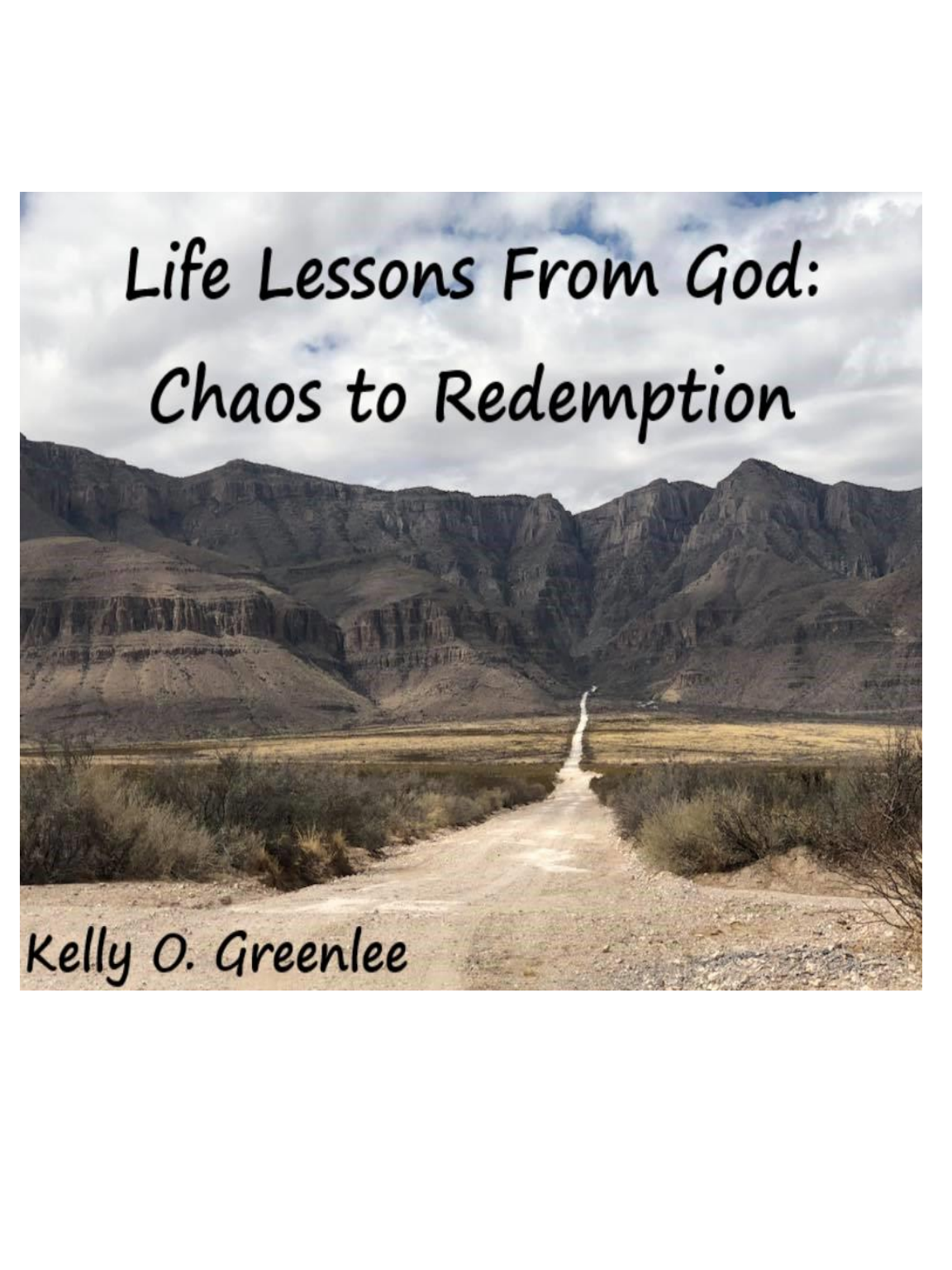


A photograph of a dirt road leading towards a waterfall in a mountainous landscape. The road is in the foreground, leading the eye towards the waterfall in the distance. The mountains are rugged and layered, with a cloudy sky above. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Life Lessons From God: Chaos to Redemption

Kelly O. Greenlee

This book is dedicated to my family and friends who have helped me through the storms of my life. May God bless them always.

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Finding Your Eye in the Storm: Life Lessons from
God

Drops on the Ocean

We all start out by being dropped into this ocean of life with no idea on where to go. There are three dominant types of people in this world. Allowing for individuality, people either sink to the bottom, float around lost and aimless, or follow God's path. Those who travel God's way tend to find land and prosper. The rest of us either see it eventually or not at all. Which one are you? I almost never found my path.

How do I know that these three types exist? I have sunk. I have drifted aimlessly through life. Finally, I began to follow God's plan and watched my life change. I have reached the shore of God's land and began to prosper.

Although, no life on earth is perfect, and Jesus warned us that we would have trouble in our earthly life, following God's plan is the only way to a good life on earth and to achieve eternal life in Heaven.

