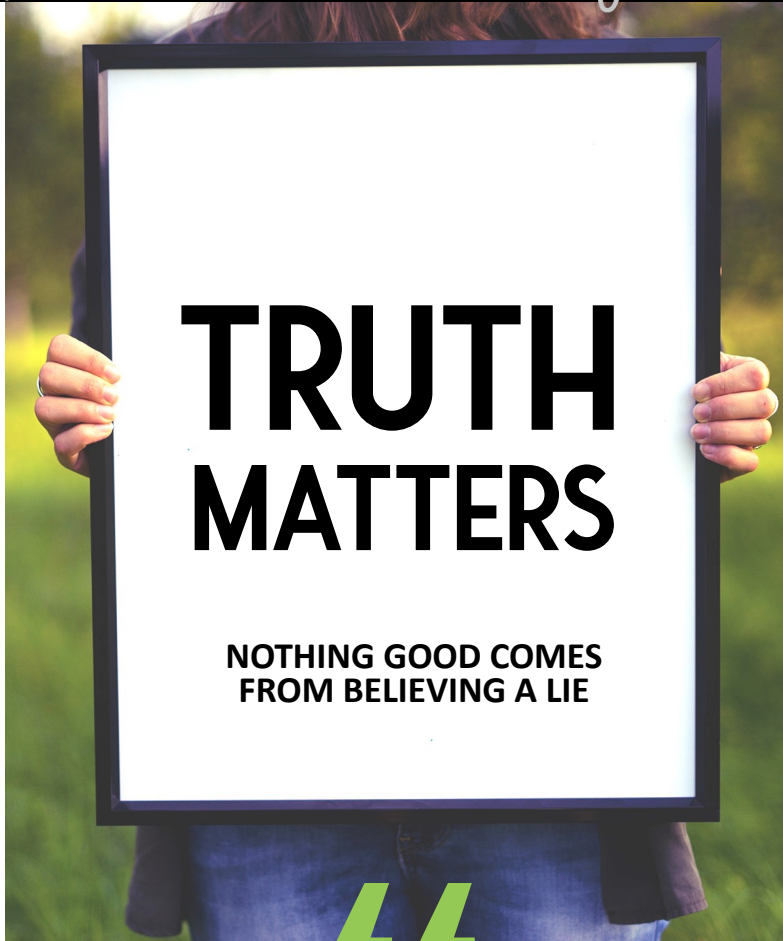
# *As a Matter of Fact*

**Y**ou probably think you want to hear the truth. You likely assume that you despise being deceived. No doubt you are quick to get angry at misrepresentations of facts. We live in an age wary of “fake news.” You know the value of candor, honesty, and accuracy and the danger of falling for lies, propaganda, and misinformation. But is any of that actually true?

## **DECODING WISHFUL THINKING**

It is easy to love the truth when it perfectly aligns with predetermined beliefs and opinions. The truth is readily accepted when it fits current lifestyle and morals. But what are you going to do when confronted with a truth that contradicts and counteracts what is long ingrained in our minds? The fact is, many times people would rather believe the veracity of a lie than have their illusions destroyed. People claim to desire truth, but the reality is, only the truths that are easy to get behind, or that position us in a favorable light, are readily accepted.

There is a reason the saying, “The truth hurts” exists. Actual truth will at some point irritate, outrage, and hurt you. We do not enjoy things that threaten our self-esteem, shatter our pre-existing beliefs, make our life difficult,



or diminish our status. It would be tempting to close our eyes to such realities, but doing so won't drive them away. Admitting our faults and weaknesses is never easy. When the truth hurts us, we want to protect ourselves by shutting it out, refusing to listen, and resisting it even at the cost of willfully believing a lie. We want to discredit those we don't agree with or that threaten the way we view the world. It seems that truth isn't what we want. Instead, we want our lifestyle, beliefs, and opinions presented uncritically.

## **SEEING CLEARLY**

Truth is not dependent on whether or not we believe it, however. Heart desire, staunch rejection, or actively ignoring the

“TRUTH IS  
SELF-SUSTAINING,  
INDEPENDENT  
OF ITS  
ACCEPTANCE.”

facts doesn't change their validity. The truth is the truth and facts are facts whether we accept them or not. Truth is self-sustaining, independent of its acceptance. In John 14:6, Jesus says that He is the truth. Psalm 119:160 says that all of the Bible is truth and that it will last forever.

These are truths that are going to confront our lifestyle. Jesus and scripture will question how we live, the decisions we make, and even the thoughts that we have. They will entirely shatter our self-esteem by informing us of our despicable nature, which is that we are desperately wicked and broken. That truth tells us that there is nothing that we can do about it on our own.

## **LIVING IN FREEDOM**

I'd rather not believe that. I'd like to close my eyes to its existence, but that won't make it go away. It's only when I believe that reality that I can possibly have hope. Jesus says He is truth. He also says the truth will set us free (John 8:32, ESV). The truth of Jesus brings the promise of hope and the possibility of redemption and salvation. Choosing to believe a lie can at best give false, brief comfort, but it ultimately leads only to disaster and destruction.

We know that simple belief in a lie neither makes it true nor eliminates the consequences of accepting the falsehood. Yet we are prone to do it. Instead, we should painstakingly seek the truth because in doing so, there is safety and life.

# QUARANTINE

## contemplations

### 5 THINGS I LEARNED WHILE LIVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

In the beginning, I remember it feeling like being aboard a slowly sinking ship. Days turned to weeks, and weeks turned into months. Months of discouraging news headlines. Months of waiting to hear what new guidelines and laws were in place. Initially, I felt paralyzed by feelings of helplessness and anxiety while waiting for everything to go back to normal. But God was quick to remind me that there is no need to stay afraid because He, unlike me, is sovereign. He's been reminding me of truths like this lately, and perhaps you will find they resonate in your life too, so, here they are.


