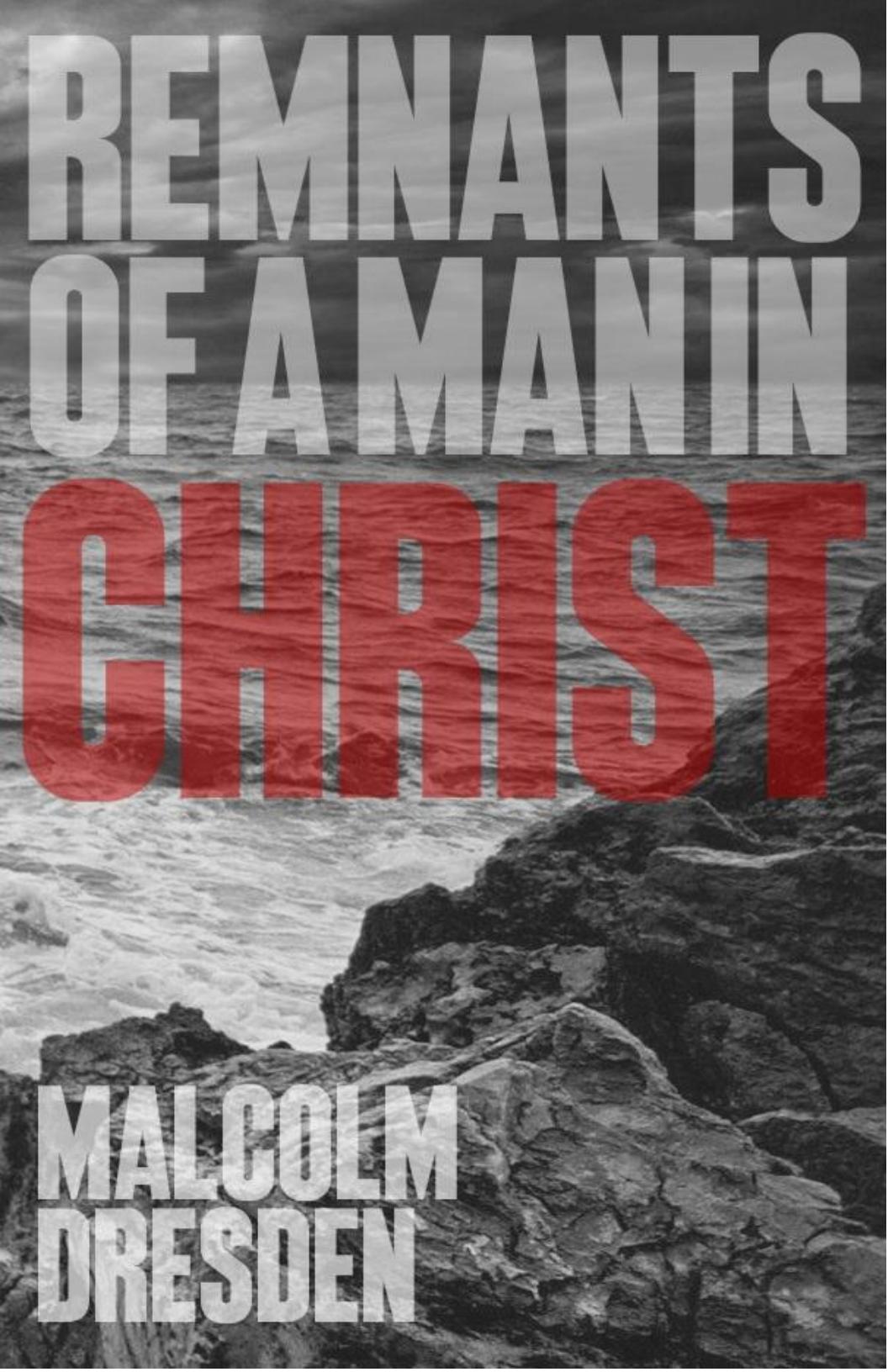


REMNANTS OF A MAN IN CHRIST

A black and white photograph of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, dark, craggy rocks jut out from the water. Waves are crashing against these rocks, creating white foam and spray. The background shows more of the coastline and the ocean extending to the horizon under a clear sky.

MALCOLM
DRESDEN



REMNANTS OF A MAN IN CHRIST

MALCOLM DRESDEN

~~Without God....~~

Trish Notting

THIS IS FOR YOU

Maybe you're already a believer and just need a little assurance that God is with you. This message was written for you. Maybe you believe in God but you just aren't sure of who He is? This is for you. Maybe you've never believed in God or thought He could make a difference in your life. Whoever you are, young or old, your religion, sexuality, race, nationality, married or single, this book was written for you. I believe there is something everyone can pull from this.

Constructing **REMNANTS OF A MAN IN...CHRIST**, I thought of you. I thought of your life, I thought of all good and bad and how Christ fills the voids in our lives. I pray that this journey you take gives you as much hope as it did for me. I had no intention of going on it myself as I unconsciously began to write it at age 15. It certainly wasn't titled *Remnants of A Man in...Christ* back then. Today, I look at my life after the completion of this book and I must even admit I'm not the same person I was after the first pen stroke. It's amazing how life can take you through changes you don't wish to make. The author of your story doesn't give you any say on the plot He chooses for your life.

I can't say I wrote this book for any self-gratification but I will say that I created it out of my love for God and His longing for us all. There wasn't a prayer to write this book. I woke up one morning and through my joy in Christ, I decided to write a book that would reveal that God loves us all. A book, I believe will reveal how His sovereignty in our lives can change us and the world we live in for the better.

No, I'm not a pastor or an ordained minister and yes, like many others I've made many mistakes. I still do from time to time. I'm far from angelic and I still have struggles just like everyone else but I can give you my living testimony that the love of Christ is alive and present for every human being here on earth.

I didn't have much advising, mentoring, or a large fleet of supporters but alone in the small studio room of my grandmother's home to the office of my now small house, with the prayers and support of very few great friends, the Lord was with me and this book was born. I pray that Jesus Christ is with you as you read and that His voice really speaks to your heart as I share this story.

I completely give you permission to write all over the book for analysis and study so take your time with it. It's not meant to be read in one day. This is a work of literature so please enjoy it. Take your time as you read. The book may be used as a

devotional. Get a highlighter, journal and post-it scripts to outline verses that compel you and speak to your life. Write down whatever speaks directly to your heart and feel free to have meetings and sessions with your friends, classrooms, children, co-workers, churches, and families.

Remnants of A Man in...Christ is divided into two volumes of books. The message in its entirety is that God is Love and without Him, we are nothing. *Volume I* consists of four individual books of poetry, A Man at Home, A Man in...Love, A Man in...Power, and lastly the cinematic A Man In...Christ. All acts are interlocked together with many different stories, testimonies, and letters to God. *Volume II* is composed of letters, advice, experiences, and wisdom I've learned over the years.

A Man at Home is completely autobiographical and explicitly details my transitional birth from sin to belief both hard and heavily. *This is my truth*. Some pieces are meant to reveal the frailties of life and others are applications that have been successful in my own life. I pray they will be in yours. A Man In...Love contains the flairs and falls of love, these pieces are all non-fictional and true. I, however, am not sharing only my experiences but the experiences of others. A Man In...Power is pack with anthems and declarations of empowerment and A Man In...Christ reveals the need for Christ in the world.

Christ compelled me to write with the intention of inspiring and igniting new passion in readers for living. My prayers are that this book will reveal to you how vast and splendid life in Christ truly is. Just as the Lord gave Moses' specific instructions in constructing the tabernacle, He gave them to me as well during the hard labor of this project. Its birth began even in my life as an unbeliever ten years ago. You'll see me transition from my old life and into my new one and hopefully find inspiration in yours. May the Lord Jesus Christ enlighten your heart with healing, revelation, wisdom and love. God bless you for reading & thank you.



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A MAN IN LOVE
A MAN IN POWER
A MAN IN CHRIST**

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UNDERSTANDING JESUS CHRIST UNDERSTANDING YOUR POWER

Before the beginning, before all humanity, there was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All of them; three persons. All of them: one God. A community as one.

Before the beginning, there was God. He created this world, everything in it and sculpted you and I with His very own hands. It's a hardcore truth for many scholars to accept but I ultimately believe it to be truth above all else. God made us in His image and gave us dominion (*rule*) here on Earth **[GENESIS 1:26-28]**. Rule here on Earth was given to Man (*humans*). Authority on Earth belongs to you and I and it belongs to us for the sole purpose of expanding the kingdom of heaven **[MATTHEW 6:6-9]**.

During the time of creation, one of His very own angels attempted to overthrow Him & was thrown out of Heaven. Lucifer, also known as satan, fell on earth and began death's cycle known as sin, **[ROMANS 6:28]** bringing havoc to the world **[ISAIAH 14:12-15]**. Sin is estrangement and disobedience from God. It is anything that is separated from God. When God's first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were created their lives were overflowing with pure purpose and fulfillment in the Garden of Eden. Yet the temptation of satan led them to eat the forbidden fruit known as 'the knowledge of good and evil' was the first act of disobedience that was committed and it led them away from God. When sin overtook Adam and Eve, their authority was then placed into the hands of satan **[GENESIS 3:1-13]**.

Now you may ask the question? If God is God, why would He allow something like this to happen? There's many answers to the questions you have and many theories as well but if I'm God, the author, of course, the plot will go as I intended it to. I will be the central hero to my people, there will be an antagonist and I will destroy him. My people will not only love and worship me always but they live in my eternal kingdom with me forever **[REVELATION 22]**. As it is written in the bible, the full plot of humanity here on earth is not only a good one but a great one.

Faithful in all His ways, God developed a plan to reclaim His people. After many years of working in the earth raising up prophets to redeem His children, God Himself entered into the womb of a virgin young woman named Mary, and Jesus Christ, the Messiah and redeemer of souls, was born (**MATTHEW 1:1-24**). Jesus, through His life, burial and resurrection, brought us life from sin so that not only you and I could go to Heaven but so that we'd restore the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth (**JOHN 1:1-18**).

He gave us all a purpose and He's renewed this world for centuries before you and I ever existed and will when we are gone. Receiving Christ is the key to Heaven on Earth. And when you discover who Christ is for yourself, it opens the door for you to step into everything He has for you here and now. Hell nor failure will be an option. You may feel like life seems to be beating you to a pulp and you just want to throw in the towel, but Christ will intercede for you.