We will encounter loss, pain, and other various disasters in our earthly life. However, knowing that God is by our side, those difficult times are easier to navigate. I tried to navigate life alone and failed repeatedly. Look at

problems not as obstacles, but as challenges to overcome. I have found that each issue that I turn into a challenge turns into a victory. Each victory increases my faith, courage, and trust in God which is more victory and glory to God.

However, what happens when you look around at those who appear more prosperous than you but lack a real relationship with God, and you begin to compare yourself to them? You may think that God has blessed them abundantly and forgot about you who are doing your best to be a follower of Jesus. Do not compare yourself with the world. Be conscious of your blessings and be grateful for the things God has given you stewardship over. There will always be those who have more, and those who have less than you. The key is to focus on your blessings from God. Remember that God wants us to develop our own relationship with Him, and it is profoundly individual based on our own needs. I have found if there are things that I do not have in this world it is because I don't need them.

God is helping us all through the difficulties in life. We bring God glory when we praise him during our storms. Not one of us who loves God is alone in their brightest or darkest times. We can always turn to God for anything we may need.

There are times that we will become lost and discouraged while our faith tested. We do not always see

adversity as a test of our faith but as an inconvenience or hassle. Even Job became discouraged after all of the tragedy he endured. In the end, Job knew that God is all he needed regardless of what happened in his life. Job was richly blessed for his faithfulness during his difficulties. He received blessings far beyond any material goods.

Some decisions impact us for life. Tragedy does one or two things to most people. It either drives people close or farther from God. I know that everything in life happens for a reason. I may not understand why at the moment, but even the worst of situations carries a lesson to be learned. Each of those lessons is meant to strengthen us. Often, God will leave us clues to where he wants us to go in the midst of the difficult times. We often ignore these pieces of the puzzle. Once we pick up on His divine cues and put the pieces together, we can figure out the picture of our life.

I have repeatedly been tested and fell short most of the time. I used God as a wish maker for many years. My relationship with God was one-sided. God is not starring in our personal "I Dream of Jeannie" show. God was not first in my life, and I struggled because of that.

I put God on a shelf and sought him out only during times of trouble. I didn't talk to God throughout the day like I do currently. God is not a toy that we hang on to like children when they are sad for comfort. Although God is

our great comforter, God should be the primary focus in all we do. God is more significant than we can conceive with our limited human imaginations. Trying to put God into perspective that we can understand often turns us from God rather than to God because we cannot understand the overwhelming idea of God. When you stop and think about God and all his glory, it can make your brain freeze. Trying to figure out how God fits into our earthly world and life is like stuffing a bouncy house inside a clown car.

I have lived with God last in my life, and I learned that when God is last, you also become last. When God is your priority, you become God's priority. We tend to look to this world to save us instead of God. We think a better job, more money, a better body, or the perfect relationship will satisfy the emptiness in our soul. I have lived it and watched countless others do the same. It is a fruitless and frustrating existence. I based my happiness on my bank account. I only felt good if I had a certain amount of money. My joy and security correlated with the numbers on the bank screen.

Although a large bank account balance is always nice because we all have bills to pay, equating money to happiness is an unending circle of stress. Happiness based on money is fleeting because it is not stable. We all start out with a nice sum of cash when payday comes, but what

is left over after bills is often depressing. What I have learned is whether I have \$500 or \$5 left over, God always makes sure I have what I need. I know if I only have \$5 left, then that is all I need at that time. If I need more, I have realized that God always finds a way for me to have it. We cannot buy happiness no matter how hard we try. We can only achieve it by pure faith and trust in God.

How do we trust and have faith in God when we have never met Him in person? How can we put our trust in what seems like nothing? What if God is a myth to keep the masses under control? When we look deep inside ourselves where God dwells as the Holy Spirit, we can quickly answer those questions. I know God is real because in the midst of my madness God is the only thing that made sense. The only thing that brought me comfort was God. If God was not real, then He could not have reached me in my psychosis when I didn't even know if my husband and child were real.

Many people have twisted the word of God to gain power and influence over others. The Bible speaks about false prophets often. One must be discerning and watchful of those who proclaim they know God the most. The Bible says to be leery of those who boastfully pray in the marketplace. Not that you should hide your prayers, but it is not meant to draw attention to oneself. Usually, those

people do not honestly know God, and selfish reasons motivate them.

God is real. I know this because I have experienced God in many ways. However, I cannot say that I don't have doubts at times. There are times that I let my imagination run, and I overwhelm myself trying to conceptualize God. I have analyzed and questioned God endlessly. I have pondered how God came into existence, how creation began, and what is my purpose on earth. I have thought about these questions and more until my brain hurt. I realized that God would eventually open your eyes to your purpose when you are ready.

I know God is real for many reasons. Whenever I begin to doubt, I think about Jesus. Jesus is our one concrete answer that God is real. I have a myriad of theories about God and Jesus. I may or may not be correct. Sometimes, I feel my opinions of God border on the bizarre. I think to understand God truly; we need to stretch our imagination.

Angels, Satan, and this universe can seem a little bizarre compared to our human existence and understanding. Think of this existence as God's movie, and He is the star. I am always amazed by what He created. God had the ultimate imagination. Mountains, oceans, deserts, animals, and people all make up this world in

which we live, and each one has a specific purpose of making this world operate. I often wonder why God created us and the universe. Perhaps, God wanted to share his vision with something He could love.