**1. I DON'T NEED TO KNOW THE EXACT DETAILS OF THE FUTURE.** I have always tricked myself into thinking that it is possible to plan for what is going to happen. But the truth is, we never have that absolute certainty. Who am I to say if I will even wake up in the morning? I've been finding myself frustrated and worried because I don't know what my church, school, work, and social life will look like day-to-day, but I'm learning I don't need exact details. I just need to be faithful to whatever God has for me right now.

**2. IT'S OKAY, HEALTHY EVEN, TO SLOW DOWN.** Before the pandemic halted everything in my life, I was probably the busiest I had ever been. Going from a full schedule to almost nothing was a shock. I have heard many others voice similar experiences, often sharing that God must be wanting them to rest and take a break or something, and I admit, I felt the same way. But as I thought about it

more, I realized that God commands us to rest in Him all the time, not just during a pandemic. There is a difference between laziness and resting, however. God is displeased by one but commands the other (Exodus 20:8-10). When I get busy running around, it is easier to excuse laziness in my spiritual life because I'm worn out and think I deserve a break. But idleness in this area is not true rest. True rest comes when time with Him is our first priority. God alone says He can give us rest (Exodus 33:14). Lots of other people and things say it, but they cannot fulfill it.

**3. FOCUSING MORE ON WHO I AM, NOT WHAT I DO, IS KEY.** It is easy to make Christianity a set of actions that include Bible reading, going to church, attending weekly Bible studies, and telling people about Jesus. When I had to stay at home during the worst of the pandemic, I found that I was unable to prop up my relationship with God through church attendance and other godly activities. When we lose sight of *why* we do what we do, we fail to see the immense grace that God has given us. Behavior modification falls so far short of allowing God to transform our minds and hearts.

**4. THE BATTLE DOESN'T STOP.** I have often blamed circumstances when I have a sinful heart and attitude. Isn't it easy to excuse being short with someone when you're just so busy, or to ignore someone when you're simply tired? I have realized that all the junk in my heart is still there, regardless of circumstances. I still need Jesus to pay for my sin. I still



"IT WOULD BE A SHAME IF ALL THIS TIME PASSES AND WE ARE NO CLOSER TO JESUS THAN WE WERE WHEN THIS ALL STARTED."

need God's grace and mercy when my schedule is empty and I don't interact with anything but my thoughts.

**5. GOD'S WORK ISN'T ON PAUSE.** Hibernating until this is all over sure would be comfortable, but God is still working, and He desires us to have a role in it. What a privilege it is to join Him! It might look drastically different now, but the heart of it is still the same: loving and serving God and those around us.

A lot of time has already passed between the beginning of the global crisis and now. Perhaps you took the time to learn a new skill or work on a hobby, but hopefully, you've also taken the time to know God better and know His Word. It would be a shame if all this time passes and we are no closer to Jesus than we were when this all started.



# UNFORGETTABLE JESUS

IT'S NOT THE END - IT TIES IT  
ALL TOGETHER

IN REVELATION 1

If you're not familiar with Jesus or Christianity, you've still more than likely at least heard of the book of Revelation in the Bible. It's the 66<sup>th</sup> book, the last one, and one of the most misunderstood. If you are a Christian, it tends to be either the book we just don't talk about, or there's an odd infatuation with it where you trade out much of the true meaning for weird prophecies that only serve to strike fear in people. Then there is option C: taking Jesus for who He is. Everyone is at a different stage in their beliefs, but take some time now to see what Jesus has to say about Himself in this last book. Let's read two paragraphs from the first chapter of Revelation.

**REVELATION 1:7-8 NLT** *Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see Him—even those who pierced Him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for Him. Yes! Amen! 'I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,' says the Lord God. 'I am the One who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.*

**REVELATION 1:12-18 NLT** *When I [Apostle John] turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lamp stands. And standing in the middle of the lamp stands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across His chest. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And His eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and His voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in His right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from His mouth. And His face was like the sun in all its brilliance. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as if I were dead. But He laid His right hand on me and said, 'Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living One. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.*

Who can fully explain and describe the awe of these verses? John, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote the words we just read. John knew Jesus, he walked with Jesus, and he talked face to face with Jesus. And still, when Jesus appeared to him here, he was so floored that he passed out. What was different about this Jesus compared to the Jesus he walked with before on planet Earth? John had known Him as meek and mild, but here He was described as having eyes "like a flame of fire." Jesus is so awesome, He is not capable of being put in a box and completely described and confined. How great and scary is this? Think of the grace and promises He makes. They are the best gifts able to be given, but they are not something to take lightly as

He paid a high price for us to have them. Jesus offers us His gift, but it's up to us to embrace it. What good are grace and mercy if there is no consequence for rejecting Him? Some say that's not fair, but the reality is we have no right to decide what directives are fair and which are not when they come from the Creator of the universe. If anything, it's unfair that He chose to redeem humans who previously rejected Him.

We must realize how desperate we are, or are not, for Him. It's so much more than intellectual understanding and "making sense" of these things. Read the verses above again and ask God to reveal to you what He's saying here. This isn't the end—it's what ties it all together.



MAKE YOUR

MOVE

MOVE  
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LEARNING OBEDIENCE STARTS NOW AND PAVES  
THE WAY FOR A LIFE LIVED WITH PURPOSE

I remember having a conversation with a group of friends in college about what life would be like after graduation when one friend asked the group, "Who among us do you guys think would be first to become rich?" Another friend pointed her finger at me, and they all exclaimed my name simultaneously. Looking back on this now, I can see why they all thought that. Because at first, college was all about getting my degree to get a high paying job. Little did I realize that college isn't just a financial stepping stone or a life upgrade. Rather, it should be an incredibly formative time to dig into God's specific mission for your life, and it starts now, not after college.

#### DISCOVERING PURPOSE

What is your purpose? If you don't know, how do you find out? Is it possible to know what you were created for even as a young adult? It is easy to go along with what everyone else is busying themselves with instead of going against the flow to find the bigger picture. We try to fit in because we are afraid of what people will think of us. We excuse ourselves from big responsibilities, especially while in college, because we think we're too young. But in truth, this weakens our ability to face all the challenges that will inevitably come our way. In the end, we lose the drive to find the real meaning of our existence because of too many excuses and reasons not to. We've taken the bait.