I grew up in pretty steep conditions. Even though, I grew up in church, I didn't have a strong personal relationship with Christ but when I reached a point of desperation in my life, alone in the depths of all my sins, I finally reached out to Him and He spoke life into my lungs. He made me over again when no one else could. Without Jesus, I was a child running around in the wilderness with no hope for the future. The cycles of sin plagued my life endlessly until I eventually almost died because I couldn't handle the challenges life struck me. As you read this book, do yourself a favor. Choose life. Choose to live again. Understand your power... Your power in **JESUS CHRIST**.

THE BEATITUDES

MATTHEW 5

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

*He said: 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

A MAN AT HOME

SALVATION

1. ACT OF SAVING FROM HARM: the saving of somebody or something from harm, destruction, difficulty, or failure

2. MEANS OF SAVING SOMEBODY OR SOMETHING: somebody or something that protects or delivers another from harm, destruction, difficulty, or failure

3. DELIVERANCE FROM SIN

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST:

deliverance from sin or the consequences of sin through Jesus Christ's death on the cross

Open Closed Doors

IN THIS WORLD...

am I surrounded by love or am I a prisoner of my flesh,
My cry flails for the second coming of my Savior,
My worries overwhelm me with grief for the sake of my enemies, my friends... my
family . . . Myself
I worry for us all when I wake up,
 I pray that we all fall not,
 that we finish out the beginning
 and close without ending . .
The entity of life and death flows through
 the vibrato of my mouth but
 I speak not fear,
 For fear brings depression
 I speak not fear,
 For fear brings destruction . .
but by the drawing of my very own hands
 lifted towards heaven in surrender
 as the end of this world draws near
 I speak grace over us all in His name
 His words of grace . . .
 I speak His Word over our lives,
 I speak life into the future
 It's time. Today!
 Submit to the kingdom.
 It's time. Right now!
 Submit to the King!
No more open closed doors . . .
 This is my story and
 It's also yours . . .

Underneath

IS IT REALLY MORNING?

In the dawn of my famine
I open up the pages of my life
and all I can picture is the sun...
Yet when I remember
the forbidden fruits of the past
there's an open road of tribulation awaiting me...
Suffrage and sacrifice.
A perilous future forged in high demonic altitudes
How do you press ahead
When the damage won't leave you?
Where does your heart go...
When you can't explain the pain
to the people you love
when the tears won't pass
and the tears in your pillow won't dry anymore
Where does your heart go
When love casts you aside...
and heartbreak ruins your tomorrow?
Should you vanish into a life of solitude?
Should you get up...
to fight a battle once lost?
Is there relief for a heart losing its steady pace?
How do you fix the strings of your viola
when the strings won't loosen
When the earth shakes, will you falter?
Can you stand in times of difficulty
when the storm keeps brewing?
Who will you call, who will you trust?
What's keeping you away, what's leaving you scarred?
What lies underneath?

ISAIAH 53: 4-6

4. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Questions

THIS WORLD...

Right & wrong?

Which way to go?

Which way to cross?

North, South Damascus

East or West Liberia

Life's turned around...in & out

A belligerent wilderness where gaining is losing

to lose is to give away

and to gain is to take away

Where will we go, where will we cross Shedu's river?

Why make a choice when there's no assurance of solace

Like wandering in a deathless comeuppance

there's trees without leaves,

Trees without roots,

Roots without soil to uphold the stability of men..

Sons without fathers

Daughters without mothers

Life prostituted and prostrated without purpose

And beneath all the confusion lies nothing

but more uncertainty
Which way to go?
Which way to cross Shedu's river?
Father or Mother to die or break away
Man or woman to bed
North, South Shaman's Dell
East or West Nirvana's Utopia
search for the right or search for the imprecise?
Be dear or be concise
Choose life or choose death
The world is complex
like the grains of a leaf
Beneath the skin of its veins
only the land of promiscuity awaits the soul of man
But when will we see?
When will we have answers?

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-9

1. To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under the sun.
2. A time to be born, And a time to die.
A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted.
3. A time to kill, And a time to heal.
A time to break down, And a time to build up,
4. A time to weep, And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, And a time to dance
5. A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;
6. A time to gain, And a time to lose;
A time to keep, And a time to throw away;
7. A time to tear, And a time to sew
A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;
8. A time to love, And a time to hate
9. A time of war, And a time of peace.

Religious

MAYBE I'LL PAINT A PORTRAIT OF

VENUS

and kneel at her altar

Maybe her breast will bring fortune untold to my life

She'll clear the debt of my bottom line

From the open zipper of my jeans to the tip pass my loins

Maybe she'll satisfy my heartbeat for momentous pleasure

In light of her encrusted image

berates my anthology of existence

Maybe her image will appease my desire

My beloved seductress in full-blown erotica

Together, long time,

Inseparable, everywhere in media

from magazines to the world wide web

Deeply, I've languished in lust with you,

Damn, our moments past are forever

The church pews, my hectic job, the hours that steal away time for me to lavish

To lavish with you in heat

Open your blouse through the pages of Playboy

Spread your legs through the clips of Tubeous flames

Your immortality arouses me

The hold of your bondage entices me

Your classroom leaves me stagnant

If I'm to accept any denomination

Due me the pleasure of naming me yours

Proclaim me your Adonis, Proclaim me your whore
Deeply, I'm religious...Deeply, I'm yours

Shadow

AM I A SHADOW?

Lost & without love's majesty?
Dreams realize themselves, Yes
but are they truly real?
Am I a shadow
Of destiny's fate... forbidden and forsaken?
Is love superior
Is it superior to hatred's offspring?
Am I a shadow
of a man never possible?
Will my heart smile sun rays of hope's promise
Or will it rain in weary axels to heavy the burden of the day's enslavement?
When will the war for my soul end
Will the scars heal?
I've shed tears for water
to survive in the desert but
the quarantine that the globe places me in seems
to bring my face..
desolation, misery, starvation,
rejection, abuse,
betrayal, deceit, depression,
poverty...
from high to low bowels of Belial
I descend from happiness

to hurt and sadness
Am I a shadow lost forever?
Somebody reveal me! Who am I?

Who am I

16 Y.O.

God, some days, I just don't care about where I'm going in life but I'm going to make it somehow. Even if I have a dream who'll be there to help me achieve it. Days like this, I really question, "who...am I? Who am I? I get so tired of looking for answers that won't be found and no one seems to want to help me anyway.

Maybe it's because they can't or I'm not worthy enough for them to. I just wanna not feel this pain and move beyond this. I wish someone would want me around or need me. I wish someone would give me some directions on how to work this car out the driveway. I wish someone would help me work my way out of who I am and into someone that matters.

BECAUSE I DON'T LOVE THE MAN I SEE IN
THE MIRROR. HE'S NOT SOMEONE I'D WANT TO
LOVE.

Some days, I don't even know why I was ever born. Who am I important to really? People say they love me but it never seems to be enough right now. Maybe if I

could find that answer, I could wake up in the morning and not feel like this. I can't keep doing this...I can't be weak. I gotta be a man, I gotta keep movin' but who do I need to be? Who am I?

PROVERBS 3: 3-6

3. Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,
4. And so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.
5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
6. In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

A large, flowing, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Marionette" in a cursive script, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the "e".

DOSE MY STRINGS...

like a psychedelic yo-yo
Heighten my depression
till it drives me down the highway naked
I cry out for help but no one hears my lips move
They tend to stay close
See, Pride, you're my bondage and I'm your masochist
So String me down to the path of Hell
I'm your marionette,
you're my operator
Contradict my actions with prejudice,
Turn my heart away, turn it against the church

Ride me out till seduction leaves me dead from its impurities
Grace won't save me there
She'll never clear the debt of my bottom line
Take me away till my heart goes empty
My sanity is your offering,
I trade it for your deception
Steal the identity to which that was ordained me
Take my innocence
Let's ride the night away down my drawers
Ruin the definition of what love to my life should mean
I'm your marionette,
you're my operator
Ruin my life..
To you, it's yours already
Run with it, string me away
I'm your marionette,
you're my operator

A large, expressive, handwritten signature in black ink. The word 'Free' is written in a cursive, flowing script, with the 'F' being particularly prominent and stylized.

I SIT IN MY BEDROOM ISOLATED,

I know I'm dead
dry of life, I can't help but
stare out the window in desire of a lifetime...
a life of joy that seems unreachable
My conscience won't clear
I'm overwhelmed in thought
My soul is clinging to breathe . .

Striving to escape..
Contemplating fleeing outdoors
I just want to feel the breeze
Why am I here,
I've already failed the course
What's the purpose?
Why won't the bell ring yet?
It should be over
I don't see my completion ahead. . . .
Somebody...
free me..
Release me..
Reenergize my will for living
free my mind with truth
and fill my heart with hope
If you do this for me
If you set me free,
Today, I assure you..
I will make it out of this..
I want to be free!

ROMANS 15: 4

4. For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Take a Picture

PEOPLE TELL ME EVERYWHERE...

it's in my DNA to be great but I feel like shit
I feel like nothing
They see my smile,
they love my laughter

But behind it all, life's a bitch
It's all talk, It just isn't good for me
If you google my back story
I'll play it for you in HD, I'll put it on full screen
You'll see I don't give a damn
Nobility in public, loved by many
A closed door slave blown out in lust
Shamed in depression, drenched in self-hatred
Maybe I'd be better if my donor thought to know me
If he just made an attempt
But I'm son to no man
16 years adult, no vanity
No ties, love what you see?
Come on, take a picture
It looks beautiful, doesn't it? But take a look deeper
See the abuse, see the internal blood
It's streaming rapidly, screaming out my chest
Feel my heart hemorrhage
Still see something?
I see nothing..
Just another statistic
Tell me if you see a man
What the hell's there, tell me, I wanna see..
Come on, take a picture
Could there ever be greatness
Coming from me?

High Ride

SHIT DON'T SEEM TO WORK OUT RIGHT

My head is spinning, I'm strung out Rated X

I think I'll just take the high ride

I'll sore till my head hits a road block

Get what I want

No matter the gratuity

Who, what, when

Later for scenes social

About me what?

