

The Unfinished Man

Transforming the Hypocrite Within

Antrim A. Gates

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FOREWORD

BY RICH CHRISTIANO

I have known my friend Antrim Gates for over thirty-five years. We first met when he was a student at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Antrim had a small speaking role in the first two Christian films I produced—The Appointment (1990) and Second Glance (1992). During that same season, a group of us would head out on weekends to share Christ with young people hanging out on the streets. We called ourselves the Gates Patrol, because Antrim was always the boldest among us—the one most willing to start the conversation. Those were special times in our Christian walk with the Lord.

The Christian life is not easy. We all battle the flesh and the world every day. Yet many churches present a false view of what true Christianity looks like. They suggest that once you follow Christ, life will smooth out, problems will fade, and prosperity will follow. Scripture does not support that idea—and if we are honest, neither does experience.

The book you are about to read is not a success story. It is a testimony—but not the kind that ties everything up neatly. It is the account of a man who has learned, sometimes painfully, that grace does not remove cost; it reveals it. That obedience is not rewarded with ease, but with clarity. And that faith, when it is real, often leads you into deeper waters, not calmer ones.

This book may unsettle some readers—and that can be a good thing. It confronts a shallow version of Christianity that promises gain without loss, crowns without crosses. Antrim writes from lived experience, not theory. He writes as a man who has been misunderstood, disappointed, loyal to a fault at times, and yet unwilling to rewrite the truth to make himself look better.

The title The Unfinished Man is not a slogan. It is a confession. And it is also a statement—a declaration that God is not finished with Antrim Gates, and He is not finished with any of us who are willing to live more like Christ.

If you are looking for a book that claims the Christian life is always a bed of roses, this is not it. But if you are looking for honesty—for a faith that bleeds a little, repentance that costs something, and grace that endures—then my prayer is that this book will minister to you and draw you closer to your relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

PROLOGUE

THE HEART I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD

I grew up believing that strength meant silence — silence in suffering, silence in confusion, silence in the face of injustice. But the older I became, the clearer it was that silence is not strength at all. It is simply the disguise pain wears when it doesn't know where to go.

My heart has always been a battlefield. I've carried within me a strange mixture: compassion and anger, mercy and revenge, tenderness and fire. For years I thought that made me a hypocrite — a man divided against himself. But life has taught me something deeper: God does not save the polished, He saves the honest. And honesty begins with admitting that the heart is complex.

Forty years have passed since the Lord first opened my eyes. I have walked through wounds, violence, betrayal, loss, salvation, and rebirth. I've stood in the shadow of my own failures and in the light of God's relentless grace. And every step — even the stumbling ones — have shaped the man I am today.

This is my story. Not of perfection, but transformation.

Not of strength, but salvation.

Not of a finished man — but an unfinished one, shaped daily by the hands of a patient God.



CHAPTER 1

THE WOUND THAT SPOKE FIRST

My story begins in a classroom, long before theology, long before understanding, long before I knew I needed saving. I was just a boy when Miss Robinson decided I was stupid.

Children are sensitive creatures. Their hearts are wide open, soft, searching for affirmation. A single word can bless them; a single insult can bury them.
Miss Robinson chose to bury me, day after day, with a smile that didn't reach her eyes.

Whenever I answered a question incorrectly—which happened more often in those early years—she singled me out.

"Wrong again, Antrim."
"Do you even pay attention?"
"Class, let's see if someone can get this right."

The class laughed. I shrank. And something inside me curled inward like a wounded animal.

Shame is a slow poison. You don't feel it all at once. It starts at the edges—a whispered doubt, a tightening in the chest, a hesitation before raising your hand. Over time, it becomes a voice louder than any teacher's.

Her words stayed with me long after the bell rang. They followed me home, into bed, into dreams.
They did not leave.

What I didn't understand then was that humiliation leaves a kind of scar. It shapes how you see yourself, how you fight, how you love, and how you respond to hurt.

The boy who stood in that classroom learned early that the world could be cruel. And he learned even earlier that strength, to him, meant not crying in front of people.

Years later, when I found Christ, I would learn a different truth—that "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit." But

back then, I knew only the crushing, not the saving.

The wound Miss Robinson planted became the first chapter of a long story—one in which insecurity and anger would grow side by side. Because when a child is taught he is worthless, he either collapses or fights back.

And I fought. But in the wrong ways, and for a long time. Something in me refused to stay small forever. But strength doesn't arrive all at once. It comes in pieces—tiny, fragile, almost unnoticeable.

Moments that don't look heroic until years later, when you finally understand what they meant. One of those moments came on an ordinary Thursday.

The clouds outside were heavy, the kind that made the classroom feel dim even with all the lights on. Everyone was restless. Even Miss Robinson seemed irritated by the air itself.

We were working on math—my least favorite subject, her favorite weapon. She called me to the board.

Of course she did.
My hands were sweating before I even stood up. The room felt too quiet, too expectant, as if everyone were waiting for the show they had seen a hundred times.

I took the chalk, stared at the numbers, and felt the pressure closing in. I could hear my heartbeat in my ears.

Behind me, someone whispered, **"Here we go."**
Miss Robinson tapped her finger impatiently on her desk. **"Any day now, Antrim."**

That's when it happened. Something in me—small, tired, bruised—finally pushed back. I turned around, looked her in the eyes, and said:
"I'm thinking."

It wasn't loud. It wasn't defiant. It wasn't brave in any cinematic sense. But it was the first time I didn't shrink. The class went silent.

Miss Robinson blinked, surprised, as if she didn't expect the quiet kid to have a voice at all. She didn't yell, smirk, or call the principal. She just sat there, stunned, as if I

had broken a script she'd spent months perfecting.

And in that moment, I learned something without realizing it: Even the smallest resistance can shift the entire room.

I got the problem wrong—of course I did. But the mistake didn't sting as much that day. Because for the first time, I wasn't just reacting to her. I wasn't just absorbing her disappointment.

I had said something.
I had claimed space; I had spoken—however softly—against the narrative she had written for me.

That moment didn't fix everything. It didn't stop her sighs, her sarcasm, or the way she used my name like a warning label. But it did far more: it cracked the shell I had buried myself in.

And once something cracks, light finds its way in. Looking back, I realize that was the day my voice took its first breath. It was shaky. It was unsure. But it was mine. The wound was still there. But it wasn't the only thing speaking anymore



CHAPTER 2

A FIRE FOR JUSTICE, A HEART FOR REVENGE

As I grew older, something else grew with me—a fire that burned hot and bright. It wasn't righteousness. It wasn't confidence. It was something darker: a hunger for justice on my own terms.

The world had taken swings at me early, and I learned to swing back.
That inner fire showed itself clearly the day my employer cheated me. I worked hard—always have. I showed up early, worked late, and did the job right. I wasn't looking for trouble. I wasn't even looking for praise.
But when I discovered I was being cheated out of hours I had clearly worked, something inside me snapped.

I went to management. I told the truth. I held them accountable. And they fired me for it.

The rage that filled me was volcanic—the old shame mixing with fresh injustice. I wanted revenge. I imagined all kinds of ways to get even.
I thought justice and vengeance were the same thing.

They aren't.

My heart deceived me—just as Jeremiah said it would:
"The heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9).
I felt the truth of that Scripture in my bones. Even though I believed in Christ at that time, and even though I knew forgiveness was commanded, my blood pulsed with fury.

It took days—maybe weeks—for the anger to cool. It took prayer, Scripture, and a kind of internal wrestling match that only God could referee.
Slowly, God's grace pulled me back from the edge.
Justice belongs to the Lord.
Revenge belongs to no one.
But in those days, my heart was still learning to surrender.



CHAPTER 3

THE PRIVATE LOVERS AND THE PATH TO DESTRUCTION

Life has a strange way of escalating in a single heartbeat. One minute you're walking toward a bus stop on an ordinary fall day in 1984, and the next your whole life is barreling toward a fight you never intended to start.

It began with a simple request from my father: "Go meet your sisters at the bus stop." I didn't think much of it. Odd, yes—but not alarming. I walked down the street the same way I always did. But as I got closer, I saw my sisters running toward me, eyes wide, panic written across their faces.

"Run!" they shouted.
But I didn't run. I wasn't wired that way. Fear has never moved my feet as fast as anger has. Then I saw them—a pack of local thugs known as the Private Lovers, a gang with a name far more ridiculous than their behavior. They were loud, aggressive, posturing like they ran the neighborhood.
They approached, yelling their slogans, throwing their threats like knives. And something inside me rose up—the old wound, the old anger, the old need not to be humiliated again. I called out for one-on-one. I wanted the confrontation clean. Honest. Man to man.

But the Private Lovers weren't built for honor. They were neither private nor lovers—and certainly not fighters.
My mother even got involved, stepping in front of me with the fire only a mother can have when her children are threatened. She was like a grizzly bear protecting her cub, and the Private Lovers did not want to mess with her.

The confrontation fizzled, but the humiliation hung in the air like a challenge unanswered.
The next day, Kevin came. Kevin—my best friend. More like a brother to me. The kind of friend who didn't just talk loyalty; he lived it. When he heard what had happened, he showed up with his cousin Frank in tow. Frank was

unstable on a good day, unpredictable on a worse one. And as soon as he stepped out of the car, he pulled out a .38 revolver.“Somebody’s gonna need a body bag today, homeboy,” he said.

My stomach dropped.
It was too far, it was too late, and I was too angry to stop any of it. The wheels of revenge were already turning. We drove through the neighborhood for nearly an hour, searching for the Private Lovers—or maybe searching for trouble itself. I wish I could say I wasn’t part of it, that I sat quietly in the backseat praying for peace. But the truth is, part of me wanted the confrontation. Part of me burned for it. Yet even then, God’s mercy ran ahead of my foolishness. We never found them. Frank, in his recklessness, even suggested shooting someone else. Anyone else. Just to make a point. The thought made me sick. But that’s how quickly darkness moves. How fast anger exaggerates itself into violence. That day taught me something I didn’t want to learn: Revenge is not strength—it is weakness disguised as justice.
Had we found those boys—those foolish, loud-mouthed kids pretending to be a gang—someone might have died. Maybe one of them.

Maybe Kevin. Maybe me. Looking back, I can see the hand of God steering us away from disaster, even when I wasn’t listening, even when I was running headfirst toward destruction. The Private Lovers incident became a boundary line in my life—a moment where the path of anger nearly overtook me completely.

I didn’t know then that loss, grief, and grace were waiting just around the corner. But I felt the shift. I felt the weight. It would take tragedy to break me. And grace to remake me.



CHAPTER 4

LOSS ON THE ROAD TO ARKANSAS

Hope came back to me in the form of a thin envelope. "Congratulations, you've been accepted to Arkansas State University..."
Those words felt like a door opening—letting in air I didn't realize I had been starving for. After the chaos with the Private Lovers, after the weight that had followed me through my youth, that acceptance letter felt like rescue.