To be honest with you, I was in that same mindset the first couple of years in college even though, to my friends, I was going places. But that's because I was going in the direction where I thought life was found. I thought that it would be meaningful if I did it my way while disregarding obvious issues that stole my attention from what truly mattered. There came a time when I doubted the purpose of life – whether it was truly a gift from God. It is clear now, however, that God was watching over my brokenness and knew every pain I was experiencing. In my first few years of college, God was preparing me for a whole new way of experiencing college. Eventually I crossed



# “ENDURANCE IS SHOWING UP DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS.”

paths with an international Christian organization, which paved the way for my knowledge of God. It was then that I discovered that I can be who God wants me to be and let Him use me in any way, even as a student. Life is not waiting for the good stuff that supposedly follows college: a career, house, family. God has a plan for what I’m doing right now.

## THE BEGINNING OF SAYING YES

Life began to start making more sense once I slowly allowed God to enter into it. I experienced a turnaround where my sole drive wasn’t just academic anymore. Instead, I was getting excited about what the day held in the hands of God.

Having a busy schedule, living with different people in our first apartment, or being too inexperienced is not a hindrance to serving God as a young adult. Though we often hide behind those excuses. Every 24 hours, our actions portray what our priority was that particular day. I remember one time when I had to choose between saying no to traveling back home for the weekend or saying yes to a Friday night Bible discussion. Saying no to say yes to other things can be hard sometimes, but God is going to use what might seem like a roadblock so we can learn to choose Him over our own desires.

Being faithful in the small things today is how a person shows their willingness to surrender himself to an authority, which is what it means to obey God. Every university or workplace has a list of rules and regulations for everyone to follow, like encouraging everyone to show up on time and meet deadlines. Obeying one simple rule develops our perseverance and gets us ready for the “bigger stuff” God might have for us down the road.

These crossroads show up in small ways. One time I had to firmly decide whether I would complete a school project or procrastinate for the rest of the weekend. It was so easy to daydream about avoiding the project, but in the end, it came down to asking myself whether I would simply do what I knew to do. I thought, “Am I going to meet the deadline for this submission or am I going to ignore it?” It is tempting to separate ourselves from tasks like classwork or work deadlines and think it has nothing to do with our walk with God, but that is a lie. Everything we do affects our walk with God, and it affects those around us too.

Even procrastination is disobedience. James 4:17 says, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” We are all guilty of it, and the truth is we are not perfect like God is. But God weighs the heart, and He knows who is willing to obey Him. Fortunately, He’s patient when we fail in this area because He desires to grow us so that we become more like Him.

Being obedient to God is part of surrendering to God, something the prophets, apostles, and disciples all had to experience. Abraham left his homeland in obedience to God’s command; David became a great king after his obedience to God’s calling; Ruth showed incredible faith in obedience to God’s promise; and Mary, the mother of Jesus, humbled herself in obedience to God’s great message. We should sit up and take note of these biblical characters, especially considering that they weren’t ancient superheroes. They were everyday men and women that, through their obedience, God used greatly. This same condition applies today. He uses every weak person, poor or rich, young or old, who takes a small step of obedience to Him.

## THE POWER OF SHOWING UP

One way of telling if a person is obedient is if he consistently shows up. No matter how hard the things that life may throw at him, he still shows up. Endurance is showing up despite the hardship. Facing project deadlines, exams, report presentations, being a student leader, and combating personal and financial problems aren’t easy, but that is how you deal with responsibilities as a student.

The organization I mentioned earlier encourages its members to follow Jesus in simple ways while in college. Serving in this ministry while pursuing my architecture degree was such a beautiful adventure to me, and I enjoyed it, but it was *hard*. Every event that I was a part of was an open door to step out and see how God might work through it. In these situations, I faced nerve-racking decision to start, or not start, a conversation with someone, or hand out a copy of this magazine to a group of college students, or just keep it to myself.

As I was learning architecture, God put me in a position where I could be creative in both designing buildings and impacting the world around me. Every step we take in obedience to God often has a dual purpose because He’s not just looking out for our interests now, but also for our

# "ONE SIMPLE ACT OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD, THAT BUILDS ON ANOTHER, REVEALS THE PURPOSE HE HAS FOR YOU."

future, and for that matter, the interests of everyone around us. Most of the time when we can't see past an inch in front of us, God is working in us an outcome that we often may never understand fully on this side of heaven. When I handed out a magazine, or took the time to listen to a fellow student rather than rushing on with my own studies, I didn't know what the outcome was, but God did. Every difficult decision-making situation is a learning experience from God, calling us to a deeper dependence on Him. Rather than asking why all the time, He wants us to obey and trust Him because He alone has our best interests in mind. We simply don't have His foresight and knowledge, or for that matter, His same love for others.

Some people ask me, "Why does it seem like you have so much time for everything you do?" If we let God handle our lives, He will ultimately put everything into order. The power of showing up to do what God has called you to that day, that hour, that year, despite how uncomfortable it is, will result in experiencing true inner joy. The weight of figuring it all out on your own vanishes when you're free to simply follow Him.

Experiencing radical changes in our lives comes through total surrender to God. As Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24). The true meaning of life is unfolded by the One who created us. He made each of us on purpose for a specific

mission. Every piece of blessing or skill that we receive are gifts to be used for the mission we are created for.

## MAKING A MOVE FOR JESUS

Being a young adult doesn't have to simply be a spin cycle of attending class, working long hours, taking exams, joining clubs, checking off experiences like trips to the lake, and then graduating on to a career, family, and house. Without God at the center of all of it, it's safe to say that your life will be wasted, no matter what age you are. However, one simple act of obedience to God that builds on another reveals the purpose He has for you. It's crazy amazing how being a part of a Christian community, even as a college student, encouraged me to step beyond what I thought was normal because it wasn't something obvious or glamorous. It was simply showing up every week and to every event with a group of Christians to see what God would do. Every opportunity forged by the commitment I had with God strengthened my relationship with Him and those around me.