I gots business to do

Dollars gon roll down my pockets,

I'm gon get money

And paper gon be my ambition

God just bless me

I don't know bout religion..

don't know bout holy

don't want no church

I think I'll just ride high

Commitments to none

Disciplines for no clarity

Order for disorder

Iced out in luxury

Iced out in me

I'm void of grace, You be my judge

I'll take the high ride

lost

DON'T TELL ME WHO I AM

Illiterate to my fall, I'll believe in myself
Do or die, I'll search within whether nothings there
 No time to look back
If I stumble, I know I'll die this time
 Tick, tock, tock or stop
 I won't stop my run
No time to recover what's steadily being lost
 If my spiral is downward
 Let the road take it's toll
 Kiss ass, kick rocks to my haters
 I'll blow my speakers till the music
 steals away my grief, till it gets in me
If my dignity fails me not, if my pride's still in tact
 Never will I go back
 My mind may be gone
I may be naked with nothing to cover me
 But naked, I'm still here
 Naked...but still me
 Whoever that is these days?
 Whoever that may be?
Get way from me with that book
I ain't got need for no road map
 I know my way..
 I'll be just fine
 Who's lost?



THE COLORS IN MY SHADED FACE

have faded dull
The cold winter's here
and my heart lies buried
Buried in an ashtray of flint
Buried in the glinted clouds of my future
What is there to gain
if the realm of this world leaves me with no hope?
My few words spoken go unheard
in room of a thousand people
Someone see me..
Can't you see my tears?
I need you to console me
Someone see me...
It's hard some days to open my air ways to take a breath
Is freedom a possibility for me
when the world seems to be closing in
Will I get a chance to speak
To breathe...To know what it feels like to have someone to care
Someone to love or believe I matter
The 000s in my credit limit speak to my knees
They shiver up my chest
from my shins to be back of my head

"I'm sorry, I can't do it for you no more
I don't love you no more, I can't give you what you need
Til you pay me what you owe.. I'll just decline."

It's hard some days to open my airways to take a breath
Is freedom a possibility
when the world seems to be closing in on you
Will I ever get a chance to speak
To breathe...To live
Somebody, anybody, see me



STARING IN THE MIRROR, I ASK MYSELF,

‘Who am I?’

I've lost the innocent tones given to me at birth
What have I become and how will I find my way back home?
There's blood slashed on the wrists of my hands
and there's no sleep for me at night
I feel my legs unable to move
I'm unable to rest.. my adrenaline overwhelms me...
I can't stop running
but I know I have no time to catch my breath..
The crossfire grows and it burns...
I'm crying out for help..
but the pain grows higher...
Is this anxiety or is it imagination?
Is this a mirage or is it reality?
I've been infiltrated internally
and I can't feel my legs ..
I know I have to run . . .but I can't feel my legs...
I have to make it but the hurt won't pass..
I have to keep going...
I have to escape the fire!
Addiction is killing me...

poverty is killing me..
Immorality is killing me...
Depression is killing me..
Oh God, I beg you!
Tear down these walls held over my soul
Fill me with love...
Cover my world with brand new color..
Make me whole again..deliver me

ISAIAH 55: 6-7

6. Seek the LORD while He may be found,
Call upon Him while He is near.
7. Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the LORD,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

ROMANS 10: 9-13

9. If you confess with your mouth and in your heart the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. 12. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 13. "For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

So I can see You

I NEED SOMEONE TO LOVE ME...

I need someone to fill the vacant space
The vacant space deep within my heart
Someone open the windows!
I need to see the light!
I need to know what love is..
Some days it stops by like one brief hello
And other days a sad goodbye
Is it too much to hope for love that lasts
I need to see you, Lord
I need you to rest on my soul the will to live
To rise another day..
Give me what money can't buy
Peels away the somber clouds
clogging my lungs with sin
Penetrate my broken heart
and rebuilt it in Your love
Strike the base of my poverty
With the truth of Your voice
I want to be born again
I want to live!
I need to see you, Lord
I'm here!
Jesus, I need you!
Peel away my pain
Peel away my sorrow
Peel away my flesh
So I can see you

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Not Alone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Tim" on the left, "Not" in the middle, and "Alone" on the right. The "o" in "Not" is crossed out with a horizontal line.

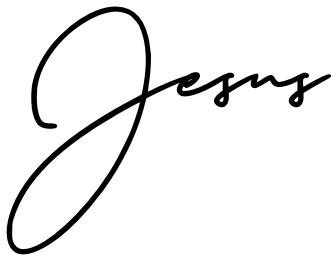
SOMETIMES, I WAKE UP AND I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU, LORD. I LOOK UP AT THE SKY AND TEARS FALL DOWN MY EYES AS THE SUN COMES UP.

A few weeks ago, I nearly lost my life and during church service in the midst of recovering, I realized You've never left me. Every day, I find something You've done in my life that makes me love You all the more.

It's impossible to not see when the picture's right in front of You sometimes. I ignored many moments You presented Yourself to me but You never gave up, when I pushed You away. Your love rose up before me greater than ever and when I lost everything there You were. Thank You.

Now today, I feel your love all around me and it overwhelms my soul with joy. I feel it in every breath I take. I see it in every person I come in contact with. Thank you for another day to smile, another day to pray for myself and those that need it. Thank you for another day to love, another day to love mindlessly. I've never been this happy in my life. I know my creator and He's the best dude I have in my life right now. I look at my life now and I live as an example that even the most forbidden of souls can be redeemed in You. Christ, my Savior! The redeemer of my soul and you're not going anywhere! For the first time, in my life, I have someone that loves me completely as I am and who I'll become.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I KNOW... I'M NOT ALONE.

A large, handwritten-style title 'Jesus' is centered at the top of the page. The letter 'J' is particularly prominent, with a large loop on the left and a smaller loop on the right. The 'e' and 's' are written in a cursive, fluid style.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S FEELS LIKE

when you don't know how to cry
the tears are running
but they're flooding up your heart
Do you know what it feels like
to wait on your breakthrough
you know the clouds are there
but there's no rainfall
Do you know what's feel like to be alone
you know you have a home
but there's isn't one to go to
Do you know what it feels like
when you can't come through for the people you love?
When there's nothing but questions
and the questions don't have answers
Is there a finish line at the end of the road?
How do you win the fight
When you don't know what you're fighting for?
Yet deep in your heart, you know there's a purpose
Greater than your circumstances, greater than even you
It's because it's not about you anymore
Drop your guards, release your weapons
the war belongs to Him
The fight belongs to God..
When the mistakes seem to repeat themselves
when sin overtakes you, when the tower won't fall
Let it be known to God
When you don't know where to go

When you don't know who to turn to... Give it to Him..
Your savior is waiting
and in the darkness lies His hand
Place yours in His and there you'll find the answer...
His name is Jesus

JOHN 14: 6

6. I am the way, the truth
and the life.

Love,

Jesus Christ

Always, He loved you

Know that God wants a relationship with you as the sovereign Lord of your life. Always, He loved you. He sees your future, not your past. Allow Him to come into your life. God wants you to have dominion with Him (Genesis 1:26).

When He created this world and said, Let them have dominion", He was speaking about us having dominion. God's original plan was for humanity, through His guidance, was to bring the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth (Matthew 6:10), the words of Jesus Christ). Heaven is a place where everything has purpose and thrives in the active presence of God.

When He created Adam and Eve, replicating the Kingdom of Heaven was His original plan. However, once the two of them were deceived into disobeying Him, it separated them from Him, cutting off all resources and creating what we know today as sin.

For a very long period of centuries, decades, years, months and days, sin controlled the world and huge sacrifices had to be made in order to gain God's attention and favor. Yet God, faithful and loving in all his ways, gave the greatest sacrifice of all to get us back into relationship with Him. Jesus Christ, His very own son, is the great sacrificial gift given to restore it.

ROMANS 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

God loved you so much that He sent His only son to be crucified on a cross for you to have a relationship with you.

JOHN 3:16: *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and*

only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Know that He doesn't look at your past or what you've done but who you are in Him. Not some, all have sinned but He paid our debts with His own life so that we could have it.

ROMANS 3:23: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

He knows who you are and what you'll be. Your past doesn't determine your future, He does.

JEREMIAH 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you to give you a future and hope.*

When praying, we often go to God and we assume immediately that He won't hear us because of what wrong we've done, trust me I'm still there with you, but through Jesus Christ, scripture says that's complete false. Read both Romans and Ephesians. It's not by any good or bad you do but by grace.

ROMANS 10:9: *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

MATTHEW 7:13 :¹³ *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

ACTS 4:12 :¹² *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

I completely understand myself how this decision may be nerve wrecking for you. You, like me, have probably been hurt so many times, you don't know how to trust anyone. Maybe even, you've not only hurt yourself but also others. God sees past that. He loves you even now where you are. He was so mad with love for you that whether you chose to accept or not, He went to the cross. Why walk away from the one Person in this world who loves you more than life itself? Before this world ever was, Christ knew your first step. Your father loves you.

If you want to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, simply with Him yourself no matter where you are, tell Him in your own words that you need Him. Tell Him that you accept that He gave up His life for you and that you accept Him as the Lord and Savior of your life. Tell Him that you want a relationship with Him and that you know that in your current state, you can't make it without Him. God didn't create us to hold our own but to lay things down at His feet and walk with Him. You can trust Him to lead your life!

GET TO KNOW GOD LIKE YOU WOULD ANYONE.

You have to roll with that person long enough to know how they operate. You have to talk to Him. Love yourself enough to grow in your relationship with Him by studying the Bible and speaking with Him in prayer. It makes no sense to expect talk to someone, you don't know, the Bible enable you to hear God's voice throughout your life. It will enable you to know His character and love for you. You'll discover for yourself a personal and authentic relationship in which two of you can build on every day. Ask questions and journal down answers in a notebook for you to go back to.

In times of trouble, we often depend on people and things rather than lean on God for help. Faith is the key we often don't use in spite of always having access to it through prayer. God is a loving father who is devoted to His children and no matter what circumstance or situation we may be in, He will answer. You can be yourself with him and can count on Him to respond when you need Him. The more you know Him, the stronger He'll make you.

Jesus was so connected to the Father, the Father gifted Him will whatever He asks because He prayed the Father's will. If you are to get an early glimpse of the character of God, you must see our Savior Himself wide open through the pages of scripture. I highly recommend you starting off reading the gospels *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, which reveal the ministry of Jesus.

Remember, God gave us authority on Earth excluding Himself (Free Will). Without prayer, God cannot move in the earth on our behalf. He works through us by the prayers we present to Him. He's given us a choice to choose where we place our faith. Throughout generations, men and women have prayed for not only me but also you to come to Christ. Those prayers have resulted in all the good we see in our world

today. Now He's given you that authority also so it's time to use it. Love yourself enough to follow His will for your life.

You can't always rely on people, things, or even yourself. There will always be disappointment one way or another. Nothing will truly live up to your standards but if you keep God close to your heart, when those things pass away He'll always be there. Only the love of God can give you the peace, joy and prosperity you seek.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS PRAY IN HIS NAME AND WILL.