I saw it as my way out. Out of Columbus. Out of the memories. Out of the version of myself I no longer wanted to be.
I was ready to leave. More than ready. I needed distance, like it was medicine.
The night before I left, Kevin and I spent the entire day together. We moved through the city like we always had—talking, laughing, drifting from place to place as if time itself was trying to slow us down so we wouldn't miss what was coming.
We ended up near Ohio State's campus, stopping at a couple of bars, soaking in the last stretch of freedom we didn't know we were about to lose. It felt like one of those nights you assume will always be there—until it isn't.

When he finally dropped me off around 3 a.m., neither of us said anything heavy. Nothing that sounded like goodbye.
But it was.
Before he pulled away, I told him, "Leave this place, man. Don't come back here."
I didn't know I was speaking into the future.
I didn't know I was saying goodbye.

I still think about that moment. Still turn it over in my mind. A warning I didn't understand I was giving. A farewell I didn't realize was final.
The next morning, my parents drove me to the bus station. I was full of energy, nerves, and anticipation. An eighteen-hour ride to Arkansas stretched ahead of me, but I didn't care about the discomfort, the

noise, or the strangers I'd be sharing space with.
I was moving forward. Or so I thought. But life rarely moves in straight lines. It moves in sudden turns.

A month later, in February of 1985, the call came.
Kevin and his cousin Frank had been in a car accident.
Frank survived. Kevin did not.
He died instantly.
The news didn't feel real at first. It hit me like something distant, like it was happening to someone else. Then the weight settled in, and everything inside me collapsed at once.

I remember sitting on the edge of my bed, unable to move. Unable to speak. Unable to process the fact that the person who had stood beside me through everything—every fight, every reckless moment, every piece of my young life—was gone.
Just like that.
I went home for the funeral. Nothing felt familiar anymore, even though everything looked the same. The streets, the buildings, the faces—it was all unchanged, but I wasn't.
The service passed in a blur.
The burial felt like a dream I couldn't wake up from. People spoke words of comfort, but they never reached me. I was there, but I wasn't there. Like I was watching my own life from a distance I couldn't close.
When I returned to Arkansas, something in me had gone quiet.

I became a shadow of myself.
I stopped laughing.
Stopped talking.
Stopped caring.
Most days, I stayed in my room or wandered the library, not to study, but to hide from the weight pressing down on my chest. I wasn't living—I was enduring.
Grief doesn't always arrive loudly.
Sometimes it comes as silence.
As heaviness.

As breath that feels harder to take each day.
It doesn't shout. It suffocates.
For the first time in my life, I felt completely lost.
And I didn't yet understand that grief has a way of breaking a person open—making space for something deeper to enter.
I just knew the ache. And I carried it with me.

CHAPTER 5

THE DAY GRACE FOUND ME

The library became my refuge. Not because I loved books—though I did—but because it was quiet enough for me to hide.

After Kevin's death, I wandered Arkansas State University in a fog, moving through the days as though the world were happening on the other side of a thick pane of glass. The grief was heavy and constant, like something sitting on my chest.

I didn't want conversation.
I didn't want comfort.
I certainly didn't want religion.
But that week, religion wanted me.

It started with the Campus Crusade for Christ students. They stopped me with smiles too wide for winter mornings and asked, "Hey, brother, can we talk with you about Jesus?" I nodded politely, listened for a moment, and kept moving. Then came the Baptist Student Union. Same message. Same timing. Same persistence.
Each time, I declined gently but firmly. I wasn't interested. My world was too dark. Their words felt too bright.
But God is persistent in ways we don't recognize until afterward.

One afternoon, before the encounter in the library, the Campus Crusade director, Carrol Baker, came to my dorm room. He brought a student with him named Ricky Wooten. I was eighteen, going on nineteen, and I had zero interest in what they had to say.

At that age, I viewed many Christian men as soft and effeminate. Ricky fit that mould in my immature mind.

He was well-built for a non-athlete, but he loved to sew and sing—interests that made me uneasy because of my own narrow ideas about what a man was supposed to be.
As Carrol and Ricky talked, I

remember sitting there thinking, I can't wait until this sissy leaves my room.
I did not know then that the man I was so eager to dismiss would later become part of one of the most unusual and humbling episodes of my life.
At the time, however, I wanted nothing to do with him, Campus Crusade, or Christianity.

One night, I sat alone at a table deep inside the library, trying to outrun my thoughts. My grief was still raw, still tearing at the edges of my soul.
That's when a stranger approached.

He pulled out the chair across from me and sat down without asking. His name was Ahmed.
He was a graduate student, Middle Eastern in appearance, carrying a stack of gospel tracts and a Bible worn at the edges.

Something about him felt unusual—not the way he looked, but the way he carried himself. There was no pressure in him. No false cheer.

No eager speed like the other campus groups. He just sat down quietly, as if he had been assigned to that chair.
He asked me about life, about where I was from, and about what had brought me to Arkansas.
He listened.
Only after he had listened did he begin to speak—calmly and plainly—about Christ.
Not religion. Not rules. Not programs. Christ.

I can't explain what happened inside me as he spoke. His words weren't new. I had heard the gospel before.

But something was different this time. His voice moved through the fog in my mind like a soft wind parting smoke.
It wasn't the presentation.
It wasn't the arguments.
It wasn't even the Scriptures he quoted.

It was the timing.
God had allowed every worldly support to fall out from under me. And there, at my lowest, He sent a stranger to sit across from me in a library and speak life into my cracked heart.
I don't remember every word Ahmed said, but I remember the moment something shifted.

A quiet realization rose inside me—not emotional, not dramatic, but certain:
It's time.
I knew it with a clarity I had never known before. I had always believed something about God, but belief had never changed me. It had never asked anything of me. It had never entered my heart. But that day, I didn't just believe.

I surrendered.
I surrendered my grief, my guilt, my shame, my anger, and my whole self. There, in the quiet of a university library, I gave my heart fully to God.
No lightning, no trembling, no dramatic scene—surrender, simple and total.



And in that moment, the heaviness that had weighed on me for weeks began to loosen. Peace did not flood in all at once, but the ground beneath my feet felt different—steadier, more real—as if God Himself had taken hold of my life and stitched something torn back together again.

That day was the hinge on which my entire life turned.
Grace had found me.
And nothing would ever be the same again.
After my conversion, everything flipped.
The very people I had pushed away were the ones I now sought out. I reconnected with the Campus Crusade group, and one of the people I came to know was Ricky Wooten.

The man I had wanted out of my dorm room became someone I could finally see more clearly. As I spent more time around him, the assumptions I had made began to fall apart.

I still could not have imagined how closely our lives would eventually become connected. In time, Ricky began dating a woman I deeply loved. Their relationship developed, became serious, and eventually led to marriage. The man I had once dismissed as soft became the man she chose.

Losing a girlfriend is difficult enough. But I had not lost mine to Flavor Flav or some reckless man whose appeal I could easily dismiss. I lost her to Ricky Wooten—a kind, talented man who designed and made her wedding dress.

As if that were not enough, I stood in the wedding as one of his groomsmen.
Few men are prepared for that kind of emotional assignment. At the time, the situation was deeply humiliating. I had to stand beside the man who had won the heart of someone I once loved while she walked toward him wearing a dress he had created with his own hands.

There was no simple way to compete with that.
Looking back, I can laugh at the extraordinary irony of it.

But beneath the humor was a pattern that would continue

throughout my life: finding myself placed uncomfortably close to the very thing that wounded me, expected to remain loyal, gracious, and composed while humiliation pressed against old insecurities.

Ricky was not cruel to me. In fact, he was kind, warm, gifted, and sincere in his love for God. The pain did not come from wrongdoing on his part.

It came from the position in which life had placed me—and from the wounds I was still learning how to carry.

Ricky had struggles of his own, as we all do, but those struggles are not the story I wish to tell about him. What I remember most is that the love of God and the love of people seemed to follow him like a shadow. He possessed a warmth that drew people toward him and a gift that made his presence difficult to forget.

Looking back, I understand that grace did not find me merely to rescue me from grief. It began teaching me how to see people more clearly—not only through the lens of what they had cost me, but through the evidence of God's love upon their lives. Ricky was one of those people.



CHAPTER 6

FIRST STEPS OF A NEW MAN

Salvation didn't erase my grief. It transformed it.
The morning after I surrendered my life to Christ, the world didn't look different—but I did.

Something inside me had shifted, like a window had been opened in a room long sealed. I woke up with a steadiness I couldn't explain. My pain was still there, but it no longer owned me.

The first thing I noticed was hunger—a spiritual one.
I wanted to know God. Not vaguely, not distantly, not secondhand.

I wanted Scripture.
I wanted truth.
I opened the Bible with trembling hands and read it like a starving man eats a meal—slowly, gratefully, hungrily.
And as I read, the Word read me.

It exposed the anger I had denied. It confronted the bitterness I carried. It soothed the ache I hid from the world. It began stitching together the torn places inside me.

Within days, I found myself drifting back toward the very groups I had avoided and dismissed: Campus Crusade for Christ and the Baptist Student Union.

The same students whose invitations I had shrugged off now became my first spiritual family. They seemed shocked—in the best way—when I approached them with a Bible in hand and said, "Tell me what to do next."

They welcomed me eagerly.
We prayed together.
We studied together.
We shared testimonies, meals, and laughter.

These weren't perfect people—far from it. But they were sincere. They loved Jesus, and they loved me in ways that helped my young faith take root.

Still, the enemy doesn't surrender ground without a fight.

Spiritual battles came quickly—old temptations whispering like familiar ghosts, anger rising at unexpected moments, and old shame trying to reattach itself to my identity.

Some days, I questioned whether I was truly changed. Other days, I felt the weight of loneliness, missing Kevin with a grief that pulsed like an open wound.

But now, I had somewhere to take the pain.
Now, I had Someone to carry it.
God surrounded me with men and women who understood His grace and didn't judge my questions or my wounds.

They prayed with me through dark nights and celebrated small victories as though they were miracles.
And sometimes they were.



CHAPTER 7

WHEN THE BLINDERS FELL AWAY

When the blinders were finally removed from my eyes, the world itself seemed altered. Colors felt sharper.

My conscience, once dull and easily ignored, became tender and alert. My desires shifted almost overnight. It was as if God had reached into my chest and tuned my heart to a new frequency.

I didn't always understand what was happening within me, but I knew this—my appetite had changed.
The things I once longed for no longer satisfied.
And the things I once ignored now drew me like light draws the morning.

The first evidence of this new life appeared in my associations.

Before Christ, my friendships were built on convenience, laughter, or survival. We were kids trying to carve out meaning in a world that offered very little. But now, something deeper was stirring.
I felt pulled away from circles that encouraged the old habits I was trying to bury. The shift was subtle at first—a quiet resistance, a hesitation, a sense that I no longer fit where I once felt at home.