Before I started writing this, I asked God with hope and trust that whoever reads this would discover that we are all created for a specific mission and purpose, but it doesn't just fall from the sky. It starts in shaky obedience, in simple trust, and making a move to go out and do something. No matter what you have done, where you came from, or how young or old you are, God has already something prepared for you. Will you make your move?

*"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10*



# the “YOU DO YOU” mentality



## THE SELF-DECEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE

Imagine this: you have been offered a ticket to board a plane that is going on a one-way trip to paradise. There is no financial cost to go on the trip, and you actually didn't even do anything to earn your invitation. But when you arrive at the airport and are mere seconds away from boarding the plane, you read a sign that says something unappealing enough to make you turn around and go home: "PRICE OF ADMISSION: DEATH TO SELF."

This plane ticket example is a very rudimentary analogy of what we are all offered by God through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ: a free invitation to salvation and an eternity spent with Him in heaven. This is possible because Jesus lived a sinless life and died in order to purchase us to be His own people.<sup>1</sup> That's right—you were intentionally purchased by Jesus.

That all sounds great, but what's the catch?

There isn't a "catch" on God's end, but for us, it's this: our sinful human nature makes us self-driven, self-worshipping, and self-centered. This is why a "You do you" mindset is so appealing to us. The cousins of the phrase "You do you" are expressions like "Follow your heart," "Be true to yourself," and "Love yourself." Adopting these mentalities is tricky business for Christians. Listening to our hearts and following our self-motivated desires is deeply rooted within us because it is part of our old, original nature.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked" (NLT). This verse warns us

that putting our personal desires and plans for our lives above God's plans is a futile effort because we will always choose selfishly. Instead, we are called to adopt the mindset presented in Philippians 3:8 that counts everything as worthless garbage when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus.

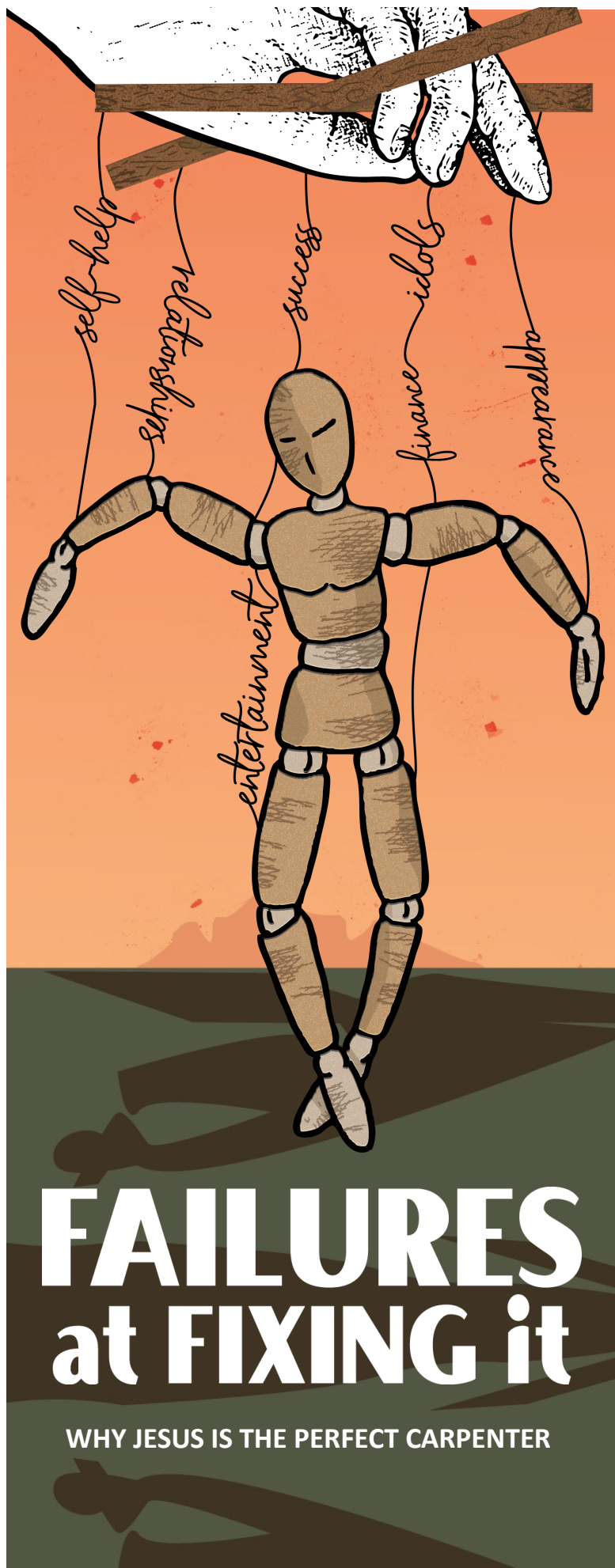
## **"LISTENING TO YOUR OWN HEART AND FOLLOWING YOUR OWN SELF-MOTIVATED DESIRES ARE SOME OF THE MOST UNWISE THINGS A CHRISTIAN CAN DO."**

This is an incredibly intimidating concept for our minds to understand, but there is hope for the Christian. We are told that, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there" (Galatians 5:24, NLT). We don't follow a God who will leave us for dead; we follow a God that is constantly working in us and giving us the desire to obey Him.<sup>2</sup>

Waiting in line only to read the dreaded "price of admission" sign is scary until you hear what is waiting for you at the plane's destination. Jesus says that, "If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life" (Matthew 16:25, NLT). When we are able to trade our self-serving mindsets for one that strives to follow Jesus and put Him first, it's only the beginning of what promises to be an amazing journey.

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:14 <sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:13





A dear friend recently confided in me: “I’m really happy with the weight I’ve lost on this diet over the last year. But, it’s really hard for my mind to catch up with the changes on the outside. I still see myself as the same person I always was. Sure, I get told I look great, but what people don’t know is that the problems I’ve struggled with on the inside have not gone away.”