Life is like a Rubik's cube. It can be challenging to solve and put in order, and if you cheat like I used to do and take off the stickers, it will mess up your world like it does the Rubik's cube. We are all given a box of puzzle pieces, and as we grow, we put the pieces together to form the picture of our life. God is there to guide us on where to look for each part and how to put them together. There are times when all the pieces look the same, and we have no idea how they will all fit together. During those times, it is imperative to turn to God in prayer for guidance because only God can see the finished product. We only see what we have in front of us, and that is just a small snapshot of God's portrait.

Prayer is our greatest weapon against the enemy. How many times have people have chastised prayer? I have heard people say that prayer is futile. People want action instead of prayer. What they do not realize is prayer is the most significant action you can take for another. It may seem like nothing is being done, but you are putting a petition on behalf of another to the creator of everything. How is that doing nothing? It is like asking for a

Presidential Pardon on behalf of your friend who is sitting in jail.

People think God is imaginary and are praying to nothing. One should do more than pray. I have felt that way myself, but what we do not realize is the most we can do for someone is to pray for them. It is the highest act one can do for themselves and others.

I am living proof of the power of prayer. Without my daily conversations with God, there are days that I would never get out of bed. God is listening to our prayers. God listens to prayers of absolute faith. Through prayer, we relay our needs to God. In return, God will direct us to the path we need to follow to gain what we need. God does not want us to fail. God wants us to have the best life possible. Through prayer, we can achieve God's goals for our life. God will guide you if slow down, pay attention, and listen to Him.

God is not going to stop by for dinner and have a counseling session with you. His house calls are a bit different. God's guidance comes in many forms. They can be through readings, a loved one, or your God voice. It depends on how God wants to convey His message. It is up to us to recognize it. The best resource for God's advice on how to succeed in this fallen world is the Bible. I have

also experienced God's guidance through other people, books, and church sermons.

I now realize the worst hell is being separated from God. Looking backward was eye-opening as I pondered what my life was like without and with God. We cannot live in the past, but we must learn from it while moving forward.

Although, if you had asked me then, I would have told you that I had life figured out and everything under control. I didn't even have controlled chaos. God could have appeared in person, and I would have dismissed His help. I was stubborn. I thought I knew better than everyone else even God. I ignored the signs, advice, and God in general for many years. I suffered for it

I thought I had my life under control even though I was on a collision course with disaster. I had no clue what was in store for me, and how the explosion that almost destroyed my life would change me forever.

God gives us numerous chances to come to Him and live our authentic life through His guidance. Life will not be comfortable but it more manageable to pray your way through a tough time then to leave it up your own powers. Since we have no power, you might as well leave your life decisions up to a coin toss. There are those who readily follow God, and I wish I would have always been

like that. Then, there are the rest of us. We stumble and fall of course, and God picks us back up.

How do I know these things? I have experienced God's love and God's wrath. I prefer to avoid His wrath. I have wandered from the righteous while searching for answers. I sought for life's answers and came up empty outside of God. We tend to look for answers within the world, but real wisdom originates from God. I found the Bible is the one source of the truth and guidance. Without the Bible, you will come to no real conclusions on how to fill the void we all have when God is not the center of our lives. When God is not the center of our lives, we tend to fill it with material goods, relationships, and even other religions. None of those things can fill the void we have when God is not our focus.

If you watch the news and look at the senseless violence that is happening too often, you will notice two things. There is a lack of the family unit and God. Without God, there is no hope, and without hope, there is no God. When people lose faith, they lose their humanity. Lost hope is the devil's opportunity to begin his work. I sunk so far into the deep, dark abyss that most people thought I would not recover. The key to my daily walk in recovery is my belief in God. Although that path is rocky at times, I can always find my hope in Jesus.

God redeemed me and brought back to His grace. This time, I knew squandering this opportunity was not a possibility. My last chance was before me, and I either got on board or drowned.

God's mercy and forgiveness are boundless. He forgives us when we do not deserve it. God has limits with us. If we refuse to follow God's laws without remorse, God will eventually cut us off. There are countless incidents of that in the Bible.

God's love is unconditional. He will search our heart and know if our remorse is real. If our repentance is genuine, He will forgive us. Unconditional love for humans is a difficult concept to understand. The closest we can see this type of love on earth is the love of a pet or child. With continued abuse of that love, it will eventually die. Love needs continuous cultivation to thrive. Unconditional love is a difficult concept because humans put conditions on love. We often think if a person does action x, our love will grow and grow. What happens when a person does action g instead? The person fails to meet our conditions, and the love will start to wither.

We often wonder how God can love us if we continually sin. We all sin. I don't care who you are. The only person who did not sin on this earth is Jesus. None of us can match Jesus no matter what we do. Do not believe

anyone who claims to be without sin because they are deceiving themselves or you.