It became clearest when the fraternity invitations came. Before my conversion, I would have jumped at the chance—brotherhood, parties, recognition, a place to belong. But now, something in me recoiled.

Deep in my spirit, I knew I could not serve two masters. Even in my spiritual infancy, I understood that my allegiance had changed. The rituals, the lifestyle, the divided loyalties—it all went against the new convictions rising within me.

Declining their invitations wasn't easy, but it was necessary. For the first time, I was choosing obedience over acceptance. Around this time, one of the brothers from

Campus Crusade for Christ approached me after a meeting. He had a warm smile, the kind that disarmed you before you even realized you were guarded.
He asked where I went to church.

I shrugged, not wanting to admit the truth.
The truth was, I didn't have a church home.
Without hesitation, Ricky smiled and said, “Come with me to Central Baptist Church.”
I accepted the invitation, not realizing how much that simple decision would shape the years ahead.

At Central Baptist, God began surrounding me with men who would help steady my first steps in the faith. Some I had met only briefly before, like Alonzo Jiles. Others I came to know there, including Bryant Pearson, Bobby Green, and, perhaps most significantly, Todd Nortier.

Todd would become far more than another face at church. He became one of my closest and most enduring friends, and our friendship remains one of God's faithful gifts in my life.

Todd was a serious Christian. He was biblically grounded, zealous for God, and unusually mature for his age. He possessed the mind of a teacher, which was fitting because teaching later became his profession.

Even then, he had the natural ability to explain Scripture clearly and defend what he believed with conviction. It remains my prayer that God will continue opening doors for him to use that gift.

Todd's convictions were not easily moved.
Once he became persuaded that Scripture was clear on a particular subject, changing his mind was about as easy as moving a mountain with a teaspoon.

One of my favorite memories of Todd occurred when our group had been studying the question of women preaching in the church. We believed Scripture left room for women to serve in important teaching and ministry roles. Still, we did not believe they were to exercise spiritual authority over men as pastors or bishops.

Todd was thoroughly convinced of this position. One night, during a special church service, a woman stood up and began to preach. Todd did not argue.

He did not complain. He did not make a scene. He stood up and walked out of the church immediately.

Everyone else in our peer group looked confused. I knew exactly why he had left. I laughed so hard I thought I was going to need stitches. That was Todd.

He was immovable whenever he believed Scripture had spoken clearly. He remains much the same today, although age and maturity have taught him to handle some situations with a little more patience and grace.

But beneath that stubborn streak was something I deeply admired: Todd genuinely wanted to honor God. His convictions were not a performance. He did not believe one thing publicly and live another way privately. What he believed mattered to him, and during those early years of my faith, I needed men like that around me.

Looking back, I can see that when God removed the blinders from my eyes, He did more than change the way I saw Him. He changed the people I walked beside.

He replaced isolation with fellowship, strangers with brothers, and a lonely search for meaning with a family of faith.

The blinders had fallen away. For the first time, I wasn't walking alone.



CHAPTER 8

UNFINISHED

I find it fitting that the title of this book is The Unfinished Man when, even at this point in my story, there is still so much more I long to say.

Perhaps that is the point.
A life that God is shaping is never truly complete on this side of eternity. This chapter does not mark the end of my story. It marks another ridge along the way, and I still do not know how many chapters remain in my own life.

None of us do.
I've come to realize that life is filled with what mountain climbers call false summits. You climb with everything you have, convinced you've reached the top, only to discover another ridge waiting beyond it.

Looking back, I see that much of my life has felt that way. There were moments when I thought the story was ending, only to discover that God was beginning a new chapter.

What appears to be the end often turns out to be a false summit.

Conversion itself was like that. Finding Christ was not the end of my story. It was the beginning of a much longer journey. God still had pride to expose, forgiveness to teach, friendships to deepen, failures to redeem, and grace to reveal in ways I could never have imagined.

This chapter stands at one of those ridges.
What might appear to be the conclusion of one season was really an invitation to keep climbing.
Scripture reminds us in Hebrews that "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

I do not share that verse merely to terrify, but to awaken. It reminds us that our days are numbered—not to limit us, but to anchor us.
Life is fragile. Time is fleeting.

Eternity is not a general idea; it is moving toward us, one heartbeat at a time.

And because of that—because of the weight of those words—I feel a holy responsibility to say this plainly:

Time is short, turn to God now.
Not when things get easier.
Not after you "fix yourself."
Not after you chase one more thrill, one more distraction, or one more season of wandering.

We do not know when our last opportunity will come. We do not know when the final grain of sand will slip through the hourglass.
Many people plan for everything—retirement, vacations, careers, relationships—but never plan for eternity.

And eternity is the one appointment no one can reschedule.
I've heard false teachers boldly claim that they will live to be 120 years old, as if life were something they could command. But none of us can speak our own years into existence.

Longevity is not a guarantee; it is a mercy.
Breath itself is a gift.
Every second we live is borrowed time.
So I say again, with love and urgency:
Now is the time to say yes to God.

While your heart is soft. While conviction still stirs. While mercy still invites you home.
My story is unfinished, and so is yours. But the beauty of being unfinished is this:
God is still writing.

Even our mistakes need not be wasted. Every detour can become a testimony. Every heartbreak can become a chapter where grace takes center stage.

Nothing is wasted in the hands of the Author.
I look back on the pages of my life—some stained with sin, some filled with joy, some cracked and broken, some overflowing with mercy—and I see a pattern I couldn't see while living it.

God was there in the foolishness, in the rebellion, and in the wandering.
God was there in the quiet moments when no one else saw the tears.

God was there in the victories and the failures.
He never stopped writing.
And He hasn't stopped writing your story either.

The pages ahead will show that my own life did not remain where it was. God continued shaping me through relationships, responsibilities,

disappointments, failures, and unexpected acts of grace.
Whether you feel strong or ashamed, hopeful or hollow, certain or confused—God is still calling.

And the chapters ahead can look different from the chapters behind.
They can be redeemed, rebuilt, and rewritten by grace.

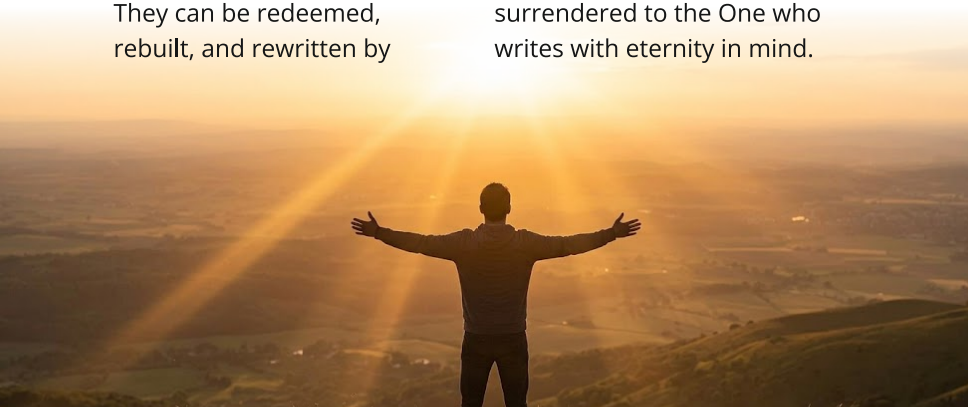
If anything in my story so far has touched you, challenged you, or stirred something in your soul, let this be the takeaway:

Don't wait, don't gamble with your eternity.
Don't assume you have more time.
Say yes to God, say yes while you can.
Say yes while the invitation is still warm in your hands.

My story remains unfinished.
Your story remains unfinished.
And as the chapters ahead will show, God still had much to teach me.

But God—the One who began a good work in us—promises to finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

There is no better way to continue than as a life surrendered to the One who writes with eternity in mind.



CHAPTER 9

WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN A MAN'S LIFE

In all my years walking this earth—and I've lived long enough to carry both regrets and revelations—I have never once heard a man say at the end of his life:
"I wish I had spent more time in the club."

"I wish I had played more golf."
"I wish I had stayed out later, running the streets."
Not once.

Not at a funeral, not in a counseling room, not in a late-night conversation where pride had grown quiet, and honesty finally took its seat.

What I have heard are the confessions of men who waited too long to get serious about what matters. Men who traded eternal priorities for temporary pleasures.

Men who would give anything—anything—to go back and lead their families with wisdom rather than distraction.

And because I've heard those voices, because I've wrestled with my own failures and hard-won lessons, I can say with conviction:

Every Bible-believing man must discover what truly matters and do everything in his power to influence his family through the Word of God.

This world will pull you in every direction, but your family is the soil where your legacy will grow—or wither.

THE TEMPTATION OF SHINY THINGS

As men, we are easily drawn to things that glitter but do not grow us.

Sometimes, we focus on the wrong priorities—Disney trips, cruises, new gadgets, and weekend entertainment.

There's nothing inherently wrong with any of it. If you can afford those experiences, enjoy them.

But understand this:
Memories alone cannot shape a child, laughter alone cannot build character.

Entertainment alone cannot anchor a soul, children need more than amusement.
They need direction.
They need discipline.
They need identity.
And they need a spiritual spine.

There is an old Jewish teaching that says:
"A father who does not teach his son a trade is, in effect, teaching him to become a thief."[1]

[1] This teaching is found in the Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a, where Rabbi Yehuda explains that a father who does not teach his son a trade is, in effect, teaching him to resort to theft.



CHAPTER 10

THE FATHER I NEVER KNEW I NEEDED

I have a father.

This chapter is not an accusation against him, nor is it an attempt to diminish his place in my life.

But salvation introduced me to a kind of fatherhood I had never fully understood—the fatherhood of God.

It was not the absence of a man in the house that Christ exposed. It was the spiritual longing inside my heart.

A person can be loved by an earthly father and still carry questions that no human being can completely answer:
"Who am I?"
"Why am I here?"
"Do I truly belong?"
An earthly father can offer presence, affirmation, protection, and wisdom. Those gifts matter more than many men realize.

But even the best father cannot reach every hidden chamber of a child's soul.

Only God can do that.
Coming to Christ at eighteen was the first time I understood that God didn't just want to save me—He wanted me to know Him as Father.

He didn't yell.
He didn't mock.
He didn't point out my failures like Miss Robinson.
He didn't condemn me like the old voices in my head.

Instead, He whispered what I had waited my whole life to hear:
"You are Mine."
Those words reached deeper than forgiveness.
They spoke to the uncertain places within me.
They told me I wasn't alone.
I wasn't abandoned.
I wasn't worthless.
I wasn't a mistake.
I belonged to God.
God became Father to me—slowly, gently, faithfully.

I didn't know how to receive that kind of love then. I didn't know how to trust without fear.

I didn't know how to rest in grace without expecting disappointment.

But God didn't rush me.
He taught me like a patient father teaching a child to walk.
He corrected me—but never crushed me.