Ultimately, pray for the path that He'll lead you on and others. Any path that God leads us on is always for our own good. As you learn His ways, eventually they'll become yours. Then, you'll have confidence that He'll answer.

1 JOHN 5:14-15: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*

FIND A CHURCH HOME.

Last but certainly not least, you must find a church home. You need other believers to encourage you in your walk and they will need you also. Never question your belonging in the local body of believers. Stay attached, stay locked in no matter what or where you go. If you find a home where you feel nothing but the love of Christ, no matter what at all costs stay.

HEBREW 10:24-25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

BUILD, SHARE AND CELEBRATE YOUR FAITH.

Your life at this point on is about loving God and fulfilling His will for your life. As He restores everything you've lost and transforms your life for the better, celebrate what He's doing in your life, share it with others who don't know Him and whatever you do, no matter what you hear, know that God loves you. As long as you continue loving Him and know you're called for that purpose, forever, He'll have your back.

ROMANS 8:28: *All things to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.*

A large, flowing, handwritten signature in black ink. The text reads "Before There Ever Was" in a cursive, elegant script. The "B" in "Before" has a small flourish above it, and the "T" in "There" has a small flourish to its left.

LORD, BRING ME FREEDOM

I've fallen in love with the world only to be heartbroken,
I placed my assurance in man
and was left for dead on the streets of Israel
Come for me, Lord
I pray Your will for me, Father
Give me a vision to walk through even in peril
Protect my mind continually and guard my hope
Cover my vulnerabilities
Bind my insecurities with the strength of Your Word
Fill me with Your presence of hope
Keep me passionate as You write of my present
In remembrance of Your sacrifice
In daily devotion to Your honor

I'm here before you bent over in distress
with my mind...
my body, I'm here with my soul..
I'm here with my heart, Lord..
Cleanse me...Again, I am Yours

I SAW YOU YESTERDAY

when you cried to Me your fears
They flailed down your cheeks like soft warm rain
and I dried them with My peace
Long before your origin,
I prepared your eyes to open this day
your ears to hear, your mouth to speak
I knew your days of pain ahead and they made Me weak
Before the groundwork of this world
was ever blueprinted,
I knew your first footsteps
I felt your small toes against the soil of the ground
before you knew to move them..
You'll never understand
the enormity of My plan regarding you...
My delight, My adoration..
You'll never understand My love regarding you..
As Noah made preparations for the ark
I shielded your home from the dismal floods
Before Abraham carried away Isaac
As Joseph wept in the pit, betrayed by his kin
I safeguarded your graduation
and prepared this blueprint
As the car you were in ended nearly flew off the bridge
David had already danced in the streets with the Ark
and Nehemiah returned to rebuild Israel
In the grief of your ancestry,
the joys past and worries present
My blood poured for you down the cross long before eternity
Heaven knows no bounds to the extent of My love
So hear My cry for Your heart
Hear the plea I made in Gethsemane

As the sweat of my pores spewed blood
I knew You
Come back to where you belong..
Come back to Me
Before you knew yesterday,
Before this very moment
I am Your God
Before there ever was
always, I loved you

PSALM 139: 13-16

13. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. 15. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16. Your eyes saw substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they are all written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Always". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "A" having a long, sweeping stroke.

ALWAYS, YOU LOVED ME...

When I closed off my heart
When I failed to listen,
Always, you loved me
I walked in the dark, I frolicked in my misery
Unashamed...in bed with the enemy
Always, you loved me..

When the thrill was over
and alone I was
as the tears continued to fall
you lifted the sheets of sin engrained in my heart
and You preserved me
Concealed me,
You bathed me in Your light
and bundled me in Your Word
Always, you loved me
for Your grace is my teacher
Your heart is my temple
and Your will is my compass..
For this..
for freedom..
For peace...For joy...For life..
When I am wrong and when I'm right
I'll choose you first
I'll choose you always..

PSALM 139: 7-10

7. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8. If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. 9. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. 10. Even there Your hand shall hold me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

Where Will Go

TODAY . . I FEEL RESTLESS YET UNAWAKE

Everything seems to be unclear
I just want to be in my lonely space
A place where I won't have to answer questions

A place where I can say no
Where I don't have to fall for misfortune . . .
Where will I go?
If I die tomorrow, what would I have stood for?
When the sun isn't shining in my direction
and there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel
What's next for my story?
Do I suffer from a lack of confidence or optimism for life?
Nothing is ever as it appears . . .
I ask myself everyday
Why people leave & never come back
Why does my heart follow the wrong directions in life
Immaturity is my bible
but I tend to remain both innocent and yet ignorant
I ask you, Lord . . . Where I will go?
If it's the same tomorrow
and the same yesterday and nothing ever changes?
Dry my eyes with your Word
Fight these fears for me, Lord
Give me the strength to stand,
and when the road seems endless
and my faith is tested by temptation
help me to destroy satan's hold on my life
Your Word is my blade, Your Word is my salvation
Make my journey for you, it's Keeper
Set its path, Lord, Where will I go?

MATTHEW 7:31-33

31. "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32. For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Forget

THOSE TEARS FALLING DOWN

Without a just cause give Me reason to laugh at you, kid..
Why must you allow men to definite who you are even in Me?
The trails of the past have healed
Yet you collect the scabs
and lick them as if they still bleed
Atonement can be given for mistakes of the past
But history is unmoving
Pictures can be thrown away
Infirmities can be stored in boxes
but true history,
pure and untarnished,
will go on unchanged..
You can do much now to forbid its existence
But history is history
When they say you are
Know that I AM..
Don't relive your past...
Remember Lot's wife
Forget..

Fly

SOMETIMES, I DREAM ABOUT

What it would be like to fly
What would I do if my wings gave in?
The high ascends like a never-ending plague to my heart
Love and adoration everywhere I turn of God
What happens after you've achieved what appears to be it all?
Where does love fall into the equation?
Sometimes, even the past can stifle our present
if the tides of its winds go unmet
The possibility of what could've been, what should be,
or maybe what's not..
Even time provides no answer to life's queries
Yet He always answers,
He answers always
Fly... Fly...
just trust Him
Trust Him and just fly...



LIBERTY'S REIGN

has written my name in the book of life
Uninhabited thoughts from my heart have recommenced
and a new path for my soul to partake has emerged

I commune with you, my God

Sovereign Lord of all...

Lord of all men and living things below

I commune with you in joy...

I commune with you in longsuffering..

Your fountain of purpose that appeases my heart has been expended

So the bread of my life...

I freely raise up for your endowment,

I present to you my life...

This easel is yours to craft and appraise for your great yearnings

And Yours is mine to conceal and hide inside my heart

To live for you is to breathe..

To know you

is to know love..

So to continue to long for a place that I've been..

A place that I am...

would render me absolved of it already

Eden is never out for reach for me and those around me...

Always it presides...

In the revelation of who you are in my heart

It thrives...

On no account is Eden in a distant future...

At home, beating right in my chest

Eden is in me..

Rainfall

DO YOU EVER RECALL THE RAINFALL?

I should've listened to Auntie
when she told me not to cross the street
The truck would've never saw the back of me
had I turned and went back
But I came out ok
Just a few scars and bruises to remember on my knee caps
The gunshots at the family cookout below in the kitchen
were a blow from out of no where
but my family secured us little ones upstairs...
they prayed and sang songs of worship
and the hour passed and we made it out to live another day
No scars, no bruises, only hymns of solace,
Another moment of praise
Some dumb kids broke into the house...
put a gun up to my head
and told us they'd kill us if we didn't tell them where the drugs were...
Didn't know if it was possible at the time
But I listened when You told me to barricade the door that night
I never believed it when the moment came
but I remembered how hard I prayed and cried myself to sleep that night
A chance to lead in my workplace was my number goal at the time
and my store manager brought me into the office
and my promotion was announced before the entire store..

Management was a possibility, I never saw for myself...
The weddings, the funerals, the court trials, the breakdowns, the promotions,
the losses, survival, the gains..
Do you remember the rain?
Do you ever recall the rainfall?
Every now and then I do... and every now and then
I remember..

I REMEMBER WHEN THE BELL TOLLED IN MY LIFE

and in the lives of men and women I've loved...
Opening the full bottle of lithium that morning...
As her body ached for relief
What was left for her to do but overdose
Maybe she thought to herself, "I'll just open my mouth to fill it up
What's next for this loser?"
But then she remembered...
He placed his hands on the hot iron
as he straightened his clothes
for a depressing day of work
He thought of taking the steel
and laying it across his face to end his sorrow,
"No need to work
I don't wanna see tomorrow..."
but then he remembered...
He looked at the rounds
As his eyes went bloodshot red

There was nothing holding him back in his losses
There was no one in the room
No one to come through that door,
“Nothing can stop me from loading the gun
Nothing will stop me from pulling the trigger”
But then he remembered..
I took a clothesline from the outdoors
I scrapped it around my neck in the backyard
I was dreaming to take my breath away slowly,
“I’m all alone
What was next for me to do next but to fall and strangle myself...”
but then I remembered...
I remembered the cross...I remembered the blood
I remembered His love for me
I thought of letting the ball go,
I thought of forfeiting the game
I’ve thought of taking my life but then I remembered....
then I remember..
I can’t forget what He did for me..

JOHN 3:16-17

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes should not perish but have everlasting life. 17. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but the world through Him the world might be saved.

Fallen Eagle

MY INNOCENT WINGS SLEW FROM ME

as I fell into satan's arms
Lifeless in a world of false light,
I fell into his will of ignorance...
and though he brought to my flesh
temporal ecstasy and much pleasure
I knew I was imprisoned..
I was a prisoner to lust...
a prisoner to agony..
a prisoner in hell, hell on earth
he threw me in Alcatraz
and I couldn't escape his island
Unaware of my worship of sin,
I surrendered my body and emotions to all that was wicked...
to all that was unworthy
My morals flailed as I threw myself
away from morality and into the depths of depression
Yet hidden away,
beneath the hollow ground of my heart
Deep down inside my soul turned cold,
I knew needed a Savior...
I knew I was just a fallen eagle
Inadvisable..
with the Truth pleading with me to take heed..
I knew I was a fallen eagle
flailing abroad, flailing to stay above ground
Hopeful even with a riotous heart
unfathomably in love with unfaithfulness,
I knew I was..

Christ, forgive me..
for I was just an eagle,
just an eagle learning to fly,
I didn't know what love was...
I didn't know who I was...
but then there You were..