As much as we would love to write and star in our life movie, reality is a whole other game because God is in control of our lives. We must actively relinquish control to God to live our best lives. Also, we must remember that God is the most excellent writer of all time. After all, this is His story. Keep in mind that other people do not follow our script. They do not always do what we want or need and often do not meet our expectations. We do the same thing to God, yet He loves us anyway. To stay on script, we must learn to pray our way through life.

God's love will not sway even when we fall short. When we push God away or sin, He still loves us. Unconditional is the type of love that you find in God. When you love God the way He loves us, that love will seep into all aspects of your life. The only way to experience this love is through God. You cannot buy God's type of love no matter how much money you have.

However, God will not tolerate our insolence forever. There comes a point when we meet God at the crossroads. We must decide to take the route of righteousness or sin. If you choose not to follow God and His path for your life, God will shut the door. God does it

throughout the Bible. Repent your sins or be cut off from God.

I have been at that crossroad. My life was out of control and hung by a thread. I was beyond lost. I made a decision that would change my life forever. It turned out to be God's greatest gift of redemption.

I was stubborn and independent of God. I was on a lightning speed course toward disaster. In the deep recesses of my mind, I knew it. I didn't know what to do. I was not sure how to change. I felt like I was in control. I thought if I could improve my situation, I could get myself back on track. What I needed to do was go back to God and let him change me. We can change little about ourselves without help from God. Only God can change hearts and minds. We can just put band-aids on problems that actually need a surgeon. The surgeon we need is God because he is the only one who can fix our soul. No pill on earth can fix a broken soul.

Little did I realize that God was really in control of my life. God had enough of me and my antics. God had other plans for me, but I was not listening. God was fed up with me, and it was time to teach me the ultimate lesson. I lost everything. He knew the only way to get through to me was to crush me completely.

I had a choice. I could either go back to God or lose my life and all of God's plans for me. It was a process. Although my downfall was sudden, my way back to reality was a mighty battle. I believe there was a battle for my soul as I could have quickly given up and sunk into the abyss. I had to prove to God that I was worthy of another chance. I had to show real repentance and longing for God's help. When we let our guard down and let God in, we can see real change.

Nothing in my life has been easy for the most part. I have earned everything I have. I believe you appreciate what you have more if you receive it through challenging work. God uses those challenges to shape us into the person he designed you to be. What do you have to look toward if everything is handed to you? God has been my greatest ally even when I didn't deserve it. God saw my potential when I saw nothing.

People dismiss me when I say I had to earn my redemption. People say God loves me despite my sins. God freely forgives when we repent. I agree with that, but I had to show God that I was truly serious.

God watches over me and gives me more than I deserve. I squandered many of His gifts. I was spoiled, entitled, and selfish. I didn't care much about things that didn't directly affect me.

God reset my life. The old me died in that car accident, and the real me was born again. When I woke up after the crash, I felt like I had to relearn essential functions. Everything I knew was wiped away. It was a weird feeling. It was like waking up from a coma. I had to slow myself down and focus on how to dial a phone for help. It all seemed surreal. I was like I had lost everything I knew.

Nothing is instant. I spent months battling for my life back. I know that God was directing my steps the entire time. Often, God was the only thing that made sense and brought comfort to me.

Time for Church

Some moments and decisions impact us for life. Most of the time we don't realize how lasting these are. For instance, the girl who has unprotected sex and ends up pregnant in high school. In turn, the girl's child sees this as being acceptable and also becomes a teenage parent. It is a circle that started with one act. That one lousy decision started a chain reaction that is often difficult to break because the sin now becomes the norm. If everyone is committing the same sin and becomes acceptable, you now have others around you to justify the bad behavior. It is the old warning from your mother to choose your friends wisely as we are influenced by our surroundings.

I didn't always have an adversarial relationship with God. I think people either start out loving God and then something terrible happens, and it causes them to turn from God, or they were never taught about God. I am not sure which is worse. Knowing God and turning from Him, or never knowing Him at all. I think both are equally sad.

I love going to church. Church gives me a sense of peace and belonging in the world. I love hearing God's

message and learning about the Bible. Church gives me a sense of belonging to something bigger than myself. It helps to fill up the spiritual void I find within myself at times. It is like getting a drink of the living water. God quenches my spiritual thirst.

I don't go to church as often as I would like. I also don't exercise as regularly as I should either. Both provide tremendous benefits to my life, but I usually fall short in both areas. That is part of being a less than perfect human. We have good intentions, but they do not always result in the correct action. God searches our hearts and knows that despite the activities that do not match our plans, we still love and respect Him. It is like our minds and body have a disconnect at times. I almost feel there is an inner war between the flesh and the soul. The flesh wants to sin, but the soul seeks to follow God. Which one is winning in your life?

I have attended church throughout my life. However, I didn't truly understand God or have a real relationship with Him until after I became ill. I think many people are in the same boat. We attend church and go through the motions, but we do not earnestly connect with God.

I learned about God through Sunday school or church sermons. I would listen to religious radio from time

to time. I thought I was being a good Christian, but like many people, I was only a Sunday Christian. By the time Monday rolled around, God was not the first thing on my mind. I was proud of myself for being proper and going to church as Christian society expects. Even during those periods of attending church, I was far from God. I was missing the point of going to church. You don't go to church because you are perfect. You go to church because you are a broken sinner who needs God. You don't go to the doctor when you are feeling okay. No, you see the doctor when you are sick to get healing. Our spirits are ill from sin, and the only doctor who can heal that is Jesus.