He disciplined me—but never demeaned me.
He guided me—but never guilted me.

He reached places within me that no earthly relationship could completely reach.
And with time, I began to understand the truth that would change my identity forever:
A man may know the love of an earthly father, but he is not complete until he knows the love of his heavenly Father.

God didn't replace my father.
He revealed Himself as the Father my soul had always needed.

He didn't just heal my wounds.
He rewrote my story.



CHAPTER 11

PROVIDENCE IN WORK AND HARD PLACES

After giving my life to Christ, I expected the road to get easier. Instead, God led me straight into hard places—jobs where I was underpaid, overlooked, disrespected, or openly taken advantage of.
At first, I thought it was punishment.
Later, I realized it was training.

Work became one of God's primary classrooms—a hidden place where I learned discipline, humility, and patience. I learned integrity when no one was watching, and I learned to serve even when I wasn't thanked.
Most of all, I learned that true character is built in the unseen hours.

Some workplaces felt like absolute battlegrounds. Supervisors were unfair, and coworkers were hostile. One of those hard places revealed itself during a freezing February.

My supervisor, Ivan Riley, called and asked me to fill in for him on mobile patrol. I agreed for two simple reasons: I could earn some needed overtime, and I could help a coworker out.
For three weeks, I covered his shift.
Then payday came.

I noticed immediately that I hadn't been paid for a single extra hour. I soon discovered a staggering truth: Ivan, the very supervisor who had begged me to cover for him, had submitted my hard-earned hours as his own and had them paid directly to him.

I confronted Ivan and the district manager, James Young. At first, James appeared receptive, insisting that the matter be handled through the proper chain of command.

James, however, was the kind of man who was a legend in his own mind—the "grand poobah" type. The kind of person who gets a minor promotion and spends ten minutes making sure everyone

knows about it. On the surface, he carried himself like authority, but underneath it was clear he was more performance than substance. Rather than correct the theft, the process was used to delay accountability and shield the man who had taken my wages. His title outranked Ivan's, but his integrity did not. So I hired a lawyer.

Once legal pressure entered the situation, the system that had been unresponsive suddenly began to function with precision. My stolen wages were returned.
Not long afterward, I was fired.

It was clear retaliation for challenging the company and forcing them to release what I had honestly earned. What made the situation even more absurd was that termination from this company was almost unheard of.

I worked alongside men who reportedly drove company vehicles into ditches while high. Other guys were caught making out with staff members inside a commercial freezer, yet somehow they kept their jobs.
But fighting for my own wages? That was treated as an offense.

Facing that level of injustice tested the very core of my transformation.
The old me wanted vengeance.

The new me was forced to choose righteousness.
I didn't always get it right.
Sometimes, the old fire rose.
Sometimes, I walked away frustrated, asking God why injustice seemed to follow me everywhere I went.

But somewhere along the way, I realized that God places us exactly where He wants to shape us.
Those difficult jobs taught me:

- **How to stand firm without fighting dirty**
- **How to speak truth without venom**
- **How to endure mistreatment without losing myself**
- **How to lead even when I wasn't in charge**

Providence doesn't always look like a blessing. Sometimes, it looks like a gruelling, unfair assignment.

And yet, through every tough season, God elevated me—not always in title or position, but in character.
Looking back, I see it clearly now.

God wasn't ignoring my circumstances; He was using them to break my dependency on human approval.
He was teaching me to work as unto Him and not unto men.

—Colossians 3:23



CHAPTER 12

WHAT LOVE REQUIRED OF ME

Love is beautiful, but it is not easy.

It asks a man for things that pride refuses to give. It demands vulnerability, patience, gentleness, and sacrifice—things my wounded heart was not trained to offer.

In relationships, I learned that anger pushes people away. Silence can hurt more than words. Fear often disguises itself as independence, and unresolved wounds bleed onto people who did not cause them.
I had to confront a difficult truth:
A man who is not healed will hurt those he loves.
God did not allow me to hide from that truth.

There were people I cared about whom I failed—not because I did not love them, but because I did not know how to love well. Love required gentleness where I only knew toughness. It required listening when I preferred to defend myself. It required honesty when I preferred silence. It required humility when I preferred pride.
God used relationships—friendships, mentors, family, and romantic connections—to soften me. Through them, I learned how to apologize without making excuses, how to forgive quickly, how to express what I felt instead of burying it, how to show compassion without feeling weak, how to protect without controlling, and how to love with courage instead of fear.

I also learned that good intentions do not always produce good outcomes. Offenses will come. I understand that now. They are part of life and part of relationships. But offense cuts especially deeply when you truly mean well, and your intentions are still misunderstood.
There were moments when I believed I was doing the

honorable thing, only to discover that my actions had created discomfort or stirred emotions I never intended to cause. That realization was painful because my heart was not trying to disrespect anyone. I was trying to move with honor.

When I wanted to speak openly about the events surrounding my conversion, I knew that other people were part of that story. Shasta's late husband, Ricky, played a meaningful role. Because she was also connected to that part of my journey, I wanted to approach the story with dignity and respect.
I wanted her blessing.

She did not say no, but neither did she clearly give me the blessing I had hoped to receive.
That uncertainty stung.

It is difficult when you know what was in your heart, but another person may not understand your intentions in the same way. I wanted to tell the truth about what God had done in my life without dishonoring anyone who had been part of the journey.

But love taught me that sincerity does not guarantee understanding.

I am responsible for my intentions, my words, and my actions, but I cannot control another person's perception. Their memories, experiences, concerns, and wounds may shape how they receive something just as much as my motives shape why I say it.

Love does not demand to be understood.
Love does not force approval.
Love does not pressure someone into giving the response we hoped to receive.
Sometimes respect means accepting that another person cannot give us the peace, permission, or closure we wanted. It means honoring their boundaries even when those boundaries disappoint us.

That experience taught me that love is not only about speaking truth with grace. It is also about receiving disappointment without resentment.
Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is leave room for God to work where our

explanations cannot.
Not every misunderstanding will be resolved. Not every relationship will give us closure. Not every person will fully recognize our motives. But even then, we can choose humility over bitterness. We can examine our hearts, correct what needs to be corrected, and trust God with what remains unfinished.

Love became another classroom—an emotional and spiritual university where God taught me not only how to be loved but how to give love. And the greatest lesson? Love is not merely a feeling.

Love is a decision.
A decision to stay when staying is healthy and honorable.
A decision to communicate when silence feels safer.
A decision to forgive when resentment feels justified.
A decision to listen when pride wants to defend.

A decision to respect boundaries when disappointment tempts us to push.
A decision to grow.

And a decision to lay down pride.
Love demanded more from me than any fight I had ever been in. It required me to confront parts of myself that physical strength could never overcome.

But what God taught me was simple and powerful:
A man's strength is measured not by how hard he hits, but by how gently he loves.



CHAPTER 13

THE QUIET SEASON

Some of us long for Christ from the depths of our souls, only to find ourselves walking through what feels like a wilderness of despair. It is in these seasons that silence becomes heavy, and unanswered prayers feel louder than any response we hoped for.

We begin to wonder if God has abandoned us—if His presence has faded just when we needed it most.
There are voices around us—and sometimes within us—that speak against our faith. They question God's nearness. They assume our God is like the god they imagine: present when life is comfortable, absent when suffering appears. They suggest that silence means abandonment and waiting means neglect.
And if we are not careful, we start to believe them.
But wisdom invites us to take a second glance.

When we look again—not through the lens of fear, but through faith—we begin to notice something we missed the first time.
There is only one set of footprints in the sand.
Not because God left us, but because He carried us the entire way.
He was with me the whole time.

God has always been present in our moments of silence. The quiet is not proof of His absence; He may be nearer than we realize.
In these seasons, He is not ignoring us—He is working deeply, patiently, and deliberately. He is remodelling us, shaping us, and refining us into people who can bear more weight, carry more grace, and fulfill more purpose.

The quiet season is not punishment.
It is preparation.
Even our Savior cried from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Those words echo Psalm 22, a psalm

that begins in anguish but ends in hope. In His darkest hour, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures and entrusted Himself to the Father's plan.

How often have we echoed those same words?
"My God, where are You?"
When a spouse walks away.
When a trusted friend betrays us.
When someone intentionally wounds us.
When we lose the job we depended on, only to discover later that God was protecting us from something we could not yet see.
In those moments, it is easy to believe we have been abandoned.

But we have not.
God's silence is not His absence. His hidden work is not His neglect. Even when we cannot trace His hand, we can trust His heart.
So do not be dismayed when God feels distant. He has not stopped working. He has not finished forming you.
The silence is not the end of His voice—it is the space where transformation takes place.
He will continue making you into the person He has always intended you to be.

And when the season passes—as it always does—you may still carry scars, unanswered questions, and circumstances that did not resolve the way you hoped.
The passing of a season does not mean everything worked out. It means grace sustained you and the One who was with you in the silence never abandoned you.
The quiet did not break you.
God used it to rebuild you.



CHAPTER 14

LESSONS THE STORM LEFT BEHIND

Some storms pass quickly.

Others leave the landscape changed.
This one left its fingerprints on me in ways that took months to understand.
At first, I thought the story ended with the lawsuit.
Justice served. Wages restored. Case closed.

But God had more in mind than a legal victory. He was after something deeper—something inside me.
There are moments in life when God allows a hardship not to break you but to reveal you—to show you what has truly taken root within you after years of walking with Him.
This incident—raw and unexpected—became one of those mirrors.

I Learned That Old Wounds Echo, Even Decades Later
When that supervisor stole my hours, something ancient stirred inside me.
A faint echo from childhood classrooms—that old lie:
"You're being mistreated because you don't matter."
I thought God had long since healed that part of me.
And He had.

But storms have a way of reaching into forgotten corners.
Only this time, the echo didn't control me. It merely reminded me of where God had found me long ago—a child bruised by words and misunderstanding.
And I realized something beautiful:
Healing doesn't erase memory, It redeems it.
I Learned That Anger Isn't Always the Enemy—But It Must Be Disciplined
Anger rose in me—not wild, not violent, not uncontrolled.

It rose like a signal flare:
"This is wrong."
"This is unjust."
"This shouldn't be tolerated."
Anger can serve truth when it is submitted to God.
It becomes dangerous only when it operates alone—when

it turns inward or outward without guidance, when it becomes the master rather than the messenger.
This time, anger stayed in its rightful place.
It propelled me to speak up—but it did not poison me.

It pushed me to seek justice—but it didn't make me vengeful.
It reminded me who I used to be—but it did not drag me back there.
Spiritual maturity teaches a believer to experience that kind of anger without drowning in it.
I Learned That Doing Right Still Costs Something
People like to tell testimonies in neat packages:
"I trusted God, and everything worked out."
But that's not the whole truth.