My friend isn’t alone. We *all* are guilty of thinking that behavior modification—if I start doing this or stop doing that—will fix the turmoil at the center of our soul. We may find temporary relief from time to time, but isn’t it true that the restlessness eventually comes back?

## BROKEN TOOLS

Life is really hard, really messy, and quite unpredictable. It seems like once we overcome one obstacle, it’s not long before we trip over another. Though our problems may differ from person to person, we all struggle with something. Hardships, issues, tough times—whatever you want to call them—are innumerable, but the biggest categories include: relationships, finances, planning for the future, regretting the past, our appearance, our character, our secrets, and more. Some of our problems are small and annoying like a fly buzzing around our ear. Others are massive, like a heavy weight slowly pulling us down as we struggle through life. Whatever the case may be, we look to many things to alleviate the discomfort.

The first and ever-present source of relief we turn to is our phone. According to an article published by *The Guardian*, we pick up our phones 58 times per day on average.<sup>1</sup> Popular apps like Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok are addictive because they have infinite scrolling and refresh with new content instantly. It’s not uncommon to open an app only to find that 15, 30, or even 60 minutes have flown by. Going to our phones for comfort temporarily distracts us from our problems, allows us to dream and scheme about a better life than the one we’re living, and provides mind-numbing entertainment day or night.

Next, we assume that success will solve our problems. We buy the lie that attending a particular school, making a certain salary, and/or marrying the perfect spouse will make trouble less likely to knock at our door. Writer Marshall Segal puts it like this:

*Success promises to fill holes in our hearts. If you could only ascend this high or accumulate this much, your fears and insecurities will be resolved once for all. Success promises the love of those around us. They will finally give you the respect and affection you crave. Success says it can cover everything wrong about us. It offers esteem, control, and security — everything we surrendered in our sin. It wears the savior’s costume and presents itself the strong, charming, and trustworthy hero.<sup>2</sup>*



# “WHO COULD POSSIBLY FIX, LET ALONE LOVE, PEOPLE LIKE US?”

In addition, we turn to makeshift scholars to tell us how to solve our problems by subscribing to the latest podcast or YouTube channel for advice. It doesn't take much perceived expertise for us to treat someone else's word as truth. We place people on pedestals if they have a degree (or two or three). While these individuals deserve respect because of their knowledge, there remains a disconnect: they don't know us. They offer helpful tips and tricks but leave us to make applications on our own. This is like going in for surgery and the doctor leaving you with the medicine, instruments, and sterile gloves for you to perform it on yourself.

On the surface, all of these things look like tools we can use to fix ourselves. They are tools, yes, but broken ones. If they gave us long term results, why do we have to try one after the other? Why do we need one more self-help book, one more diet guru, one more glance at our phones? It's because the last one wasn't enough.

## MAKING THE PROBLEM WORSE

Have you ever attempted to fix something only to further ruin it beyond repair? If you've ever had a stain on your shirt, you know that rubbing it harshly without soap and water only makes it permanent. So too with our lives. When we perpetually seek after things that won't fix us, our problems grow deeper and deeper. The restlessness in our hearts only becomes more permanent. For example, if we think a romantic relationship will save us, the more we set ourselves up for heartbreak as we get more attached to that person. If we think getting

the perfect college degree will save us, we will be sorely disappointed when we don't land our dream job immediately after graduation.

The Bible has a term for this idea of going to something or someone other than Jesus to save us. It calls this idolatry.

We may have a stereotypical image in our head when we hear that word. “Isn't worshipping idols what the ancients did way back when?” “Doesn't it involve statues of gods people bowed down to?” Yes, that was part of it, but idolatry is something we all are guilty of, even today. Author and Pastor Tim Keller helps explain: “What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”<sup>3</sup> We go to idols instead of Jesus to fix our problems because they are easy, convenient, normal, logical, and indulgent.<sup>4</sup> They provide instant gratification.

While the immediate relief idols offer us seems okay in the moment, the Bible warns us that, in the long run, they only lead to destruction. Not only that, but we are too naïve to grasp the full extent of their consequences. Proverbs 14:12 puts it plainly: “There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death” (NLT). If we insist on being seduced by our idols, scripture says that we will be eternally separated from Christ (Revelation 22:15). In light of this serious reality, let's call our idols what they are and run.

## THE CARPENTER

Our problems in life and the reasons we turn to idols for help are a direct result of sin. Every single one of us is a sinner who has rejected God.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the Bible, our natural condition is described as poor, naked, blind, unthankful, foolish, wicked, immoral, proud, undiscerning, and unmerciful. Looking deeply at our inner selves, at the things no one else knows, we see why this is true. Who could possibly fix, let alone love, people like us?

Thankfully, God was well aware of our ugly condition since the moment sin entered the world in the third chapter of Genesis. From that point on, the entire Bible details His plan to rescue us. The Old Testament predicts and anticipates a coming Savior who, in spite of our constant rejection of Him, would descend from His high place of honor to come and live among us. Then, the New Testament details the miracle of Jesus's birth, His life and ministry, and ultimately His death and resurrection. All of these events had to take place so that His perfect life could be a sacrifice and substitution for our broken ones. Romans 5:8 makes it clear that Jesus didn't wait for us to clean up our act before saving us, but rather, “When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners” (NLT).

What a wonderful God that He would look at our wretched condition with mercy. Author Dane Ortlund writes, “The evidence of Christ's mercy toward you is not your life. The evidence of his mercy toward you is His [life]—mistreated, misunderstood, betrayed,

abandoned. Eternally. In your place. If God sent His own Son to walk through the valley of condemnation, rejection, and hell, you can trust Him as you walk through your own valleys on your way to heaven.”<sup>6</sup> That’s just it. If Christ went to such lengths to repair and rebuild our relationship with Him, we can trust that He is good and He wants good for us.