God does want us to attend church and fellowship with other believers. God wants us to watch and listen to religious programs. God wants us to read the Bible. These things are where we learn His word. Are you genuinely emerging yourself in God or going through the motions? It is almost difficult to distinguish between the two because as humans we are only seeing the outward appearance of people. We do not know their heart and soul as God does. False prophets often fool people. We are deceived by our friends and family members who seem to be good Christians, but once the veil is removed, you see a festering wound of sin breeding in their lives. This is what Jesus talked about in the New Testament about the teachers of the

law. They looked perfect from the outside because they could recite the commandments correctly, but under their fancy robes was a heart of deceitful sin. Jesus sought to uncover the sin of the world and heal it. Why do you think people flocked to Him? They were sick and needed healing.

We often cover up the sin that we don't want people to see by putting on a good act of the ideal Christian. In the meantime, we are living in a vat of sin and swimming in our own filth. I have felt superior to people after going to church. I had the attitude of look how good I am because I went to church on Sunday. Attending church does not make one superior to anyone. Often people let their ego get in the way of why we attend church. We go to church not to judge others who do not attend. The church is for us to learn, worship, and fellowship with other believers. It is not to show off your new dress.

As much as I love God, I am not a huge fan of organized religion. First, man created religion and used it to commit atrocities throughout history in the name of Christianity. Religion has been used to control the masses since religion was created. God gave us ten simple commandments to follow. These are essential rules to keep us from falling into sin, but countless people have twisted the Bible to trap people into religious cults. It is not only religious cults that attempt to control people. Churches

have been shown to be corrupt over the centuries. People like Martin Luther was appalled at this corruption and called for a reformation.

God knew this would happen. If you read Revelations, it talks about the churches being corrupt and falling away from God's teaching. You can see it today with the churches changing their doctrine. They justify the changes to keep up with modern society. Things that were once not okay are acceptable. This evolution is to accomplish one thing. It is to get more people in the seats and increase donations. Churches cannot survive without donations. I am not saying that churches are bad for wanting to raise money because they need money to operate. If you have to change your beliefs to increase attendance, that is not what God intended.

Notice the Bible does not change. We attempt to change the Bible by glossing over or ignoring God's word. The Bible states that divorce and homosexuality are a sin. The churches once frowned up both and would excommunicate people for engaging in either. Now, divorce is forgivable, and homosexuality is innate instead of a lifestyle choice. There are even gay churches. Divorce is rampant. I am not better than anyone else because I have three divorces in my past. The ones who change is us. We try to whiteout in the Bible where it says

not to sin. We think if we ignore it then it does not exist. Last time I checked, God has a pretty good memory. That is why He is upset with the church in Revelations for changing to fit society. God does not change to suit us. We are supposed to change to meet with God as God's ways are always better than our ideas.

The church should be a place of quiet worship and sanctuary for our souls. For some of us it is that place, but as humans, we cannot help become distracted. We are distracted by the annoyance of the crying baby, or in the judgment of someone's appearance, or if we are making a significant enough donation. We let life's distractions interrupt us at church. Who of us has not been guilty of at least one of the above? The church is a hospital, not a social gathering. The church is where we go to heal from the brokenness in our lives. The church is where we get a dose of Jesus, and where our soul can regroup through a momentary rest.

If we change our view of church, perhaps we can improve our view of the world. The world is not a stage where we are the star waiting on the director of our life to cue our next move. We are all intricate parts of God's design. We were all meant to fit together to create beauty and love one another to complete God's masterpiece. We are too busy fighting over what style to use and who will be

the star of the portrait. If we realized that we are all stars in God's picture, we could see each other as God does. If we could see each other as God does, there would be much less strife in this world.

The Road We all Travel

Everything on earth has a beginning and an ending. Eventually, God will remake Heaven and Earth when the time comes. We will experience God's renewal of all things.

The good and bad of life's various beginnings and ending are inconsequential because we know that God lasts forever. When we believe in God, we are assured that we will have eternal life. We know that although our earthly life ends, our Heavenly life with God then begins. It is the last step in our journey through this world. Think of death as another transition in life like graduating from high school. It is not to be looked at as the ultimate ending but as the ultimate beginning.

The good and bad things in our life while on earth are only temporary. The temporary status of life can be both depressing and joyous at the same time because we know nothing is permanent. We may wish that a great day will last forever, but it will eventually end at midnight. It can be depressing because nothing good is eternal on earth, but there is joy in knowing that the bad is not eternal either.

To combat this, we must focus ourselves on God and Heaven above. Life with God is eternal which should be our focus. Our end goal is not to live on earth forever but in Heaven with God. If we keep that in mind, it makes the shifts of life more bearable. God will always provide the tools we need to get through each day if we ask him. In times of lack and plenty, pray your way through it.