Righteousness costs.
Integrity costs.
Standing up for yourself costs.
You can tell the truth and still get fired.
You can do what's right and still get betrayed.
You can walk the narrow path and still face consequences the wicked avoid.
The Bible never promised otherwise.

Joseph acted with integrity and went to prison.
Daniel prayed faithfully and ended up in a lions' den.
Paul preached Christ and was beaten for it.
So why should we expect smooth roads?
God does not guarantee ease.

He guarantees presence, and that is enough.
I Learned That Justice Is Slow, but God Is Not Blind
Months went by during the lawsuit.
Forms, hearings, conversations that felt like going in circles.
It reminded me of Scripture:
"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"
—Genesis 18:25

He does.
But He does it in His timing, not mine. In the end, what was stolen was returned. The truth stood taller than their lies.
Their actions were revealed.
My name was cleared.
But the greatest relief wasn't the money.

It was the peace of knowing I hadn't dishonored God or myself. Justice came slowly—but it came surely.
I Learned That I Am Still Unfinished, this was the most

important lesson.
Not unfinished in a shameful way—unfinished in a beautiful way. Still growing, still learning, still softening, still sharpening.
Still becoming the man God envisioned.

If this storm had never happened, I might have believed that God's work in me was complete.
But He showed me:
I am still clay.
He is still the Potter.

And His hands have not left me for one moment.
I Learned That Battles Change When You Walk With God
Years ago, a betrayal like this would have turned into violence, rage, and retaliation.
But this time, the battle unfolded differently:
I fought with truth, not temper.

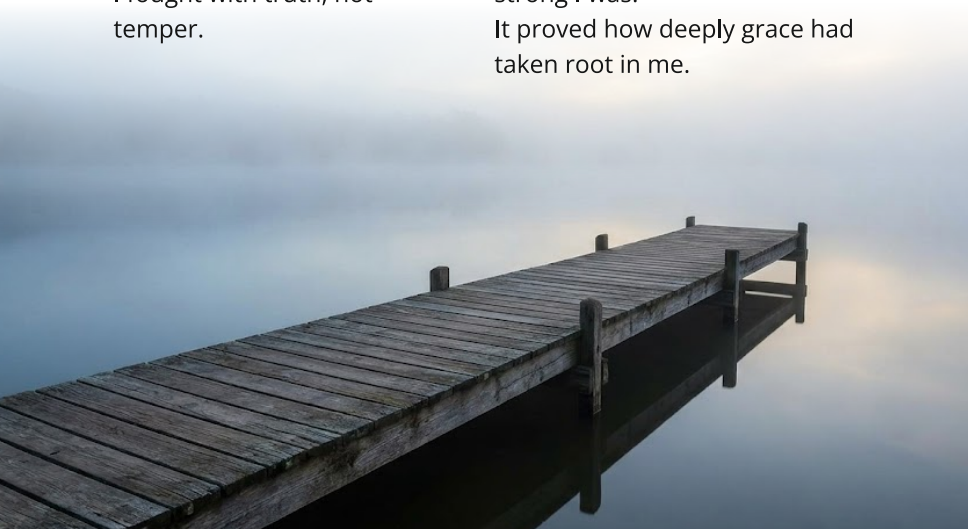
With documents, not fists.
With patience, not impulse.
With faith, not fear.
With clarity, not chaos.

With quiet dignity, not destructive pride.
And that difference was proof of one thing:
Christ has changed me.
Not perfectly.
But unmistakably.

A STORM SENT BY GRACE:
Strange, isn't it?
How something so unjust, so frustrating, and so painful could become a tool of grace?
But that is the nature of God.

He turns: Betrayal into wisdom,
Injustice into endurance,
Loss into strength,
And wounds into testimonies.

This incident didn't prove how strong I was.
It proved how deeply grace had taken root in me.



CHAPTER 15

THE WEIGHT OF A CALLING YOU DIDN'T CHOOSE

Some men spend their lives searching for a calling. Others stumble into it without realizing what they've found. And then there are those, like me, who wake up one day and discover it has been pursuing them all along.

I never set out to become a mentor, a teacher, or someone people turned to for wisdom. I never imagined carrying the stories of others, speaking hope into broken places, or walking beside men through storms that looked remarkably like my own past.

Yet life has a way of placing us exactly where God intends. Over the years, I sensed something growing within me—not ambition or career aspiration, but a quiet responsibility that didn't originate with me.

It was something entrusted. Something sacred. Something heavier than I wanted and holier than I believed I deserved.

IT DIDN'T START WITH A PULPIT—IT STARTED WITH PEOPLE

It didn't begin behind a pulpit. It began in ordinary conversations.

A brother wrestling with anger.
A young man searching for purpose.
A coworker silently drowning in depression.
A neighbor trapped in a violent home.
A stranger who needed prayer but didn't know how to ask.

One by one, they found me.

It was as though God had quietly drawn a circle around my life and placed within it the very people I once resembled—angry, lost, ashamed, searching for identity, longing for dignity, reaching for God without always knowing His name.

Without planning it, words came. They weren't polished sermons or prepared lessons. They were shaped by Scripture, refined through suffering, softened by grace, and formed by God's slow work in my own heart.

I wasn't preaching.
I was remembering.

Remembering who I had been.
Remembering what God had rescued me from.
Remembering the battles I survived only because He carried me through them.

As I shared honestly, others began opening their hearts.
Their trust revealed something I hadn't seen before:
God had been turning my wounds into ministry long before I understood it.
That became especially clear during an outreach on a college campus.
Our team was having meaningful conversations with students when a young woman, already a believer, opened up about serious relationship struggles. Carla, who organized our team at Calvary, was better suited to help her than the rest of us.
Watching her care reminded me that God uses different people in different ways.

Carla also spoke with two young men about Christ, helping them consider the historical evidence and encouraging honest searching rather than pressure.
Then something remarkable happened.
Both young men became convinced that Jesus' claims were true, and they accepted Him as their Lord and Savior.

That moment encouraged me more than they could have known. I was walking through difficulties at church and had been removed from a leadership position. I accepted the church's right to make that decision, but standing on that campus reminded me that position and purpose are not the same.

A pastor can remove me from leadership, but not from what God has placed in me.
The position had changed.
The purpose had not.
There was no pulpit that day.
No title.
No official role.
Only people, honest conversation, the truth about Christ, and two young men choosing to trust Him.

THE CALL COMES WITH HONESTY
What no one tells you is that this kind of purpose exposes you.
It isn't glamorous.
It isn't easy.

It doesn't always make you feel strong.
It often reveals weakness more than strength.
Every time I walked with someone through pain, I saw reflections of my own story—old fears, familiar struggles, scars I thought had healed. God wasn't reopening wounds to harm me. He was reminding me where His grace had already been at work.
It demands honesty.
Not only with others, but with yourself.

THE FEAR OF BEING UNQUALIFIED

There were seasons when I questioned whether I had any right to speak into another person's life.
Who was I to guide anyone?
Who was I to counsel another man?
Who was I to speak about healing while still carrying scars of my own?
Then one day, while reading Scripture, a simple truth settled deeply in me:
Every person God used was still unfinished when He called them.
Moses believed he couldn't speak.
David failed morally.
Peter denied Jesus.
Paul persecuted believers.
Jeremiah thought he was too young.
Gideon thought he was too weak.
None of them came with a flawless résumé.
Their strength was not perfection.
It was obedience.
God does not wait for people to be polished before He uses them.
He calls the willing and shapes them along the way.

THE PURPOSE AND MY FATHER

As my father grew older, something unexpected happened.
The man who once led mostly by example began listening to me. He asked questions, sought my perspective, and sometimes asked me to pray for him.
Not because I had become wiser, but because time had changed our relationship. He had raised me as his son. Now we were learning to know each other as men.
Though he was never deeply expressive, his consistency, presence, and work ethic became lessons God later used in my life.

In ways neither of us expected, my father became part of my purpose.

PURPOSE REVEALED IN SEASONS

God rarely reveals purpose all at once.
Instead, He unfolds it season by season.
A conversation.
A burden.
A person in need.
A moment that demands courage.
A heart that needs someone willing to listen.
A situation that requires truth spoken in love.
Piece by piece, I realized my life wasn't only being transformed by grace.
It was becoming a channel for it.
Not a spotlight, not a title, not a position, but a willingness to let God use my story to bring light into someone else's darkness.

THE GIFT IN WHAT IT COSTS

With time, what once felt heavy began to change.
What once felt like pressure became purpose.
What once felt like responsibility became privilege.
Because this was never about perfection.
It was about presence.
Being present when God places someone in your path.
Being present when someone needs strength.
Being present when truth must be spoken.
Being present when silence must be broken.
Being present because God was first present for you.
I realized I never had to chase it.
God had been forming it in me all along.
Everything He brought me through—wounds, battles, storms, and victories—was preparing me for the people He would place in my path.
He rarely wastes pain.
He redeems it, reshapes it, and uses it in His time to bring hope to someone else.
That is the calling I didn't choose.
Heavy enough to humble you.
Holy enough to sustain you.
And forever marked by the grace of God.



CHAPTER 16

WHEN THE PAST COMES KNOCKING AGAIN

You can think you've outrun your past. You can think maturity has buried it. You can think prayer has sealed it off and years have softened its edges.
But the past has a strange way of finding the door—not to destroy you, but to ask a question:
"What has God really changed in you?"
It doesn't come politely. It doesn't schedule an appointment. It shows up suddenly, unexpectedly, and often through people or situations that resemble the wounds of old.

For me, the past returned not through memories, but through patterns—familiar feelings, familiar triggers, familiar tests wearing modern clothes.
Some came quietly. Others came violently. But whatever their source, God was able to use them.

THE ECHO OF OLD ANGER
Even after years of walking with God, anger did not vanish from my life.
It became quieter, more disciplined, and more contained by wisdom—but it didn't disappear.
One day, a man made a remark that was intended to get under my skin. It was not a loud or obvious attack. It was provocation disguised as innocence.
He knew where the trigger was.
If I reacted, he could deny any harmful intention and point to my anger as proof that I was the one who was out of control.
That was the trap.

For a split second, I wasn't the man I am today.
I was the boy in Miss Robinson's classroom again, staring at mocking faces and feeling my value threatened.
That old fire rose—not the wildfire that once consumed everything around it, but a spark. A reminder of who I used to be.

But this time, I recognized what was happening.
The anger was real, but it did not have to become my response. I did not have to give someone else the reaction he was trying to produce.
It startled me.

I remember thinking:
"After all these years, after all this growth—why is this still here?"
The answer settled quietly within me:
"Because I am still shaping you."
Sanctification does not erase every old impulse or painful memory. It is the Spirit's ongoing work of teaching the new man not to be ruled by what once mastered him.
Growth is not proved by the absence of a trigger.
Sometimes it is proved by refusing to let the trigger decide what happens next.