ROMANS 6: 20-23

20. .For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21. What fruit did you have then in things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death 22. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. B. Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "T" and "B" being particularly prominent.

BLESS THE LORD!

HALLELUJAH!

for my presence in His house was thought as so
the greatest treasure in all the earth ...
the greatest gift I could've ever given to my God
was standing afoot there in His house
yet I never believed I belonged there

It was always easier to love Jesus
Outside of the building
Outside of the drama, outside of the scandals
Outside the judgment
with my head down before God
I'd say to myself, I don't belong here
constantly before the altar voiceless... I was ashamed . . .
ashamed of my faults ..
Ashamed for not being there
I was ashamed of myself ..
Yet as time went by
and I learned to let my heart flail before Him...
I learned to focus my heart on Him alone
I set laid before Him my imperfections
and I grew out of them and into praise....
He had to do a lot of work inside of me
Work that is still not yet finished
I'm not perfect...None of us are...but today, I can say
As I worship in the house of God
Hand in hand with my brothers and sisters ..
I know in my heart that I belong...

HEBREW 10:23-25

23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25. not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

How did it get so ~~Bad~~

WHAT'S OUR ISSUE?

I'm an overcomer... I'm just like you,
How did it get so bad?
I'm a hard worker fighting to live life right,
I'm trying to make it out here
I'm fighting the good fight just like you,
I cry on the inside
I carry the burdens of the world in my heart . . .
I pray for them to be lifted, I pray for you
When I'm alone . . . when I'm with God
I release it all, I'm just like you
I'm an overcomer, I'm just like you
I've battled addictions, I've messed up bad,
but one day, I gave my heart to the Lord
and I came into the kingdom
I came into agreement with you . . .
I give you honor, I give you respect,
I give you love because you're my brother,
you're my sister and although
we don't see eye to eye all the time
I have enough God in me to love for the both of us . . .
I'm an overcomer . . . I'm just like you
How did it get so bad?
What I have I give, and what I give I don't have . . .
I don't have it all together but God is in me
He's the restorer . . . of my dreams,
He's the reviver . . . of my heart,
He's the maker . . . of my makings,
I may not yet have what you have
but I trust that He'll do it for me

because He is my Father just as He's yours
king of kings, Lord of Lords
Just as He's in you . . . He's in me?
What's our issue? I'm an overcomer . . . I'm just like you
How did it get so bad?

EPHESIANS 4:31

31. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

A large, flowing, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Gotta Be Here" in a cursive, fluid style.

EVERY DAY, A PIECE OF ME FIGHTS TO FORGET THE GRIEF

At 8:00am, I want to smash your face
with a plate of mashed potatoes
I was loyal like no one else yet still,
You beat me down worse than everyone else...
Forgive me, for being human but I gotta moralize
If my language is too deep, if my words are too bold,
I'm sorry to offend you, I must I apologize
I need Christ to intervene,
"Lord, stand up for me!"
I don't know how to pray bout it no more, this dude's trippin"
I just can't make sense bout this situation no more
When it comes to the labor pains of our bond,
I'm bruised from the beatdowns,
bleeding from the artery down up
the tip of my heart is fighting from giving you a chokehold,

“Come, Lord, help me!”
I’m clinging to hope that may never come,
and then my belly clings down
for water balloon payback,
“I finally got em, back” I’m hungry for revenge
I just want to beat you down bad like you beat me
Yet sometimes at noon when I think to myself on a pier,
At the peak of the day, all I feel is love,
When I want to let you go, I find myself staying
When you walk pass me, I throw back the knuckles,
I planned for your face
Jesus says to me, “don’t go, stay locked in”
And then the tears roll, then I remember
You looked out for me when no one was there
They forgot bout me, didn’t realize I was dying,
they ain’t think to care
No, we ain’t perfect,
Yeah, you beat me senseless
but the scars made me better,
They brought me close to Jesus, they made who I am..
I ain’t going no where
Let’s box til our arms waste away!
Let’s scream till our pride goes dry!
If we gotta fight till our anger bursts up laughs
If we gotta yell till we snot up tears
We’ve been in this too long, We’re solid, we’re sealed
My shield to yours
I gotta cling to the brotherhood
I gotta be here always..
No matter what... I’ll need you
No matter what...I gotta be here

Stand

I STAND BEFORE YOU, LORD,

a servant with the burdens of Your heart
I'm not the strongest, I'm not the smartest but I give you my life
I give you my voice,
I stand in the rain, shackles on my ankles
Cuffs on my wrists bearing a soul of love overflowing
I need a new name, Lord
for people to call me . . . They don't know me anymore
I need a new face for people to see me in . . .
they've not seen me
I need a new voice for people to hear . . .
they've not heard me
They tell me smile in my face and slander me the next moment . . .
They say "I'm a fool to love You for I've never seen you"
Who is any man to judge me but You?
Unaware that I stand before them in a body that is no longer mine
They say that not anyone like me could ever be saved . . .
I'll never know your holy name
But do they know yours?
All those who believe shall be free from their distresses..'
Your very words unfounded by the fruit of their deceitful lips
Unscathed, I journey to know Your name,
I fight to enter Your presence . .
I long for fellowship with You....I long to go home . .
So I ask you, Lord, show them who I am,
I stand...before you a servant
I stand...with the burdens of my heart
I'm not the strongest, Lord...
I'm not the smartest, but I give you my love,

I give you my life
I stand as a believer . . .

MATTHEW 5:11

11. Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

Not so Perfect

1st John 3:10 -11, 16-17, 23, NKJV

LOCK IN AND HOLD ON

Many would argue with me, while some would agree but I truly believe if the church has a place in every believer's life. I also believe that if you've committed yourself to a church that you believe in your heart God wants you to be, I believe you should remain there until the Lord releases you. No matter what lock in and hold on. No matter how hard things get, lock in and hold on. Now don't get me wrong if where you are is killing you more than its helping you, you should leave but if there is growth for you there in every situation good and bad, stay. Stay with your brothers and sisters no matter where you are. Remember just because the church isn't perfect doesn't mean you are.

How can I say something so crazy right? Well.. This is for the hardcore faithful believers that believe in the power of binding relationships because even though, I've been looking for another church home...

I BELIEVE THAT JUST AS A MAN OR WOMAN TAKES A WIFE OR A HUSBAND SO WILL THEY TAKE A CHURCH ALSO.

As a member of a church I loved heavily for five years, I discovered the possibility of this truth. Those five years, were in no shape or form perfect, but they were everything. I had run-ins and many tumultuous fights with my brothers and my sisters but at the end of the day, somehow we ended up still loving each other. Things just got hard and small issues would go unaddressed and they got bigger and bigger until I had to take a step back. The more I tried to fix things they got worse, I felt like

God was telling me to leave and to this day, I really believe that. It was becoming unhealthy for my relationship with Him to be unhappy there. I didn't argue with God about it. I did everything I could and I left. It was a tough decision but it was the best decision at the time, I knew I had to make. It hurt like hell but it had to be made. Today, in spite of the fact that is my truth right now...

I'm telling you if God opens the window and is telling you to stay, if you've had unresolved issues with your church that have gone unaddressed... I'm telling you, right now, get it right! Whether you stay or go, come to a resolution. Trust me knowing that you did all you could whether it works or not, will be enough even if things don't work out as you planned.

AN UNBREAKABLE COVENANT

Committing to anything long term is no smooth drive down the road. There are bumps and struggles, both big and small. I never thought in a million years, I would commit myself to a church. I fought for over a year with God after receiving Him to even step foot in one but when you're truly born again and have survived a huge ordeal, you realize God knows what best for you.

I remember my first day waking up in my hospital bed. It was 2008 and the beginning of August and I felt like crap. I had just survived a month's worth of hospital run ins and was finally on the road to recovery. I could barely walk or stand for long periods of time, everything tasted bad and nothing seemed good. The nurses were easy on the eyes but I was ready get out of there as soon as I could. TV was pretty cool that morning though, this short dude was preaching like D'Wade on a lay-up rampage. He was hilarious and watching him was fun but I could never join his church. I didn't know it then when I woke up that morning but God had already chosen him be my pastor at the time. Whether I liked it or not, I was stuck with him. Next to my bed had been a nice bouquet for me to get well with he and my co-pastor's name on it and from one day to the next someone from our church would come to my room and pray for me. God chooses the place, we call our church home and at that time, mine was chosen specifically for me.

Stepping in the building, I wasn't accustomed to how big it was but it was something about the atmosphere that drew me in. I knew God was there and every day, I went, I became more aware of Christ in my life. Every time, I walked into a class

or service, I grew four inches taller spiritually or so I believed. It encouraged me to dream again.

It led me to write this book. I've found some of my best friends there. It's impossible for me to believe lifelong church commitment isn't possible. I have to believe I'll find it again.

WALK IN LOVE WITH YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

If we don't love each other, how can God live in us?

v. 10. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

We are all unique but dealing with that sometimes is difficult. He made us all different and none of us are the same. We all come from different backgrounds., different childhoods, and different places. Galatians 5:26 says, 'Each of us is original.' We have all wronged and been wrong, we all fall short, but we all born of God.

v. 11. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

LOVING ONE ANOTHER IS A FAMILY VALUE.

We should be able to love one another simply because we are God's children. We should be able to love each other because our love for Him. God gave His only son Jesus Christ for us so that we can have eternal life and a relationship with Him and because we know this, we should be able to love one another just as Christ laid down His own life for us. How can I love God if I can't love my brother or sister?

v. 16. By this we know love, because He (Jesus) laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

GIVE IN LOVE.

Because Jesus was able to lay down His own life for us, we ought to be able to do the same. God healed the sick, preached to the lost, and has fed and clothed us all, righteous or not. He never made past judgments on people and looked at who they really were on the inside, good people caught up in mess. We need to be like God. He never shut people out, He always let them in. Even knowing, the betrayal taken against Him, He managed to still love us. He never shut away his heart from anyone.

v. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and see his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Goods necessarily don't have to mean money, it can also mean encouragement and support. We can confide in one another, give a good Word to one another after a rough day. We can be there for each other as brothers and sisters. Money isn't everything but what we can do, we should do it.

LASTLY, REMEMBER, THE MOST LIFE CHANGING
RELATIONSHIPS OF OUR LIVES ARE NOT SO
PERFECT.

Before Hello

PENNED UP EMOTIONS CLOUD MY HEART TO THE CORE

My exterior radiates joy

Yore...are the scabs of my healings

Yore...are the screams of my sorrow for inner freedom

Pull the chains from heart bearing me down..