My time of rebelliousness was up. It was time to test me. Would I turn to or from God? The answer was entirely up to me. I ended up at that crossroads half out of my mind. Reality was subjective at that point as there were times I could barely remember my name, but the one thing that I didn't forget was God. He was the only thing that made sense to me at times. God was my only comfort during my darkest hour.

My favorite board game growing up was Life. I found the game fun because the outcome of the game depended on which life road you took. No game was the same. Depending on how wise your decisions were, those decisions dictated the outcome of the game. I liked to choose a different path each time to see the changing results.

Life is a series of roads to follow. We all start out on the same dirt road at birth. Our life is a blank slate. All

roads lead to the same two endings. We can either end up with God or end up with Satan. I do not prefer the latter.

The challenge is God does not provide us with a roadmap when we are born. The only book that we are given on how to live life is the Bible. I didn't receive a script of my life. Not one of us will have the same ride through life. Some of us ride in a BMW while some of us will ride on a BMX. Know that God is by your side even if you only have a bike to journey through life.

Despite the vehicle you have, the destination is still the same. Some of us may take longer to get on the right path than others while some people remain lost in the thicket. Free will gives us those choices. Free will without God in control, will often lead to pits and dead ends

Although God does not provide us a map to follow, He does offer us the tools along the way to reach our destination. Through the utilization of these tools, we are better able to navigate through life. These tools are simple but powerful. What are these tools?

First, God has placed Himself as the Holy Spirit inside us. Some people call this our conscience. I call this our God voice. We all have that voice inside us that distinguishes between right and wrong. We all have it even those who do not believe in God. Whether or not we listen to that voice and let it guide us is our own choice. I had

found that my life had fared better when I listened to my God voice. I had also felt the repercussions when I ignored it.

I knew our first attempt to move was a bad idea. I told my friend that I had a feeling that something terrible would happen. I ignored that voice and ended up almost damaged for life. I strongly urge everyone to listen to that voice.

Second, God gave us His word through the Bible. There is much controversy surrounding the Bible's integrity. People will claim that man wrote the Bible and man are fallible, or man organized the Bible, and they left out certain books for selfish gain. Yes, man can manipulate the Bible. They have twisted it throughout history. As someone who writes for God, I know that when a thought is put in my head to share with others, I have to write down precisely what is given to me. Changing God's words is not an option. If you look through the books of the Bible, some of the words may be different from Bible to Bible, but the underlying message is unchanged. The basic message despite many translations throughout time has not changed either. That is because we may alter words, but we cannot modify God's message.

I have questioned the authority of the Bible. I once looked at the Bible as merely a chronological account of

the Jewish people and a source of information on how to be a righteous person. I did not look at it as a manual on how to know God and live our best life. I did not realize that the Bible is a source of hope and inspiration. It is more than just a book.

Most people, like me, do not trust the Bible because they do not fully trust God either. The more one reads the Bible, the more it reinforces your relationship with God. God is open about his likes and dislikes and how we should live our lives. This openness is the foundation of any relationship with Him. The Bible is special. My pastor told me a story of a man who was in a car wreck. The car was engulfed in flames. When the firemen put out the fire, they found the man's Bible in the car unharmed. God kept that Bible safe even in the midst of disaster the same as He does for us.

Third, God places people in our lives to guide us. We all have those people who help us and those who challenge us. All the people we encounter are meant to move us forward in some way even if you have a Nellie Olsen in your life. Those Nellie's can drive us crazy, but they can also inspire us to do better in life. I also think Satan will put people in our lives to bring us down. However, those who are there to assist us are far more powerful than those who want to destroy us. The key is to

recognize who is who. Satan hates when we are walking with God. That fool will try anything to pull you down into his wicked world.

I feel sorry for Satan and pray for his redemption. God gave him everything, and that was not enough. His ego skewed his sense of right and wrong and eventually caused his demise. How many people live their life based on their ego and self-esteem? They are only happy when someone is feeding their ego and become angry when ignored. There is no contentment found in that lifestyle. I know because I lived like that for years.

Being content takes practice. We tend to look at what we don't have instead of all of our blessings. We are like children with never-ending requests. To God, we are like toddlers who need constant direction and discipline. As we need positive role models in our lives to keep us moving forward constructively, we need to recognize that God is our primary source of direction. He gave us the Bible as our roadmap.

We come into this world to make our way through this "Candyland." We start life with all of these tools. How do we get to the finish line in one piece? The answers are in the Bible. God gives us example after example of what to do and what not to do.

We start out on this highway of life with what seems to be a natural road to travel. Think back to your youth, and you will find that the worries of adulthood seemed eons away. Although none of us had a perfect childhood, it was easier when someone else worried about working and bills. We all face adversity in life. Hard times either push us from God or toward God.

Look at two children who both lost parents at a young age and had to live with relatives. The first child does not have God in his life while the second child turned to the Bible during his time of tragedy. The first child became hopeless and angry while the second child may have felt angry and hurt, but the hope of the Lord was with him. The first child went on to commit a horrible crime while the second child went on to get good grades in school and play sports. God can turn the worst situation into our best situation if we let Him.