WHEN OLD WOUNDS RETURN TO THE SURFACE
When old wounds return to the surface, they can feel like renewed injuries. Yet God can use what has been exposed—not to shame us, not to break us, but to heal us more deeply.
Sometimes healing requires a second opening—a fresh exposure of a scar so God can treat what the first surgery didn't reach.
Across the years, old wounds returned to me through:
Conversations that mirrored childhood rejection.
Authority figures who misused their power.
People who tried to take advantage of my kindness.
Moments when I was misunderstood.
Situations where I had to defend the truth alone.
Every time, I felt echoes of who I used to be:
The fighter, the survivor, the protector, the young man who believed justice depended on his fists or his fury.

But every time, I also felt something new—something God had formed over decades:
Stillness.
Wisdom.
Restraint.
Grace.
Clarity.
Strength without violence.
The past had returned, but it did not defeat me.
God used it to show me how far He had brought me.

RUNNING INTO MYSELF
Perhaps the most challenging encounters weren't with other people.
They were with me.
Moments when pride tried to return.
Moments when insecurity resurfaced.
Moments when fear whispered in the dark.
Moments when I doubted my worth, my calling, my direction, and my identity.

Moments when I felt like that confused eighteen-year-old in the Arkansas State University library again—searching for truth without yet knowing the language of faith.

Those moments exposed both weakness and progress.
The weakness was that old fears could still reach me.
The progress was that they no longer governed what I did next.
Fear of old pain can remain even after genuine growth.
The evidence of growth is not that fear never returns, but that it no longer controls the person who feels it.

THE TEST IS THE TESTIMONY
I used to think my testimony was:
My salvation.
My deliverance.
My transformation.
My victories.
But I've learned something deeper:
The real testimony is who you become when the past tries to pull you back.
Not the first battle.

The second, third, and fourth.
The battle that comes after you've already claimed to be changed.
The moment that proves whether grace has roots or only leaves.
Some people think being saved means never struggling again.
But salvation doesn't erase humanity.
It redeems it.

So when old temptations resurfaced, when my old temper stirred, when old lies whispered, and when old insecurities knocked, I discovered something miraculous:
I didn't answer the same way I used to.
God had changed the man behind the door.

A NEW RESPONSE FROM AN UNFINISHED HEART
Instead of reacting, I reflected.
Instead of exploding, I prayed.
Instead of withdrawing, I responded with wisdom.
Instead of hiding, I spoke the truth.
Instead of fighting with fists, I fought with faith.
Instead of collapsing into shame, I stood in my identity.

And that was the evidence:
Grace had done more work in me than I realized.
Even now, the past still knocks sometimes.
And though I may still feel its weight, I do not face it alone, because I know the One who answers the door with me.
I know the God who rebuilt my heart from the inside out.
I know the Potter who is still shaping the clay.

And I know that every return of the past can become an opportunity:
To walk in the strength of the new man.
To honor the God who brought me this far.
To prove that unfinished does not mean defeated.
It simply means still becoming.



CHAPTER 17

GRACE IN THE UNEXPECTED PLACES

Grace doesn't always arrive dressed in glory.
Sometimes, it shows up in the ordinary.
Sometimes, in the inconvenient.
And sometimes, in places you would never think to look.
Some people meet grace on mountaintops, in church pews, through miracles, or during moments of powerful worship.

But for me, grace often appeared in the places I least expected—pockets of light hidden inside ordinary days, whispers of God in rooms where I thought only trouble lived, and small mercies that revealed a great God.
It took years to recognize them.
Because grace is not always loud.
Often, it is subtle—quiet, steady, and almost invisible unless you are paying attention.

THE GRACE OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

One unexpected source of grace was ordinary people doing small things that made lasting differences.
A coworker who encouraged me at precisely the right moment.
A stranger who spoke a kind word.

A young man who asked for guidance and strengthened my faith through his questions.
A neighbor who prayed for me without knowing what I was facing.
A child who smiled at me during a day of deep frustration.
God uses people who may never realize how much their presence mattered.
Grace rarely arrives alone.
It often arrives wearing human faces.

THE GRACE OF CORRECTION

Then there were times when grace came through correction.
A rebuke that stung but stopped me from continuing in the wrong direction.
A word of truth I did not want

to hear.
A moment when someone challenged my perspective and forced me to examine my heart.

Not every criticism is correct, and receiving correction does not require pretending that every judgment is beyond question. But even when I disagree with someone's conclusion, I can still ask whether there is truth I need to hear.

I used to reject correction.
I thought it was an attack.
I thought receiving it made me weak.
I thought it was an insult to my pride.
But as I matured, I realized that love does not leave us beyond correction, and growth requires enough humility to receive whatever truth that correction contains.
Grace corrects not to shame us, but to sharpen us.

THE GRACE HIDDEN IN DELAYS
Some of the greatest mercies of my life were the things that did not happen when I wanted them to.

Jobs I didn't get.
Relationships that didn't work out.
Opportunities that slipped through my hands.
Plans that failed.
At the time, I saw only disappointment.

Looking back, I can see that some of those delays protected me. They kept me from entering situations I was not prepared to handle, settling for less than wisdom required, or choosing paths that might have derailed the man I was becoming.

I do not understand every closed door.
But I have lived long enough to know that some doors remain closed because grace is standing on the other side.

THE GRACE THAT CAME THROUGH HARD LESSONS
Not every grace feels good at first.
Some of God's deepest work in me took place through hardship:

The betrayal by my supervisor.
The humiliation of being fired for telling the truth.
The long, exhausting lawsuit.

The burden of delayed justice.
The resurfacing of old anger.
The unexpected tests of character.

Those experiences were painful, and the injustice within them was still wrong. Calling them places where grace worked does not excuse what happened or make the pain good.

It means the wrong did not have the final word.
Through adversity, God built endurance.
Through injustice, He strengthened integrity.
Through betrayal, He developed discernment.
Through loss, He taught wisdom.

Through waiting, He formed patience.
Grace isn't just comfort.
It is transformation.

THE GRACE OF STILL BEING HERE
And then there is the simplest, most profound grace of all:
I am still here.
I survived storms I once feared would destroy me.
I endured battles that could have broken me.
I walked through seasons that tried to steal my faith.
I faced challenges that revealed my weaknesses and relied upon a God who has no weakness.

I lived through things that, in the moment, felt impossible.
But here I am, still breathing, still growing, still learning, still standing, and still unfinished.
Every morning I wake up, I am reminded that grace did not merely save me in that Arkansas State University library in 1985.
It sustains me today.

GRACE IN THE SMALL AND THE MIGHTY
What I have learned is this:
Grace does not always shout.
Sometimes, it whispers.
Sometimes, it redirects.
Sometimes, it shields.
Sometimes, it teaches.
And sometimes, it meets us in brokenness and begins rebuilding what pain tried to destroy.

Sometimes, grace looks like this:
A quiet heart in the middle of chaos.

A soft answer when anger

would be easier.
A clear mind in a confusing moment.

A sense of peace before the circumstances have changed.
Strength that cannot be explained by human resolve alone.

Grace can meet us even in places where we would never think to look.
But the greatest grace is not merely that I survived.

It is knowing that God is still shaping me, still walking with me, and still working on the unfinished parts of my life with the same patience He has shown from the very beginning.



CHAPTER 18

ONE GOD AT A TIME

I first met Darren Holland on the football field during a gruelling afternoon practice. I had recently transferred schools, landing on a team where I didn't yet belong. I was the unproven, unwelcome new guy, and honestly, I was close to quitting. Football wasn't my strongest suit. My skill set was average on a good day; I wasn't the fastest, the most gifted, or a natural athlete. But I paid attention.

One day during practice, the offense ran a play I already recognized—not because I outsmarted anyone, but simply because I had seen it before. The pass was intended for Darren. I jumped the route, not off raw instinct or athletic talent, but off pure knowledge. I intercepted it.

A few plays later, it happened again. Same play, same recognition, same result. That's when I saw it—the distinct look Darren gave me. It wasn't irritation or ego. It was recognition. It was a look that quietly said, "Okay. I see you."

That was the beginning of our friendship. On the field, Darren was the exact opposite of me. He was a natural athlete—gifted, fluid, and fiercely confident. He had a great work ethic, but in my opinion, he was heavily underutilized and mismanaged, caught up in school politics long before people were honest enough to call it that.

Darren had swag before swag even had a name. He carried himself as if he belonged anywhere he stood, and though he spoke with a slight stutter, it never slowed him down for a second. He wasn't perfect, he wasn't polished, and he certainly wasn't a saint. But he was authentically himself. For me, that mattered.

Our friendship didn't begin with words; it began with a moment of honesty where preparation met opportunity

and earned mutual respect. I didn't impress Darren with talent. I earned his acknowledgment through awareness. Sometimes, that's how men recognize each other—not through dominance, but through shared effort.

Darren became part of my story because he accepted me in a space where acceptance had to be hard-earned. At that point in my life, that mattered more than anything.

The Deception of a False Beginning

As time passed, Darren and I unexpectedly found ourselves responding to the exact same spiritual moment. We both answered a call, both stepped forward, and both prayed. To anyone watching from the outside, it would have looked like the identical beginning of a lifelong faith journey. But beginnings can be deeply deceptive. What I was learning—slowly and painfully—was that true repentance is never proven by public movement, but by private surrender. It is measured not by words spoken before a crowd, but by what a man is willing to lay down in the dark.

Darren's introduction to Christ came through a man whose testimony was incredibly dramatic, but whose life still seemed tightly tethered to the world he claimed to have left behind. There was no hatred for his old ways, only a slight religious reshaping of them. That dynamic mattered more than I understood at the time.

When we prayed together during that season, Darren spoke words that instantly startled me. He looked up and said, "Lord, I come to You with my wisdom and knowledge."

Even then, though I did not yet possess the theological language for doctrine or discernment, something about that prayer felt fundamentally wrong. It did not sound like confidence rooted in grace. It sounded like arrogance. Imagine a mere human being approaching a thrice-holy God and presenting his own wisdom and knowledge as credentials. The thought now seems completely absurd. We bring absolutely nothing before God that He did not first give

us, and nothing in us places Him under a shred of obligation. True repentance does not arrive with a résumé; it comes entirely empty-handed. It does not announce its qualifications. It confesses its deep need.

That specific prayer stayed with me for decades because it revealed a heart that had not yet been completely broken—a man willing to approach God, but not yet willing to come undone before Him. What God was doing in me felt like total surrender, like being completely dismantled and rebuilt from scratch. What I witnessed in Darren felt like alignment without abandonment. It was belief without burial.

False repentance does not reject God outright; it simply reshapes Him into something manageable. It keeps control, preserves pride, and accepts God as an addition rather than a replacement. Sincere repentance, on the other hand, costs you your old self. It strips you of the right to remain unchanged.