These bruises are still wounds

And the tears don't muster my anguish like they used to..

Knowing you're still a possibility marinades my senses with hope

Yet our clashing of woes heighten the storm's collision

All I want is to be there...

In the security of what I had with you..

Yet reality pulls me far apart from what my heart clings to hold

Your essential to the man that I am

Yet detrimental...

detrimental but iron to the steel of my being

Could I have been wrong

To think of misconceiving our problems

Turning them under the rug..

Bridling my fears

Fears of waking and not from the aches and cold sweats

Dreaming of happier days

here in the joy and presence of the Lord

I just want to feel the peace again

The warmth in my heart that told the world

You were my church home

Before I ever knew you...

Before hello..

How do I go Back

Some days, I don't know if I'll get up to for work.. They're in my mind.. in the heart of the thoughts...I wish I didn't feel so weak to going back to this situation. History tells me there's no love waiting for me there.

YET THE LOVE STILL BURNING ON THE
INSIDE OF ME IS SET ABLAZE LIKE THE SWORD
OF EDEN...LIT ABLAZE STRONGER THAN IT EVER
WAS.

They hurt me so bad but all I want do is forgive and move past it. I want to go back but how? I know I made mistakes too but what do I say? How do I say it? All I feel is the war of love and hurt brewing in my heart pulling away at my sanity...tugging away at the memories I had laughing and being happier than I ever was. Nearly a year we've been separated...and still I feel the same... Would they even see me? Fix this. I've done all I could to no avail. Only you can resurrect the dead as their remains wither away. Help me, Lord!

HOW DO I GO BACK?

A large, flowing, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Home".

IMAGINING A FUTURE OF JOYOUS EYES

Tears filled the swelling of my wounds with healing

I didn't know myself before I stepped foot here..

You were my first love..

Inseparable was an un-forsaken tale I constantly told my heart to hold forward

No place could ever be more perfect

and you were mine...

Beloved to me like a candle to the light of the Lord

Beaming in my heart were the promises I believed from my Savior

Yet then my heart broke...and I fell

I fell so hard the life in me felt as if it slipped away

Never had I loved a place this hard..

Maybe someday, I'll go back

Maybe today, tomorrow I'll run back

& my throw my arms around the altar

The altar where I first found me...

If this great love never dies...

Someday soon..

I'll come back home

Brother

SEPARATE BUT SAME

One by two
He's equal to my one
He's one to my none
So who would've thought I had a brother
Who reflects my light
We're one, but unalike
two pairs in one stone
Set by God, separate in personality
If he borrows my shoes, I'd bleach his Timbs
If he wore my pants, I'd curse his name
Brother, forgive me
I thought of myself, as only one child
Only one stone, Only one hope
Only one dream, Only . . . one me
You needed my protection
I shunned you from the world,
You needed my acceptance
I shunned you from my love
Brother, forgive me
I'm here now
I'm ready to step up
If you still need me
Wear my shoes, Borrow my pants
Let me shelter you
Make me laugh again, drive me crazy

So we can fight
Forgive me, brother
We're separate but same
One in two, Equal as one
One in the same
Two pairs in one stone
Set by God, dual in dreams
Shining in hope
Brother, forgive me
I forfeited my title
For younger, I was....I was young in my hope
Young in my dreams...Young in our stone
Brother, Forgive me

1 JOHN 3:10-11

10. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 11. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

A large, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "One". The "O" is a simple circle, and the "ne" is written in a cursive script to its right.

NO LONGER WILL I SEARCH THE SKY FOR ANSWERS...

For they are there
concealed in my heart
the rough spots have softened
and my life begins anew

“Love’ Himself welcomed me in
though I never searched for Him, Love invited me in
Thank you, Lord!
You made me a home in Your heart and I’m so full
I’m so full of life.. so full of You
I never thought I’d be here
I close my eyes and I’m soaring like an eagle
I can feel the clouds powder my cheeks
The breeze of Your horizon
surrounds my world with hilarity
Continually you bless me in Your waves of grace
I am whole in Your kingdom
faultless through Your blood..
No longer bound by the tears of this world
Today because of you I smile
Today because of you I live..
Forever...may I maintain Your unspeakable joy
Forever...may I uphold Your eternal love
Finally, I am free
In Your fullness, I can finally say I am free
Great in one lifetime
Mighty with one soul..
Loving with one heart
Incredible with one mind
Kingdom-driven in one body...
You and I, Lord
One

ROMANS 8:37-39

37. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, 39. nor height or depth, nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A large, handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. D. Minion". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "D" at the beginning.

I ONCE CRIED RIVERS

longing for a dream. .
I made my petition to the Lord
and He answered my request
I reached my destination..
but my dream was unattainable..
I had nowhere to go....
Home seemed like a lifetime ago..
But then as I cried in my hotel room, alone
no money, no friends or family
I cried out to God in tears with song
Then I heard a voice inside my heart
And He said, "just let it go, I will be all that you need
I will shun your failures with blessings.
I will comfort you through your pain...
I will take the losses you were
and make you brand new again..
As long as you love yourself enough to receive me...
just let it all go, give me your life"
I heard this saying a million times but somehow
hundreds of miles away from home...
as I laid my head on my pillow,
I could finally feel the strength of His power
I could feel His divine power flow through my veins...
I could feel the power of His love...
And as I stood up after rinsing the tears from my face .
I stared at the morning sun rising in the sky
and I believed..
I believed that He died to save me..

He died to save me.. I believed...
And for once I felt, I could do anything...
For if I loved myself enough to believe in my dreams...
If I walked away from all that has hurt me and held me back, I would be free... If I put
God first,
If I would just let go..
The beat of my heart would steady
The armor shielding my eyes would pierce
And the fool that lied beneath my soul would vanish ..
And as I gave myself to the Lord in a song of Worship
He opened the door for me to walk through
And I declared Him my Lord and Savior.
Some call it growing up, some call it salvation
but I call it dominion ..

A large, expressive, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Awake". The signature is fluid and dynamic, with the "A" and "W" being particularly prominent and sweeping.

I WALK INTO THE VAPOR OF DAYBREAK

And all I can do is
gaze out into the distance
All I can do is gaze at the sky of my Father
Nothing is more precious than the gift of life
Yet knowing that I live in this world
Makes me long to see Him, I long to meet my Father
I long to go home

As I see the clouds flailing over the sun,
I ask myself, 'what trouble awaits me today . .

For the day that awaits me..
gives me nothing but trouble

But then He played His song into my heart
And I begin to tell myself . .

I won't walk in sadness
For the Lord gives me joy
I won't walk in fear

For the Lord gives me strength
I won't be unclear of my purpose
For the Lord directs my steps
He will hide me in His love...

Protect me from hostility
He will teach me His ways
and guide me into His promises
Grateful will I not be

Grateful am I to the Lord for this day of my awakening
For this day He spoke into existence
This day He wonderfully made
This day He made just for me...
This day, I will be glad . .

No longer will my joy remain asleep
Today, I smile
Today I'm wide awake . .

LUKE 6:23

23. Rejoice in the day and leap for joy!
For indeed your reward is great in heaven.

I thought Once

You Loved Me

I USED TO BELIEVE, I USED TO ONCE KNOW

You'd carry me in my disappointments...Love me in my failures
I still believed one day...you'd return when I saw no answers
As to why you were gone, I still don't understand
Maybe you decided you'd trust life
with the grasp of my heart when you wrote me the first time,
I thought once you loved me
You'd void my life of the grief in your absence
The cold sleepless nights would break away
like a burnt letter's ashes...I used to believe
That with your encouragement
I'd be a man able to stand always
In my times of trouble,
I could defeat my greatest enemy if you'd just love me
If you thought to care...If you thought to give a damn

I thought once you love me.. I'd be free to trust again,
I could depend on you and you on me
You'd pray for me and I'd pray for you...I had too much faith..
Maybe I was a fool
I tried to reach out and it only brought me grief
God showed me who you were
But the denial wouldn't leave me
I wanted to believe...I wanted to know
You'd bare arms for me as I would you
I wanted you to care, I wanted you to give a damn
But then I came to the revelation
that your heart needed more of the true love of God
You really hurt me bad..
You nearly stabbed me to pieces
But there He was...There was Jesus...

PSALM 118:14

14. The LORD is my strength and song.
And He has become my salvation.

A large, handwritten cursive word "Forgive..." is written in black ink. The letters are fluid and expressive, with a long, sweeping "F" on the left and "give" following it. The "g" has a small loop, and the "e" has a long tail extending to the right.

Forgiveness is a fundamental necessity for humanity. Often we convince ourselves us that holding back is the only way to survive the pain but truly it's the only way to survive. Even being as young as I am now, I realize the importance of forgiveness. It's not primarily for the other person who hurt me but it's primarily for me and my relationship with God.

EPHESIANS 3:31-32: *31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: 32. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as even God in Christ forgave you.*

No matter the hurt, how big or how small, holding back forgiveness will hurt you more than it hurts anyone else. Holding on will just make the pain worse. As you learn to forgive, you'll experience not only healing but you'll begin to have a greater understanding of God's love. You understand the depth of what Christ did for you when He gave His life for you. In your process, here is what I suggest you do.

Cry out and release your pain to God. Don't allow the bitterness to take away your joy in God. Find joy again in God. The joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

CRY IF YOU NEED TO.

Close the door in your room and turn off the lights and worship God. As you worship you'll begin to feel His spirit comfort you and the pain will lessen. God

knows you and you know yourself. If you let Him know what you're feeling, He will be right there when you worship Him.

FIND COMFORT IN GOD'S WORD.

You can find solace and peace in the Bible. Let His soft words heal your broken heart. Recommendation: **The book of Psalms.**

GET GOOD ADVICE.

If you reach a breaking point, talk to other believers or family members who share your experience and will give you best advice (**Proverbs 20:18**).

PRAY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL & YOURSELF INVOLVED.

Pray for the person who hurt you and ask God to give you a heart for understanding why they did what they did. Pray for their wellbeing and change as well as yours. If you have having difficulty forgiving yourself, make atonement if you can but if you can't, choose not to walk in condemnation (**Romans 8:1**).

RECONCILE. Be reconciled to that person if God is telling you the relationship is important enough to save but if not release that person in peace (**Matthew 18:20-25**).

REACH OUT. Reach out others who are hurting. Reaching out, you'll find hope for the future. God will speak through everyone you come in contact with. You'll minister to them and they'll minister to you about your situation (**Isaiah 58:10-12**).