**“WE GO TO IDOLS INSTEAD OF JESUS TO FIX OUR PROBLEMS BECAUSE THEY ARE EASY, CONVENIENT, NORMAL, LOGICAL, AND INDULGENT. THEY PROVIDE INSTANT GRATIFICATION.”**

When we abandon our best efforts to fix things and run to Christ as the only One who can truly save us, life as we know it begins to change. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (NLT). We are no longer left to fend for

ourselves, trying to salvage what meager life we once had. Christ gives us brand new life. That is really good news!

At this point, it’s important to address a common misconception: accepting Christ’s offer of a new life does not mean we are exempt from experiencing anymore problems. Because this world is fallen and sinful, we will continue to see sin rise up in ourselves and others. The difference is, Christ will be with us in our trials, and He will use them for our good. The things we go through in life are no longer arbitrary and pointless: they can be used to build our character, and with a renewed perspective, we might even be thankful for them. Ultimately, Christ enables us to look beyond our current circumstances and realize that they are only temporary compared to the eternity we’ll get to spend with Him.

Jesus lived on this earth for 33 years. Of all the professions He could have chosen, He was a carpenter. For many years before His ministry even began, He spent His time building and fixing things. Today, He is still the perfect craftsman.

So, dear friend, have hope that He can and He will give you new life, from the inside out.

<sup>1</sup>theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/aug/21/cellphone-screen-time-average-habits

<sup>2</sup>desiringgod.org/articles/the-lethal-drug-in-your-dream-job

<sup>3</sup>Keller, Tim. *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*.

<sup>4</sup>thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-attraction-of-idolatry/

<sup>5</sup>Romans 3:23

<sup>6</sup>Ortlund, Dane. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*.

# God’s Will or Human Decision?

A Study from the  
Book of Ruth

In the time of Judges, there was an Israelite widow named Naomi who lived with her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, in Moab (Ruth 1:1–5). Together with her husband and two sons, Naomi had left Bethlehem because there was a great famine. Such an irony to experience famine in a land of the bread. After they had reached Moab, they settled there for ten years. Her two sons married women from Moab. God warns the Israelite men from marrying foreign women because they will be led away from Him to pagan idols. God wanted Israel to be set apart, yet it was not one of the commandments. Moses, the lawgiver himself had married a non-Israelite; however, he had married before he was given the Law. Also, she submitted to her husband’s community and worshipped His God. Nevertheless,

the sad tale of the book of 1 and 2 Kings shows that foreign women had led the husbands and the nation astray and God punished them. In the story of Naomi, we do not know the cause of the death of her husband and her sons, but we also know that her daughters-in-law were not the cause of their death either. Instead, one of them brings back joy to her bitterness.

Naomi decides to return to her land to the safety of her people (Ruth 1:6). But wouldn't God be with her even if she remained in Moab? God has always been faithful although she confesses otherwise, "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). She should not be misunderstood as cursing God for her misfortune, but she was grieving the loss of her dear ones. She was distraught. She had no one for relational dependence. All her extended family were in Israel. So, she set out to her own land after ten long years.

But she had the responsibility of her daughters-in-law, so she lets them go to their own parents. However, Ruth chose to follow her mother-in-law instead (Ruth 1:8–18). Now, we do not know if we should be suspicious of Ruth's character. Why would she not join her relatives? Does she want to escape from her land? Or does she want to experience the vibrance of God with His own people? All this occurred when she only heard of God's awesomeness to His people from Naomi's family, but she hadn't been among the people of Israel apart from her small Elimelech family. This was her opportunity to witness God in Israel with His own elect people.

When Naomi and Ruth were resettling in Israel, Ruth volunteered to work in the fields (Ruth 2:2). Her presence must have caused some stir among the Israelites. From Boaz's words we hear that she was highly favored among the Israelites for

the kindness she had shown towards her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:11–12). Boaz was impressed by her loyalty towards her Israelite mother-in-law and was kind to let her collect the leftovers from the field. Ruth labored and returned with an ephah, or 13 kg of barley (Ruth 2:17). Naomi is now blessed with an industrious daughter-in-law and generous kinsman redeemer.

Naomi once again is seen as the protagonist (Ruth 3). She cleverly chalks out a marital plan for Ruth. Ruth is seen

## **"RUTH WAS NOT A PUPPET BUT CHOSE TO FOLLOW THE TRUTH."**

to observe every detail to the utmost. Ruth finds her way to Boaz's feet in the night, so the startled man is too startled to accept the marriage proposal (Ruth 3:9–10). Yet, the following day, he settles the matter according to the law of the land (Ruth 4). Each of the three characters operated at their best within their roles. Naomi directs every detail for Ruth. The young lady obeyed even though it was late at night when she courageously approached Boaz. Even Boaz did not act in haste but respectfully dealt with Ruth, Naomi, and the community.

From the beginning of this tale to the end, we see the human characters displaying love, generosity, and kindness towards one another. But what is God's role within

this story? Is it the human decision that led to the success of the story? Does God care for the details of family life?

God was present with Elimelech and his entire family in their journey. Even when death struck them, He did not leave Naomi in her loss and grief. He had greater plans that the Messiah will redeem not only her family but the entire world (Matt. 1:1–17). Yes, gentiles are included (Isa. 56:6–8; Mark 7:24–29; Rom. 11:17). Ruth herself is a witness.

Naomi at several points is the decision-maker but those decisions came from the thought process of God in the equation. She had grumbled, but God healed her (Ruth 4:14–15). God implanted the right thoughts, and she acted on them promptly.

Ruth was not a puppet but chose to follow the truth (Ruth 1:16). She followed her mother-in-law to the land chosen by the almighty God. She submitted to the will of God even in her second marriage and God honoured her faithfulness. Ruth did not know the end from the beginning but God does.

Finally, Boaz, a man of honour, did not give in to human desires but obeyed the law of the land. God set him as the example for his employees in the fields: a redeemer for Ruth and Naomi and great grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:22).