The Slow Nature of the Drift

I could not judge Darren's heart, but over time, the fruit of his life revealed what his words tried to hide. Looking back, I can see that Darren didn't fall away all at once. He was already drifting. Long before prison, before his language changed, and before the outward shift in his beliefs, the warning signs were there.

His attention naturally leaned toward appearance, public recognition, and what could be displayed rather than what needed to be surrendered. He was flashy, material-minded, and drawn to what could be seen and admired by others. None of that is a crime on its own, but it always reveals the ultimate direction of the heart. Christ does not compete with our displays; He actively dismantles them.

Darren's faith never collapsed in a single cataclysmic moment. Instead, it thinned out. It loosened. It slowly bent toward a custom version of spirituality that allowed him to keep his control, keep his status, and keep his old self fully intact.

That is precisely how spiritual

drifting works—not by a loud rejection, but by subtle distraction. Prison did not begin Darren's departure. It simply accelerated it.

After prison, his turn became unmistakable. The faith that once lightly brushed against Christ leaned fully into identity, symbolism, and self-definition. That was when Kemet entered his life—not merely as historical education, but as a total replacement for faith.

The ancient name carried cultural gravity and depth, and there was nothing wrong with honoring that inheritance. The danger arose when cultural identity became a substitute for internal surrender, and history became a replacement for the cross. In Darren's life, it offered a dangerous illusion: roots without repentance, strength without surrender, and identity without obedience.

Where Christ calls a man to be radically remade, this new path allowed Darren to simply reframe his existing pride. And that difference matters.

After loss, exposure, and public consequence, a man will desperately cling to something. If he has not learned to cling to Christ, he will naturally reach for whatever system affirms him instead.

The Guardrail of Sobriety

Darren's story ultimately forced me to look deeply at my own walk. I did it without an ounce of pride or comparison, but with absolute sobriety. The same drift that carried him away had once lived inside of me, too. The exact same pull toward control, recognition, and self-definition had whispered its empty promises in my ear.

The difference between us was not intelligence, strength, or discipline. It was surrender. Where Darren resisted being undone, God was slowly, patiently dismantling me. Where he reshaped faith to fit his lifestyle, I was being shattered and reshaped by a faith that demanded everything.

That process wasn't dramatic. It was quiet, frequently uncomfortable, and entirely unseen. But it was real. I

learned that perseverance is not powered by emotional enthusiasm, but by daily obedience—by faithfulness when absolutely no one is watching.

Christ did not spare me from the storms of life; He walked me directly through them. He did not remove temptation; He trained me to recognize its trap. He did not affirm the man I was; He kept forming the man I was becoming. And that is the only reason I am still standing today.

It is not merely because I once professed Christ in a public moment, but because His grace continued to hold me fast, teaching me to choose Him again and again—on His terms, and never mine. That is the narrow way. And it is the only one that leads to life.



CHAPTER 19

RETURNING TO THE NARROW WAY

(Meanwhile, back at the ranch)

Ministry was never meant to be comfortable.
I understood that when I served at the Lord's Ranch, accepting low pay, minimal privacy, canceled days off, and the steady loss of personal convenience.

These were not injustices but sacrifices, made bearable because the work was still holy.
In those early days, the ministry was defined not by structure, but by calling. Many of the ground-floor staff were hardly distinguishable from the residents—and truthfully, many were not far removed from the same struggles.

Some were still fighting their own demons.
That was not a contradiction.
It was the mission.
Broken people were helping broken people under the mercy of God.
No pretense.
No performance.

Just repentance, accountability, and hope.
That is how the Church has always survived—by telling the truth about sin while clinging to grace.
Bud was far from perfect.
He could be overwhelming, forceful, and even wrong.
He was not always doctrinally precise.

But he possessed what God consistently honors:
A heart bent toward ministry.
He cared for souls, not systems.

He understood that authority exists to serve, not to dominate.
That distinction matters in heaven.

But that foundation did not remain intact.
A shift began—subtle at first, then unmistakable.
The ministry became corporate.
The Lord's name was stripped from it.

Authority replaced calling, and

control displaced care.
What followed was not reform.

It was corruption.
Leadership passed not into faithful stewardship, but into grasping control.
What had been entrusted was treated as property.
What had been sacred was treated as expendable.
Mercy was replaced by management.

Shepherding gave way to intimidation.
Weakness was no longer met with restoration, but with punishment.
Scripture has words for this kind of leadership.

It is not called strength.
It is not called vision.
It is called abuse.
This transformation did not remain abstract—it revealed itself in daily practice.
To be clear, this is not a plea for leniency toward genuine evil.

Gross and serious crimes demand firm, decisive action.
Scripture does not confuse mercy with permissiveness, nor does justice disappear under the banner of grace.
Some sins must be confronted sharply to protect the vulnerable.

That is not what I am speaking of.
I am speaking of petty vices once handled with patience, now treated as capital offenses.
A staff member caught smoking was summarily dismissed.

Someone parked in the wrong space and received a ticket as if it were a moral failure.
Minor infractions were elevated into instruments of fear.
What had once been addressed earnestly, relationally, and with an aim toward restoration became punitive, impersonal, and absolute.
The sin here is not discipline.

It is disproportion.
When authority loses mercy, it begins to resemble something far darker than righteousness.
When systems punish trivial faults with devastating consequences, people are no longer corrected.

They are conditioned.
They learn that survival depends not on integrity, but on silence and compliance.
That is how consciences are dulled.

That is how participation in wrongdoing becomes normalized—not through dramatic evil, but through small obligations demanded again and again.
History teaches us that atrocities are not sustained by monsters alone, but by ordinary people trained to enforce rules without conscience.

When mercy is removed, even small acts of enforcement begin to serve something monstrous.
No one believes they are doing evil.

They are simply "following policy."
There are rulers in Scripture who do evil and repent, and there are rulers who do evil and harden themselves.
Manasseh humbled himself under God's hand and was restored.

Pharaoh hardened himself, mistaking power for permission and repeated warnings for something he could ignore.
—2 Chronicles 33:10–13; Exodus 7–14
Repentance is the dividing line.

Here, no repentance was ever demonstrated.
Instead, there was a consolidation of authority, spiritual intimidation, and the steady hollowing out of a ministry that once bore good fruit.

The language of righteousness remained, but the substance vanished.
God's name was still invoked, but His character was no longer reflected in it.
This is not a matter of opinion.

Scripture teaches us to judge by fruit.
And the fruit here has been fear, silence, and decay.
Lives were not healed—they were managed.
Souls were not shepherded—they were controlled.

What was once solid and beautiful was rendered putrid and vile, not by persecution

from outside, but by corruption from within.
God is patient, but He is not mocked.

Ministries do not belong to founders, heirs, boards, or executives.

They belong to the Lord.
And when what is His is treated as a thing to be seized rather than a trust to be guarded, judgment does not need to be announced.
It arrives quietly, then completely.

The greatest crime here is not the fall of a leader.
It is the wounding of the sheep.



CHAPTER 20

WHEN GOD BEGINS TO HEAL THE DEEP PLACES

There are wounds so deep they eventually become part of the very architecture of your soul. You learn to walk with them, you learn to talk with them, and you learn to function around them the exact way a person learns to live with a permanent physical limp. They don't always bleed, and they don't always ache.

But they silently shape everything—your reactions, your fears, your defenses, your behavioral patterns, and even the unique way you love and allow yourself to be loved.

For most of my life, I carried heavy wounds exactly like that. Some I inherited, some I learned, others were cruelly inflicted on me, and some I foolishly inflicted on myself. They came from childhood and adulthood alike; some were born out of sin, and others were born out of raw survival. But there comes a time—if you stay close to God long enough—when He begins to gently unlock those hidden places, not to hurt you, but to finally heal you. And that deep healing, I discovered, often begins at the exact moment you convince yourself you've already moved on.

God Prepares Us for Deeper Healing

One of the greatest mysteries of God is His pacing: He rarely heals every wound immediately. Instead, He reveals and treats our brokenness according to His perfect wisdom and timing. He does this not because He is slow, but because He is wise.

If God had tried to expose and heal certain parts of me earlier in my journey—when my faith was still fragile, my discipline was weak, and my identity was unsure—I would have easily mistaken His healing for weakness and His growth for punishment. Some deep wounds can only be confronted after God has developed a greater spiritual maturity within us.
They require emotional

stability before they can be exposed, and advanced wisdom before they can even be named. So, God waits. He waits not to punish you, but to protect you. And then, in His perfect timing, He begins the slow, surgical work of healing the deep places.

The Healing That Begins with Truth
True healing never begins with immediate comfort; it always begins with absolute truth. It requires the truth about who I was, the truth about what shaped me, the truth about the toxic lies I believed, and the truth about where hidden anger still lived.

It demands that we confront the patterns we repeat simply because we never understood their roots.
Through this process, God revealed one of the hardest truths I have ever had to accept: just because you survived something does not mean you have healed from it.

- **Surviving is strength; healing is surrender.**
- **Surviving is grit; healing is grace.**
- **Surviving says, "I got through it"; healing says, "It no longer controls me."**
- **Surviving hides the wound; healing exposes it directly to the light.**

God was so incredibly patient to guide me through the exhausting valley of both.

Touching the Wounded Child Within the Grown Man
I can point to the exact day when I realized God was putting His hand on an old memory I thought I had buried forever.

Suddenly, I was back in that childhood classroom. I saw the teacher with the cold smile, and felt the agonizing humiliation of a young boy being mocked in front of his peers.

I remembered how my heart learned to hide behind toughness, and how my spirit adopted a defensive silence as protection from further shame. I didn't expect God to bring that memory back to the surface, but He did.

He brought it up not so I would relive it, but so I could finally release it. In that moment, a

striking realization hit me: the boy who was wounded still lived deep inside the grown man, and God wanted to heal both of us simultaneously.

That healing didn't arrive through emotional catharsis alone. It came through the weight of divine truth whispering into my soul: "You were not stupid.

You were not worthless. You were simply a child being mistreated by an adult who failed you."

Sometimes, God heals your present adult self simply by telling your past self the truth you were far too young to understand at the time.



CHAPTER 21

A LOVE I DID NOT EXPECT

We do not always recognize grace when life feels stable. More often, we notice it after something has already broken—something we thought would last, something we built our lives around.

Before I met Jhee, I went through a painful divorce. It didn't just end a marriage; it unsettled my sense of identity and direction. Even when you are not solely responsible, you still carry the weight of it—grief, disappointment, and questions about your future and your ability to love again.

A DOOR I DID NOT EXPECT

Then, when I least expected it, life shifted again.

I met Jhee through a deliberate introduction. It was not a chance encounter. Someone saw what I could not yet see: that my heart was not finished and that God was not finished with it either.

Jhee is from the Philippines—gentle, warm, soft-spoken, and quietly strong. Her presence brought a calm I did not realize I needed. She did not erase my past or rush my healing. She brought steadiness into places that had long been unsettled.