Forgive

FATHERS, LOVE YOUR SONS...

they need you more than you know
I used to walk the side path of life
without the other half of me..
It all started the day of my birth
I believed myself a blunder to him
and there was no way I would be accepted
I never really knew of his face as I looked in the mirror
I thought to myself,
who is the man my mother once loved?
Who is this man who let her to raise me alone?
Where do I come from?
Then I discovered I was born in God's will
I was born for the purpose of Christ
Although, encouraged by the enemy, my heart was burdened at times in resentment
of my father's absence
I overcame the weights on my heart
with the path of life flowing in Christ who lives in me
He purified the dark hole of my soul
and poured into it contentment
He filled my broken heart with His words of comfort
and I finally came to know Him
I didn't have to go searching for my Father
He came searching for me...and the man who never raised me
has turned out to be
one of the greatest blessings to me never given
forgive today..free yourself..forgive..

Worship

EVEN WHEN THERE'S NOT ALWAYS SUNLIGHT

as I endure my tests...I worship

When the sun won't reveal itself...

and there's no light at the end of the hurricane...I worship

When my heart doesn't mend

when my troubles never fade...I worship

When war seems to never ends,

As life never sees change,

As I lose all that I have...I worship

There's no option, there's no choice,

there's no two-way street to the heart of the Lord...I worship . . .

He is God, my Lord, my Savior

In spite of my circumstances, in spite of my past,

in spite of my future

In spite of me

I worship . . .

We all cry . . .

We all feel pain

But remember . . . there's not much promise . . .

without much rain

And so I worship

I bless the Lord as my heart fills up with heartache...I worship . . .

When dreams never pass...I worship . . .

When the famine seems to last . . .

I worship for He is God,

my Lord, my Savior , my all,

I shall not be forsaken...

for eternity.. I worship...

PSALM 18:1-3: 1. *I will love You, O LORD, my strength.* 2.

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So I shall be saved from my enemies.

Whenever I think of worship, I remember critical moments in my life when I felt all hope was lost. Nothing in my life seemed to be going right but when I began to lift my hands and surrender the anxiety that filled my heart to God, seconds later, the anxiety would begin to escape me. I remember moments when I was sick and I would prostrate myself before the Lord and suddenly, be healed. Worship seemed to be the only thing that made sense in my life when nothing else did.

CHRIST WAS ALL THAT MATTERED.

I could separate myself from the world and hide in His presence. It wasn't much so the act of lifting my hands but more of the surrendering of my burdens to God. "Lord, I don't why this is happening but You are worthy. Things don't look good

right now but You are amazing. I'm letting this go and I'm putting it all in Your hands so I chill with You, Dad."

People change, they don't always love you as they should, even those who you depend on will hurt you in some way but God won't. Our lives are filled with so many expectations but His presence is always the same. He is peace, joy, comfort...He is everything we need and more. People want you to be what they feel you should. They will try to tell you who are but when you worship Christ, the peace of His voice gives you the assurance of knowing who you are in Him. I'm not talking about angels, visions or anything prophetic. I'm simply giving you the truth. When you worship God, He will make Himself known to you.

YOU CAN'T SEE HIM BUT HIS PRESENCE WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO YOU WHEN YOU SEEK HIM.

Frequently, I find myself going to a pier to be alone with God. In my most dire moments, I've cried there against a pole asking Him for direction. There was so much going on in my life, family issues, school, work, sometimes, life just seemed to swallow me but whenever I went to that pier, I always left with the assurance that things would be ok and they were. I never wanted to leave, I felt like a kid out there with my dad. I could go out on that pier and just sit and talk with Dad my whole life and live in solitude. I knew I was created to worship Him.

As a kid, I was the backlasher taunting the worshippers in the church. It all seemed like actors putting on a show. I never realized why they danced as mightily as they did but I do now. Worship was all that made sense when nothing else did for some of them, worship was all that could fill them. Who was I to judge them especially since now I feel the same way. Even being as young as I am now, I've had everything, money, clothing, authority, self-gratification, I've gotten a chance to experience many things many would kill for but He was the only one that could fill the gap in my heart. I ended up becoming just like those men and women I'd see dancing exuberantly up and down the aisles for Christ and the subject of much gossip. I will not mention the rift between David and Michal but you get my drift. I don't care what people think, I love the Lord. Nothing will shut me up and don't let it shut you up either, we were created to worship Him and He is worthy of it all!

IT'S PATHETIC AND BENEATH WHO WE ARE TO
BE CRITICAL OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF
ANYONE'S WORSHIP.

We all have a different relationship with God and our personal worship during a service is a reflection of that relationship. Some of us jump sky high, others of us run and dance, but as long as we are respectful of one another and organized, it should be respected. No matter what He is Worthy! When you worship Him, you open the gap for Him to fill. His presence brings you the fulfillment you long for. Do what you were created to do.

Adam at Home

SOMETIMES, I WONDER

if dreams come to pass

but when I rest in God,

I believe in the impossible . . .

Lord, resting in You is the only place I desire to be in life.

Your light is sweeter than the shower of eternity

when I'm with you my heart is full of peace

Every moment, we share helps me

to accept what the day may bring...

Your love covers all endless wounds of man bruised by time

Because of You,

I realize that even the small multitude of dreams can come true . . .

I can travel the globe from America to Japan . . .

I can go wherever Your love will take me

The faith is inside me,

I know that I can . . .

This time things will be different . . .

The lone soul that once lived inside me
has a foundation.. a foundation built on You,

Now, I too, can finally say I have a place
a place that I can call home . . .

And that Home is with You, Lord forever . . .

1 JOHN 5: 1-4

1. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments . And His commandments are not burdensome. 4. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -our faith.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

PSALMS 23

A PSALM OF DAVID

1. The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside the still waters.
3. He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
4. Yea, 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.
5. You prepare a table before me in the
Presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Realizing Christ Loves Me

I look at the world today and so many of us don't have our own personal beliefs and most of them were chosen for us. I was that kid too but there comes a point in your life when you have to choose for yourself what you believe in. Religion chosen for you has to die and faith by choice has to arise. Religion was never truly a major necessity for me. I often thought of it as an over-ceremonial and self-indulgent society created to control a large group of individuals.

I WANTED A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAT WAS INTIMATE, FULFILLING, REAL, AND ALIVE. I DIDN'T WANT A CO-SIGNER.

I believed belief as a fad would bring no lasting change to my life. I wanted something deeper. My family and I would often go to church but life outside the four walls seemed incoherent and inconsistent. Eventually, our family broke down in shambles leaving me to discover life all on my own.

ALL MY LIFE, RELIGION HAS DRENCHED MY WORLD.

Before my conception, my mother was involved with a man who was a devout Jehovah's witness. They were young and in love yet they both lived in two different worlds. His parents were prominent figures in the Kingdom Hall and their family had to be a complete vision of what family should be. (Not to offend my friends who are Jehovah's Witnesses) My mother was Christian and the very sight of their involvement was inappropriate to both sides of their families. Sadly, their relationship wasn't strong enough to survive the tests placed in front of them. Eventually, they split and my mother discovered she was pregnant. Once she told my father, they reconciled once again yet as time grew along, things grew more complicated between them. My

father felt he had nothing to give me and left my mother to solely raise me.

I WAS BORN CHRISTMAS MORNING IN 1987 AT DEPAUL HOSPITAL.

It was not exactly the immaculate conception but during pregnancy to the very moment of my birth, my mother had no regrets. To her, my very existence seemed to be very evident that God definitely existed. She believed she made the right decision regarding her and my father and thought it was best for him to not be present in my life. She married a year later and a few years after, my brother was born. She knew giving birth to us would bring strain to her mental health yet still she chose to have us. I had a great childhood filled with loving family members and friendships and my Christmas birthday actually made me feel special. It felt great sharing a birthday with Jesus. I remember defending Jesus often as a child and having dreams about Halloween being evil. Christ meant a lot to me back then, I just never developed a personal relationship with Him.

I ALWAYS LOVED TO HEAR ABOUT HOW CHRIST DIED FOR MY SINS BUT HADN'T CAUGHT THE REVELATION OF WHO HE WAS TO ME YET.

Like many others I was baptized at a young age and even went to the altar but church seemed boring to me. I loved my pastors but the services were longwinded and I wasn't really friends with anyone there. My brother, cousins, and I would rather have been at home playing Super Mario all weekend and listening to music. Today, I look at churches and some of are either stuck in the 60's and are too far in today's ungodly culture. It's a new millennium, it's a new day. We don't have to copy or not change to be innovative to draw people in.

As I got older, I began to discover my parents weren't as perfect and committed to the church as I thought they were. They would argue for hours and it seemed as if my dad didn't have a strong will for leading our family. Now being older I realized him, growing up from a childhood much worse than my mom's. He had a lot of strikes against him but when it came to staying employed, he never stayed faithful for the long term. My mother for a long time was the primary financial provider of our household and as she got older, it began to take a toll on her mental stability and their

relationship. My brother and I would spend days breaking up their arguments and fights.

GOD BEGAN TO SEEM A LIFETIME AWAY.

When I was nine or at least ten years old, I came across a baby book. The book was placed together when I was born and I discovered a family tree with names which seemed quite unfamiliar to me. The father category even seemed to throw me off guard. The line I knew my dad's name would be was present with another. At first, I didn't know what to make of it and didn't understand but my parents confirmed the truth. Being a kid, I didn't really understand what it meant because sadly, many of my friends' families were similar to mine and I didn't feel abandoned. Me and my dad never had the perfect relationship and often fought but I knew he loved me and I loved him. Somehow, whenever I looked at he and my mom's relationship, it never seemed to be enough.

I never felt fathers were as important as mothers because they just never seemed to stay around and my dad and I never seemed to get along most of the time and we were abusive to one another. Culture depicted black men as dogs on TV and horrible fathers and my dad seemed to have attributed to that. Women were more empowering in my eyes from that day forward. He was supposed be a model for me and I lost respect for him. I felt like my mother shouldn't have helmed the household as long as she was and he would begin to lie to all of us habitually and once the extramarital affairs began, my mother crashed and we began moving in with one family member to the next.

ALL MY YEARS GROWING UP AS A TEENAGER, CHURCH WAS A DISTANT MEMORY.

My mother, brother and I had moved in with my grandmother and she was there whenever I needed her but even then I couldn't bring myself to open up. I didn't want to overburden her with all my problems considering she was already raising along with us my other three older cousins who lost their mom at a young age.