God is the central character who channelled a way for redemption through this little family. They had their struggles, but God held the story of their lives. God was faithful in the times of Judges, and He continues to be so even today.



# A WORLD DIVIDED

WHY DO WE LIKE TO FIGHT SO MUCH?

**Our world is divided more than ever. This race hates that race, political parties are at war, the genders rage against each other, vegetarians separate from the meat-eaters, and Coke-drinkers keep their distance from Pepsi-lovers. Everywhere you look disunity runs rampant, and it doesn't seem to be getting any better. If you take a moment to collectively think about all the tension, it can make you start to wonder: What's going on here? The human race is suspiciously segregated.**

It's not to say that having an opinion is a bad thing. The world would be pretty boring if everyone just liked and disliked the same things. We're all wired differently and see things from unique perspectives. We have different tastes and styles. So, why can't we all just be different and learn to get along?

Imagine you have a friend who is an adamant Coke-fanatic. All conversations with them seem to end back at why they think Coke is so great. Their social media feed revolves around Coke. They wear Coke t-shirts. They're just all about Coke. Good for them, right? Sure, but let's say their love for Coke doesn't just stop there. This friend is also constantly trying to get you to love Coke as much as they do. One day, they find out (much to your horror) that you actually prefer Pepsi, and it nearly starts a fist fight. There's no intelligent conversation, just loud insults and mocking jeers before your friend stomps away and starts posting rude things about you on social media. You're nearly certain you've lost the friendship for good. And at this point, you're pretty okay with that.

Now, no one's probably getting this hot and bothered over soda. However, this scenario isn't too far off when it comes to gender issues, politics, or race. The

problem comes when an opinion, preference, or belief takes on more weight than it's supposed to, and we build our lives around that one thing. When it gets threatened or isn't cherished by another person, we feel personally insulted. Since our identity has become embedded in it, we demonize the people who think differently than us. We post and like propaganda online that supports our views and tears down the opposition. We lash out at anyone who goes against us or doesn't think the same way. We will do anything to protect our identity.

The truth is, we're all looking for evidence that we're okay, and adamantly liking or disliking something does the trick for awhile. Everybody feels insecure whether they admit it or not, and we're constantly grasping for something we can do to give us a bit of stability.

The Bible can explain why we all feel so wobbly. It frankly says that "No one is righteous," (Romans 3:11, ESV) and that we "all have sinned and fall short" (Romans 3:23). Basically, the Bible is throwing all our little segregations out the window. It's making us focus on the fact that there are really only two groups: the righteous

and the unrighteous; the good and the bad. Unfortunately for us, every single human falls into the unrighteous category.

To make things worse, our problem is much bigger than our badness only making us unacceptable to other people or to ourselves. Our biggest issue is that we're unacceptable to God. Bad people have no business being anywhere near Him because He is good, righteous, and perfect. We belong in Hell, far away from Him, and we can never be good enough to change that.

The great news is that Jesus can change that. He "justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5, ESV). He offers the wobbly human race a chance to finally be okay. He takes hopelessly bad people and makes them perfect in God's eyes. He lived a righteous life for us and then took the penalty of our bad lives on Himself. Our world may still be crazy and divided, but the reality of Jesus simplifies things.

Because of Him, we now each have one main choice that we have to make. Will we accept what He's done to make us righteous, or will we continue trying to prove ourselves? It's up to you. Which group will you belong to?



# LIVING IN FREEDOM

## Bursting Out of the Darkness of Spiritual Isolation

**T**he pandemic brings us all back to our box. It makes us think more about ourselves—our safety, our survival, and our plans. Though it helps us contemplate our past actions and our deepest regrets, it also pulls us away from communicating with others.

### Fading into Darkness

There are moments in life when it's hard to open up and say what's on our minds and in our hearts. It can be difficult to embrace what's outside our comfort zone. Courage fades into the shadows and fear takes center stage. When we give in to fear, we embrace what goes with it: isolation.

Isolation can be merely physical, but it can also be something much deeper, something spiritual. When we give in to fear, lies, shame, and guilt, we are on the fast track to spiritual isolation. To protect ourselves, we settle into our selfish ways and embrace the false security of our fragile shells. We reject God's calling on our lives and His command to live out a dynamic faith with other people. The less of ourselves that we share with other people, the darker our lives become.

### Embracing the Light

The Bible commands us to meet regularly with other Christians.<sup>1</sup> If we obey this command, we can overcome challenges and help each other out of the dark. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (NLT). If wrapped up in ourselves, we start to think we're better than others because the more we insist on our independence, the lonelier and weaker we become. But if we have someone to grab our hands when we fall,

we can keep each other steady. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."<sup>2</sup> In Ephesians 5:8, the Apostle Paul reminded the believers, "At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." How can we walk together as children of light if we're isolated from each other? When we reject our selfish and petty fears, we can embrace the light...together.

**"THE MORE WE INSIST ON OUR INDEPENDENCE, THE LONELIER AND WEAKER WE BECOME."**

### Living in Freedom

When we're spiritually isolated, we get weighed down with guilt, but the Bible tells us that fight is over. The battle was won when Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Grace wins... every time. God's mercy is new every morning.<sup>3</sup> Those things in the past that keep us from living as free can't hold us down when we walk in the light. Nothing can separate us from God's love, not even our guilt.<sup>4</sup>

What will you do with the freedom that is found in walking in the light? Will you embrace the Bible's command to carry your brother's burdens? It may sound heroic, but that's what Jesus did, and Christians are called to be like Jesus. He didn't isolate Himself while He was here on earth. He was with people of different personalities and attitudes. If we strive to be like Him, the one who "eats with tax collectors and sinners," God will break your fragile shell, bring you out of the darkness, and into His light.<sup>5</sup> Let Him set you free from the prison of your spiritual isolation.