God restores in many ways—through time, through His Word, and through people. In my life, Jhee became part of that restoration. She walked with patience and kindness, without judgment, and over time her love softened what pain had hardened.

She reminded me, not merely through words but through her presence, that beauty can still come from what was once broken.

A MARRIAGE BUILT ON HEALING, NOT HISTORY

Our relationship grew slowly, built on honesty and intention.

As we talked, I came to know her story—her faith, her sacrifices, her family, her culture, and the quiet strength that had shaped her. Though we came from different

cultures and followed different paths, we were aligned in what mattered most.

In Jhee, I found peace, stability, and a partnership grounded in something deeper than emotion alone. She did not come to replace what I had lost. She came into a life already being rebuilt.

When we married, it was not about rewriting the past, but stepping into what God was forming next. She did not erase my story; she became part of its restoration.
We do not have children, but our life is full in ways that cannot be measured by absence. It is full of faith, laughter, travel, service, and a steady love that has grown over time.

Jhee is my companion, my confidant, and a clear expression of grace in my life. Through her, I am reminded that God still writes new beginnings—even when we assume that season has passed.
Our marriage remains part of the ongoing work God is doing in both of us—steady, patient, and still unfolding.



CHAPTER 22

ELEVEN YEARS OF GRACE IN MOTION

Love does not automatically erase life's challenges. Marriage does not magically eliminate human imperfection. And two people, no matter how deeply or spiritually bonded, will never create a completely flawless home.

What God brings together, He faithfully sustains—not because the marriage itself is perfect, but because His presence within it is faithful. December 26, 2025, marked our eleventh wedding anniversary. That milestone represents eleven years of continually learning one another, forgiving one another, carrying each other's burdens, and trusting that God knows exactly what He is doing with two unfinished people walking one shared path.

A MARRIAGE FORGED IN REALITY, NOT FANTASY

People love to celebrate the glamour of weddings. Still, very few celebrate what comes after—the daily choices, the difficult conversations, the navigation of cultural differences, the inevitable misunderstandings, and the quiet moments when human pride must die so that peace can live.

Our marriage is no fairy tale. It is real—messy at times, beautiful at others, and holy in the unique ways only a tested love can be.

Jhee is from the Philippines, and she brought immense warmth, joy, and gentleness into my life. But she also brought a distinctly different culture, a different way of expressing deep affection, and a completely different rhythm of daily communication.

I had to learn her intentionally. She had to learn me patiently. Together, we had to learn what it truly means to honor God in the middle of two vastly different stories becoming one. We have disagreed, misunderstood each other, and unintentionally hurt one

another. We have needed grace more times than I could ever hope to count.
But the true miracle of our story is this:
We never walked away, because God never let go.

GOD IS IN THE IMPERFECTIONS
Some people mistakenly think God is present only when everything feels perfectly peaceful. But I have seen God show up most clearly in the exact moments when peace was hardest to find.

When our communication temporarily broke down—He was there.
When we did not see an issue the same way—He was there.

When outside stress—work, finances, or the weight of life—brought immense pressure, He was there.

And when old, lingering wounds from past seasons tried to bleed into our new territory—He was right there.
Our marriage is not held together by mere compatibility, aligned personalities, or fleeting romance—though all those things matter. It is held together because God Himself is the unshakable third strand in the cord that binds us together.

His presence keeps drawing us back toward one another when stress and misunderstanding threaten to pull us apart. He continues teaching us how to live out the purpose He has given our marriage.

ELEVEN YEARS OF BECOMING
Eleven years is not a small thing. It is far more than time simply passing; it is time being transformed.

In these years together, we have learned that:
- **Humility is infinitely more powerful than being right.**
- **Listening to understand is far more important than winning an argument.**
- **A sincere apology is never a sign of weakness.**
- **Forgiveness is not a luxury or an option.**
- **Love often grows deeper through the storms of life.**
- **God uses marriage to sanctify us, not merely to satisfy us.**
- **Two deeply imperfect people can grow a holy union**

when they keep God at the center.

Our marriage is not perfect, but it is fiercely faithful. It is growing, protected, blessed, and still being written by a God who is faithful to finish what He begins in us.
If I have learned anything in these eleven years, it is that love is not something you merely possess.
It is something you must steward faithfully.

God gave me a wife after a long, agonizing season of pain—not to erase my past, but to show me that His grace can restore what brokenness tried to destroy.

We are still learning, still growing, and still being shaped by the Potter's hand.
We are together—and that, in itself, is a beautiful miracle worth recording in any autobiography



CHAPTER 23

FORGIVENESS, THE HARDEST LESSON

Forgiveness is not natural, revenge is, pride is, silence is, self-protection is.
Forgiveness is supernatural—it demands a strength no human heart possesses on its own.
And God began teaching me that through the deepest wounds of my past.

Miss Robinson, the employer who fired me unjustly, friends who betrayed me, people who mocked me, lied about me, stole from me, or humiliated me.
Their faces returned one by one—sometimes in memories, sometimes in dreams, sometimes when I least wanted to see them.

Every time, Christ whispered, "Forgive them." And every time, I resisted.
Forgive the teacher who buried my confidence?
Forgive the manager who lied to my face?
Forgive people who wounded me when I was defenseless?

Forgiveness felt like letting them win. But God showed me something both painful and liberating:
Forgiveness doesn't free the other person—it frees you. My anger wasn't punishing anyone, it was poisoning me. Every grudge was a chain.

Every memory of injustice was a weight around my heart. Every refusal to forgive was another day I carried someone else's sin on my back. Christ was asking me to lay it down—not because they deserved mercy, but because I needed healing.

There was one night in particular—quiet, late—when I felt the Lord press me hard: "You cannot follow Me while dragging your enemies behind you."
I cried.

Not because I was sad—but because forgiveness felt impossible. It felt like ripping out a thorn that had grown roots.

But I obeyed.
One name at a time, one wound at a time, one memory at a time—I surrendered them.
Miss Robinson?
"Father, she planted shame in me. But now I give her to You."
My employer?

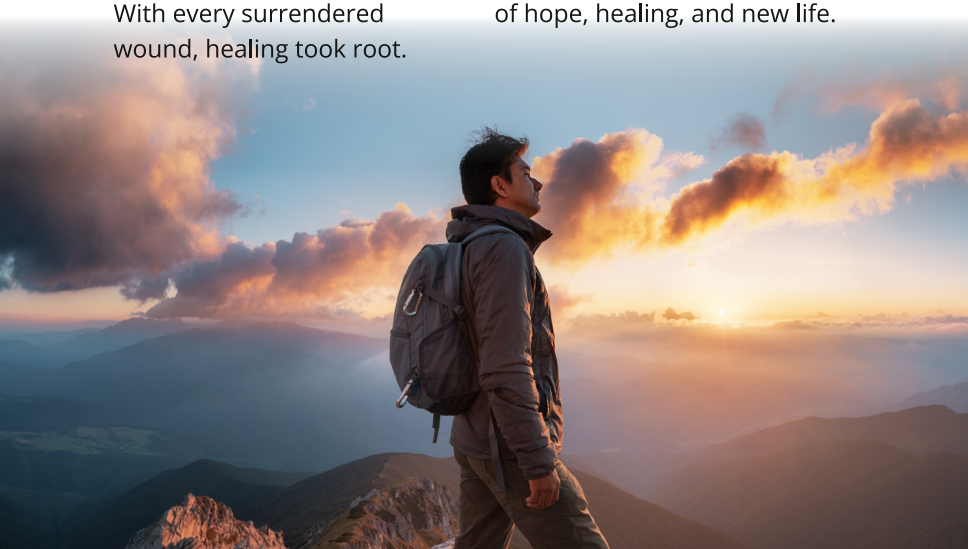
"He lied. He harmed my reputation. But Lord, I forgive him."
The people who mocked me?
"I release them, Father. They don't owe me anything anymore."
Forgiveness wasn't a moment—it was a process.

A painful one.
A freeing one.
With every release, a weight fell from my soul, with every act of mercy, anger lost its power.
With every surrendered wound, healing took root.

By the end of that season, I felt lighter than I had in years.
Forgiveness didn't make me weak, it didn't erase what happened, it didn't excuse the injustice. Forgiveness made me free.
And for the first time, I realized that God wasn't finished with me—He was just getting started.
My prayer is that, as you close this book, you will not close your heart.

That you will seek the Lord for yourself.
That you will discover—as I did—that Christ meets us in the very places we are most afraid to reveal.
Open His Word. Walk with Him.

And watch as the same grace that rescued me begins to transform your story into one of hope, healing, and new life.



CLOSING REFLECTIONS

As I reach the final pages of this story, I do so with a quiet awareness that my journey—like every believer's—is still unfolding. The chapters you have read are not a record of a perfect man, but of a rescued one. A man carried by grace far more often than he walked by strength.

This is not the story of a poor, fatherless Black boy who had nothing and no one. I was wounded, but I was also deeply loved. God gave me parents who protected me, sacrificed for me, and showed me, on a human level, what love could look like.

Their love could not reach every place within me, because no human love can. But it gave me a glimpse of something greater.

As I grew older, I began to understand that the deepest love I needed could come only from my Creator. My story was never ultimately about skin, but sin—and about the One who can save us from ourselves.
My parents gave me a glimpse. God revealed the source.

If anything in these pages has encouraged you, challenged you, or helped you feel less alone in your own struggle, then I am deeply grateful.

That alone would make every sorrow worth the telling. But I must say this plainly:
Do not let my testimony stand in place of God's Word.
Do not rely solely on my experience, my victories, or even my failures.

Take up the Scriptures for yourself, read them daily, wrestle with them. sit with them when you do not understand, return to them when your heart trembles with doubt, anger, or confusion.

Because the real healing—the kind that reaches the deep places no human story can touch—comes not from reading about a changed life, but from encountering the One

who changes lives.

I am simply a witness.
A man who has seen God's mercy in the ashes and His patience in my rebellion.

A man who has learned that grace does not erase the past, but transforms it.
A man still being made whole.
My prayer is that, as you close this book, you will not close your heart.
That you will seek the Lord for yourself.
That you will discover—as I did—that Christ meets us in the very places we are most afraid to reveal.

Open His Word.
Walk with Him.
And watch as the same grace that rescued me begins to transform your story into one of hope, healing, and new life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I write from the conviction that a man is not defined by what he achieves, but by what he survives without surrendering his soul. Much of my life has been shaped in places where faith was tested not by belief alone, but by obedience, silence, and discernment.

My years in ministry exposed both the beauty and the danger of devotion. I learned that sincerity does not guarantee truth, that loyalty can become a liability, and that silence—when chosen for the wrong reasons—quietly erodes integrity. These lessons were not learned quickly, nor without cost.

I do not write as one who has arrived. I write as one still being formed—learning where to stand, when to speak, and when faithfulness requires walking away.

The Unfinished Man is not a story of completion, but of grace at work in a life still in the hands of God.