I then, started hanging around the wrong crowds dealing with the grief in unstable ways. Family members were open for me if I needed them but I was so consumed with my issues, I didn't trust anyone. My mother's illness grew worse and

my grandmother's home seemed more dysfunctional than where I'd left. A police officer seemed to be at the house nearly every weekend due to all our own attempts to cope with life. All of us were lost from my oldest cousin to my younger brother.

WE WERE ALL YOUNG MEN WITH NO
MALE AUTHORITY OVER US AND THERE WERE
NO MEN IN OUR LIVES TO LOOK AFTER US TO
SHOW US HOW TO BE MEN BUT IN OUR
DYSFUNCTION, WE ALWAYS HAD EACH OTHER.

Our uncles and grandfather were there whenever we needed them but they'd never fill the void left by our losses. My dad was a call away but it was rare for him to be around and he wasn't for a long time. School happened to be a brief break away during the day that did wonders for me.

WRITING WAS LIBERATION FOR ME DURING ALL
MY ROUGH MOMENTS.

I would become more involved in after school projects and ultimately, I became editor-in-chief of my high school's magazine. Outside, everything looked good but my life seemed to be falling apart everywhere else and eventually, it affected everything I did. I was hung-over in depression losing myself in the internet and music to numb the pain. Eventually. I even developed an addiction to pornography. I always seemed to be depressed from one day at home to another so the addiction numbed the pain. My grades tremendously suffered as a result and I ended up graduating with a 1.9. I just didn't know what to do anymore. I tried everything but nothing worked.

FINALLY, I FOUND MYSELF WRITING LETTERS TO
GOD.

I would write so many inappropriate things but when I look back at it all I realized it was all He wanted to hear. Then I began pulling inspiration from various men and women in my life who were there for me. My aunts and uncles gave me hard

knock truths and my 10-12th grade teachers got me into physical and mental shape. All my years in high school these men and women were huge inspirations to me who gave me wisdom whenever I needed it. They pushed me to never accept a second rate life.

THE YEAR AFTER I GRADUATED, I FELT A STRONG SENSE OF HOPE IN MY HEART AND ONCE I WAS ACCEPTED INTO A PROMINENT ART SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA.

Things seemed to be looking up for me but unfortunately, I couldn't go because there was no way for me to afford the cost of living there. By then, my brother was incarcerated, my cousin had passed and once again, my mother and I were forced to leave home. The rising conflicts between us all in house got too overwhelming and we ended up moving in with one of my aunts. It seemed as if the railroad of life continued to rail me into each corner of Virginia but from time to time, I would keep writing my sorrows away.

I still remember the morning I woke up as I spoke with the CEO of the school, she was vastly interested in taking me in for she believed I had much potential. My aunt, uncle and everyone in the house were gone. I was alone and for the first time in years, I began to talk to Jesus. I just asked Him to get me there. Even if it wasn't where I was supposed to be, I asked Him to somehow get me there. Suddenly, my grandmother found me a \$200 flight.

AT THE TIME, I HAD LIED TO EVERYONE BY THEN, I KNEW I COULDN'T AFFORD IT.

Everything was covered but I would have no place to stay once I got there. I just wanted to leave and never come back. My life in Virginia seemed to be over and I wanted it to be. I was tired of the family issues and all the unreliable men coming in and out of my life. I didn't even care what would happen once I got there, I just wanted to get there and see my dream in front of me even if I couldn't live it. I just wanted to find some hope no matter where I would find it.

While on the plane, it began to sink into my heart and as I looked down at city, I began to realize how much my family really meant to me and once I got off the airport, I grew afraid.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I ACTUALLY WANTED TO GO HOME.

It was early in the morning around 5:00 or 6:00am. I was 19 with a large black American tourist and I had no idea what I would do next but once I got to the hotel room suddenly, I felt so much grief I began to cry out and sing to God. Eventually, my aunt took wind of what was really going on and suddenly, COO of the school came to pick me up to see if we could come up with a solution.

When he came to pick me up, he noticed how young I was and immediately took liking of me. He was extremely motivated with how determined I was and offered to mentor me. He began to talk to me about God and that it was the will of God that I was there and that God loved me. It was a divine intervention, I never saw coming.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I HAD SOMETHING AND IT WASN'T RELIGION.

I was beginning to discover faith and ultimately, I realized that I was only running from my problems and not facing them so I returned home. When I look back now, I realize anything could've happened to me but somehow, I knew the Lord was protecting me and I was safe.

Once I returned home, another family member had passed but this time, it was different. Her death meant my life. I remember when the end of the funeral began and the preacher began to call men and women to the altar. There was rarely anyone going down but I felt my heart jump out in two places and began to stand. I remember the nerves all over me as I began to walk down the altar while my family watched but as I began to get closer, the nerves in my heart suddenly began to breakout in intense

tears of joy. That very moment I hadn't said all the words but my heart had officially declared Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Submission on my part was another story. When I returned home, I wasn't ready to return to the church.

I JUST FELT THE PEOPLE WOULD CONDEMN ME AND I DIDN'T WANT TO DEAL WITH THE DRAMA.

Fortunately, I was blessed enough to have gotten a job at Walmart and I started to watch church television on Sundays. As I began to watch, I began to apply the word of God to my life. I would listen to the sermons and immediately take heed to them and become successful in my job. The preacher didn't seem like a man who was just talking anymore but it was a man who was speaking truth. It was truth that I could understand and it actually helped me.

I GOT A PROMOTION.

I can still feel the tears flowing down my face as I cried out to God about the position that seemed to mean everything to me but once I got it, I realized it wasn't worth all it was cracked up to be. I did, however, learnt a lot about running a business and it paved the way for a promising retail career I have thrived in for years. Other things just seemed to matter to me more and I began to feel my life slipping away from me. I would work seemingly endless hours without much sleep and after a while, I had forgot about God altogether.

Late July of 08, I'd reached a breaking point of overwhelm grief along with an allergic reaction to the burning air of the Dismal Swamp. Emotionally, I was lost and was completely disoriented mentally. My mind seemed to be clogged up with bottled up grief and I would furiously release it from time to time. My family just didn't know what to do anymore but pray. There were days where I would forget my name or pretty much where I came from. My body would continually swell until the weekly visits to the clinic became daily visits to the emergency room. The only thing that came to mind and gave me peace was God. My airways would fill up with so much

swelling no doctor on earth could make a difference. I just didn't know what to do but sit there. I was so tired. My body was worn to pieces and I could barely breathe. All I could do was wait to die. I finally reached a breaking point and one night I exploded.

THE LORD BROUGHT ME THROUGH.

When I got home immediately, I was still weak from everything that happened. I was worried about my job that I loved so much and the people around me but I was grateful I survived. My mother took care of me the entire day and after I woke from a nap. I suddenly began to talk to her about God and as the joy I felt flooded my heart, a pleasant presence flooded my face but this time it was different this time, the presence brought relief to my body and I felt healing, beginning to spread throughout my body. My mother was terrified but I told her that I felt great. I didn't realize what had happened at the time but I knew the Holy Spirit had come. I had asked somehow and He arrived out of nowhere and began to heal me. My mother told me to go to sleep immediately, because she was scared out of her mind at what she'd seen.

THE DAY AFTER, I KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

Everything seemed to be alright and I felt as if I was on the road to recovery and ready to head back to work but the sickness came ten times as worse as it was before and I was again rushed to the hospital.

In the midst of my final hospital stay, the doctors tried to give me every antibiotic but the swelling wouldn't go down. They'd never seen what had happen to me before and my recovery seemed impossible

Eventually with nowhere else to turn, my family went to a full congregation of 4,000 people and they prayed that I might be healed. Somewhere down the line in the midst of my unconsciousness, the last name that came to my mind was *Jesus is God* and I woke up. Once I woke up, my room was surrounded with over six to seven interns. They wanted to study my recovery because they couldn't believe the swelling was vanishing. They ran many tests but all of them came back negative and I was in full recovery.

EARLY AUGUST MORNING OF 2008,
SEEMED LIKE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE
FOR ME.

I couldn't believe I survived. I'd returned to the land of the living. I could feel my body's exhaustion from all the fighting everyone had done to keep my body stable. Sure, I hated that I'd allowed myself to become so sick but I was happy to take another breath.

AS I BEGAN TO GO TO CHURCH, THIS
TIME RATHER THAN BE MINISTERED TO I
DECIDED THAT I WANTED KNOW GOD FOR
MYSELF.

I start attending church regularly and study the Bible intensely. I asked Him to reveal Himself in my life. It didn't matter to me what I got out of it or what situation took place, I just wanted to know God and He unveiled himself to me. As I began to retrace steps in my life, the Bible wasn't a book any longer but it was God's voice showing me His pursuit of me from the time of my birth. I began to see Jesus everywhere I went. I saw Him in the lives of people who I'd often come in contact with, everywhere I went Christ was all around me, I saw the message of the gospel in books I would read as a child, video games, signs, posters, Christ was there the entire time. Finally, I began to see Him and everything that was a blur started to make sense.

I SOUGHT THE LORD OUT AND DISCOVERED HE
PURSUED ME MY ENTIRE LIFE.

I must even admit the process I underwent in returning to the church wasn't easy but I had a good stable job, a place to live, and enormous hopes to create

open as many doors for people as God will allow. I live to reveal Christ. I pray that soon I'll be able to create great opportunities for many men and women and reveal the love and sovereignty of Jesus Christ to everyone I can reach. That is my life mission.

My goal is to continue to love and appreciate the family that God has already given me. Not only do I have them but most importantly, I have Him. I wake up every day and know I'm blessed.

I have a future now that I never thought was accessible. The Lord enabled me, Himself, to see life the way He sees it and things have changed for the better.

I STOPPED BEING THE VICTIM AND LEARNED TO BE THE VICTOR.

I've fought many wars but my faith and love for Jesus Christ has brought me out of them all. In Him, I found all my mistakes and misfortunes to work together solely for my good. Everything that I had been through was only a tool, God used to shape me and enable me to help others. When I wake up, every day, I know that I am loved. I know for myself He took everything up there with Him when He bled and died on the cross for me. He took my grief, my pain, my addictions, and became the Father I never had.

I am still a work in progress, God's still healing me, and even today, I still have struggles like everyone else but my relationship with God has enabled me to overcome whatever may come my way. It strengthens me in all my rough times not to give up. When you have a relationship with someone so personal and authentic, it can't be taken away from you no matter who tries to break it, even you.

THE GREATEST REVELATION I EVER CAUGHT IN MY LIFE WAS REALIZING CHRIST LOVES ME.