God gives us hope. Without God, we have no hope. Without hope, we have no God. Our trust and faith in God can get us through the worst times in our lives. Being with God is much better than without Him. I have lived both ways. I can attest that having God first is much better than having Him last in our life.

We are cruising down our life highway making good time, then, out of the blue, that road becomes dark

and treacherous. Now, you are stranded at the drive-in with no one in sight to help. These monster potholes didn't show up on the GPS. A tragedy is often unexpected and leaves us feeling ill-prepared for life.

A thing can happen that completely knock you off course such as death, divorce, or a job loss. You have no idea how to get back on track. You feel lost and floundering. You end up wandering through life trying to figure out what happened.

Then, there are times when we are on the right path, and we come to a crossroads. There is a decision in front of us that can change the course of our lives dramatically. Although every decision affects our life path, some are more impactful than others. That is what makes life interesting.

Two forces influence our map. God who is keeping us on the right road, and Satan who is throwing stones at us to knock us off course. Remember that Satan cannot destroy us even when it feels that way. God has the ultimate control over our lives. When you surrender control over to God, you will find that navigating life becomes a bit easier than trying to do it alone.

There are periods when the hard times feel like they overshadow the good in life. Eventually evil will fail. God sent Jesus as that reminder. Jesus paid for our sins on the

cross and crushed Satan. We can all rejoice at that good news.

There is a war for your soul. Even if it feels like Satan is winning, God is stronger than us all. Neither man nor devil can surpass God's might and will. With God on your side, you can defeat any ills thrown at you.

Turning Point

We all have incidents in our lives that either moves us toward or moves us away from God. I have found that most atheists can trace their disbelief back to one or several incidents. It is mostly due to what they feel are unanswered prayers or loss. There is a disappointment that makes them angry at God. Their anger turns to disbelief. They may think if God is real then bad things should not happen, or if God truly loves me, He would have answered my prayer.

God always answers our prayers. God is always listening to our pleas. We don't always listen to God's answers because the answer we want to hear is yes. We take no or wait as God not answering our prayers. We must understand that God sees the whole picture of our life. If he responded yes to a particular prayer, it could negatively impact our lives.

If I had made it to Texas the first time, I would not have been there when my mother in law passed away. My son would have missed out on spending precious time with his grandmother. That would have been guilt that would

have been difficult for me to get past. My son was able to spend time with his grandma before she passed. We do not see these things while we are praying for something we think is best for our lives.

I have found that some of the highest blessings are when God says no to my prayers. We have to remember that God knows everything. Sometimes the things that we think are good for us can turn out to be bad in the end. Since God knows all, we have to trust His judgment over our own.

If my first marriage had not ended in divorce, I would not have my son, and I would not have ended up marrying the love of my life. God can turn the bad breaks into good breaks. We have to be patient and wait.

In my case, I turned from God. I became angry and then a disbeliever. Although, deep down I knew God existed. I think most atheists know God exists, but their anger blinds them to His love.

We moved from Texas back to Ohio the summer between my seventh and eighth grade school year. We lived with my grandparents. I resumed going to church with them. I loved church although I didn't agree with most of the Pentecostal doctrine, but they didn't either. I respected their rules, but I thought they misinterpreted the Bible.

I had no desire to move back to Ohio, but I adjusted to small-town life and made the best of the situation. When you are thirteen, the choice is not your own. I knew it was best for my mom, and I always figured I would make my way back to Texas eventually.

As with everything in life, nothing stays the same forever. I had never experienced a significant loss. My uncle passed when I was five, and my parents divorced when I was around the same age. I think when you are that young the loss is not reality like when you are older. I think younger children are more able to take things in stride. Deep thought and analysis of the situation are foreign to young children.

One day can alter your life forever. We cannot fully control the things that happen to us. We cannot stop people from dying or leaving us. We cannot prevent an unexpected disabling illness. That lack of control can make life feel daunting. However, we can learn who is in control, and that is God. However, we can control how we react to a situation.

When your house burns down, you can either become paralyzed and do nothing or realize all material things are replaceable. Although no one wants to imagine losing all of their possessions, if you are still alive,

understand that is all that matters. Thank God that it was not worse.

My turning point came during Memorial Day weekend. I was camping on the Ohio River with my friend and her family. It was a great weekend of water skiing and boating.

Since Monday was a holiday, my friend's parents decided to stay an extra day. I called home to get permission to stay with them a day longer. My granny answered the phone. We chatted for a few minutes. I told her I loved her and hung up the phone.

I went about my day having fun with my friend waterskiing. It was like any other day until later that evening. I was told that my mom needed me home. I was not told why I had to leave, but I already knew why. I am not sure how I knew what happened. Perhaps, it was God's way of preparing me for what was waiting for me when I arrived. I became numb during that car ride. It felt like forever until I got home.

When we arrived at my house, I saw several of my family members sitting on the front porch. My feeling was confirmed seeing their distraught faces. My beloved granny was gone.

She was a faithful Christian woman who went home to Jesus. Now, I understand that it was her time as

she was very ill with heart problems, but as a hurting teenager, all I knew was she was gone. At the time, I found no comfort in that. I went numb and turned angry. I blamed God for taking her away. With her went part of my hope and faith.