*"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1*

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:25 <sup>2</sup> John 8:12 <sup>3</sup> Lamentations 3:23 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:39  
<sup>5</sup> Mark 2:16





## THE GIGANTIC ADVENTURE OF A TINY ACORN

Once upon a time, there was a tiny green acorn growing on the smallest branch of Mighty Mother Oak. As he bobbed in the wind and danced among her leaves, he admired his beautiful mother. She was enormous, sturdy, and useful. Her noble presence attracted folk from across the countryside. Children would come play on her branches, travelers would lean against her trunk, and happy families would rest in her shade. She was greatly loved, and hardly ever alone. The tiny acorn dreamed of the day when he'd be a significant giant, just like her.

Then, that day seemed to arrive. It was autumn and his mother's leaves had all blushed scarlet. A stiff wind blew and the acorn, who had grown robust and brown after a summer's sunshine, was released from his home among her branches. He soared through the air triumphantly, barely able to contain his excitement of what was to come. What would it be like to sprout roots? How many branches would he have? Would he even possibly become a mightier oak than his great mother?

The sharp pain of impact quickly interrupted his thoughts. He bounced and spun in a flurry down from his mother's hill, smacking his cap on rocks and scuffing his shell over cracked ground. Finally, he rolled to a stop. On top of aching all over, he suddenly realized that he was also completely alone. The little acorn was shocked. In his dreams of becoming great, pain certainly hadn't been part of the plan.

The following days were hot, and the sun baked down on him. All he could see was bugs and dirt and stiff blades of boring grass. He grew impatient. He was lonely. He wondered how long this all was going to take.

One day, he heard shuffling in the grass. Abruptly, the sniffing snout of a squirrel was upon him. Startled, he tried to shoo the squirrel, but squirrels are quite hard to shoo when you're only an acorn. Paws clutched at his sides, and before he knew it, he was rocketing through the grass.

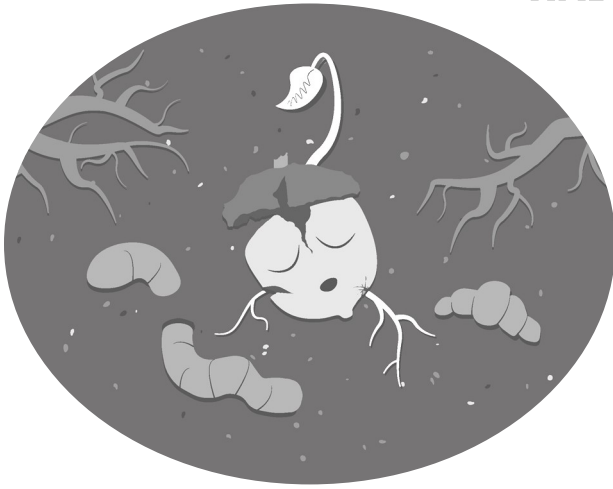
Irritation melted into excitement as a thought blossomed in the acorn's mind. He wondered if this furry fellow had been sent to help him along in his quest of becoming mighty. The more he considered it, the more he became certain. The acorn felt more hopeful about his future than ever, and he was confident that nothing could spoil his mood.

Coming to an abrupt stop, the squirrel chucked him to the ground, turned its rump to his face and began digging in a frenzy. The acorn nearly started to laugh at how silly squirrels can be. He tried to move away from the bushy, swishing tail, but before he could manage the animal spun around again, apprehended him and shoved him deep into the black earth. Paw-fuls of soil started to spray into the hole and the acorn panicked as he realized that he was being buried alive. He tried to scream for help, but it's quite hard to scream when you're only an acorn.

The squirrel's chittery chirps and labored puffs became more and more muffled as the hole was filled up. Finally, the horrified oak nut was entirely entombed in dirt and all was frightfully quiet. His hopes were completely shattered. If acorns could cry he would have unleashed a flood. But they can't. So, he mourned in silence as worms slithered around him, burrowing deep to escape the coming cold of winter.



# “IN HIS DREAMS OF BECOMING GREAT, PAIN CERTAINLY HADN’T BEEN PART OF THE PLAN.”



After indulging in a long spell of self-pity, he tried his best to accept his own death with some nobility. He resigned himself to be forever tiny, useless, and forgotten. He hardened into a gray husk, and for the first time in his life he felt nothing.

Up above, a thick blanket of snow soon covered his unmarked grave. The ground froze around him. For months he only existed, not fully asleep or awake, mummified deep in the icy mud.

Until one day, a warm wind was sent to melt the world once again. Frigid water trickled down, thawing his cap and shell. Before he could get around to ignoring the sensation, something inside him stirred. His mind cleared for a moment to take note of this unusual feeling. Then, something inside him twisted horribly. Now he was fully awake. His insides started to wriggle and writhe about with an ever-increasing intensity. Soon, he was in the worst agony of his life.

The little Acorn wanted to wail. He wanted to be back with his mother, bobbing in her branches. He wanted the sunshine back. He wanted his dreams back. He would have even gone back to be with the stupid squirrel, anything but suffering this horrible pain all alone in the dark.

Pressure built up inside him. He felt like he was going to burst. Fresh alarm overtook him as his sides finally split open with a singular sharp crack. The torment was nearly unbearable as alien arms and legs twisted out in all directions, tearing through the dirt.

Suddenly, his grave was much too small. He felt stooped over and cramped up. He shifted, shrugging new shoulders and raising what seemed to be a head, up, up, until his crown was just beneath the surface of the ground. One final stretch, and he broke through.

He could see the sun again. He could hear birds. He smelled fresh spring air. The worst of his discomfort melted away, leaving only new sore limbs rooted in dirt. The little acorn was stunned. Much to his own surprise, it seemed as if his season of horror had finally passed. A new chapter was beginning. He had come back from the dead.

Over the coming weeks, he came to understand everything more fully. He truly was no longer an acorn. Buds started to unfold, his slender stem grew strong, and he could barely believe that he had actually become the tiniest of trees. He was well on his way to becoming mighty. His transformation had just been much different than what he had expected. Eventually, he was able to accept that every ounce of his pain was very necessary. By the time he had become big enough to offer shade to a squirrel, he was even thankful for it.

*That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!*

2 Corinthians 4:16-17





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