At the time, I didn't understand why she had to pass at sixty-five. I don't recall crying much. I do remember feeling nothing for a long time. I willed myself not to feel the pain.

I kept trying to find her. I would look for signs of her spirit but found only silence. Part of me was waiting for her to come back, but there was nothing. Some people talk about their loved ones coming back in dreams or feeling their presence. I longed for that, but I never had a dream or felt her presence. I have concluded that those things are more manifestations of intense longing for someone than reality. We all want some sort of affirmation that our loved one is safe and okay. That is where faith comes into play. We have to trust that God is taking care of them in life and death.

My life derailed. I was stuck living in a place where I felt I didn't belong. Moving from Dallas to the country was a culture shock even though I would visit during the summer. There is a big difference between a vacation and a residence. A person who I loved almost

more than my mom was gone. I felt lost. I tried to keep going the best that I could. The one thing I did learn is life will go on with or without you. Because you lose someone does not mean your own life is over. As hard as moving forward can be, we must continue.

Again, another good thing in my life would end. I kept attending church with my grandpa. I tried to keep moving forward the best that I could, but the anger was brewing inside. It was the perfect storm for me to turn from God.

Looking back, attending that church was not for me. It was all that I knew, so I went. I did love the feeling of going to church. It was often the highlight of my week.

The Pentecostal doctrine is strict when it comes to women's dress. You are not allowed to cut your hair, wear make-up, or jewelry. I cut my hair, but out of respect, I didn't wear make-up or jewelry to church. I guess cutting your hair was not as bad as wearing nail polish because they still let me in the door.

One evening I was at church and was sitting in my usual spot behind the pulpit. I had painted my nails earlier that week and didn't think leaving it on for church was a big deal. It was only nail polish. It wasn't like I came to church looking like the whore of Babylon.

My nail polish was noticed by another member, and I was sent to sit in the back of the church. I felt humiliated like I had committed the ultimate sin. I was upset and angry for being punished for wearing nail polish. You would have thought I suggested a human sacrifice during the evening's service.

I decided if they expelled me for wearing nail polish, that was no longer the church for me. I stopped attending. Some point after that, I declared myself an atheist. I wasn't a great atheist because later I began attending youth group at another church with my friend.

I was no longer a good Christian after those two incidents. Although I did attend a youth group, it was less about God and more about hanging out. I let the devil win and turned from God.

My turn to the world is where my trouble began. I became lost for many years. I know if I would have turned to God, my life would have been much different, but I may not be writing this book if I had kept on the right path. It was the life that I had to experience to get where I am now.

Looking back, I prefer to have taken the path God had in mind for me, but I know my experiences have brought me closer to Him. I can see God rescuing me countless times from situations that could have turned deadly. God was using my sins and mistakes to shape me

into the person I am today. I would prefer to have looked back and not had any adversity. No one wishes for difficulties in life. No one prays to God asking Him to burn down their house or repossess their car.

I know that those trials in my life have strengthened me, helped me to persevere, and grow as a person. After everything that I experienced, I know the good and the bad are all gifts from God because He used it all to show His glory in my life. The key is to remember that all good comes from God and all bad comes from Satan. God is intelligent and He uses the bad to His advantage.

I have learned that nothing lasts forever. That is a painful lesson to learn because endings are painful. Who isn't a little sad at the end of the night when you have spent a great day at the beach or amusement park? You don't want to go home and let the fun end. Who isn't sad when someone dies or a relationship ends? Although that relationship may be toxic or that person may be terminally ill, you don't want to let go of people in your life. There is a season for everything and everyone in our lives. Each person and event are sent from God to shape your life how He sees fit.

Once we realize that God is in control of our lives, we can let go and let God do His work. We can focus on how we react to those situations and people. Instead of

being angry at God for the loss of my granny, I should have rejoiced that she was finally in Heaven with her beloved Jesus and sickness free. The selfish part of us often takes over, and we fail to see the big picture God has set out before us. That is why we are merely humans and can only live moment by moment.

Into the Woods

Into the woods I went for over thirty years, but I never made it to grandma's house. I became the big, bad wolf. I spent years looking for answers in all the wrong places. My life was hanging by a thin thread. Looking back, I am surprised my implosion was not sooner.

I thought I had the bull by the horns and riding life like a champion. I was more like a one-armed bull rider who was barely hanging onto the beast. I have no idea how I hung on as long as I did.

I thought I didn't need God on a daily basis. I mostly went to God when I needed a favor or help. I would say my nightly prayers for God to watch over my family and friends. If something big were coming up, I would pray for God to bring it to fruition. I lived my life on the edge because I was not grounded in my faith. I treated God more like a wish maker. I didn't understand how to have a real relationship with Him. It was more of a Wizard of Oz type

of relationship before they pulled back the curtain. God was this far away entity who magically made things happen. I had no idea who God was.

I was drowning and looking for answers. I would attend church for periods at a time. I had a deep longing to go to church, and I would always feel good after going. However, I was still on the outside looking inward. God was not the primary focus of my life. I didn't talk to God throughout the day like I do now.

For the most part, I was going through the motions. I had no real connection to anything. At times, I thought I was not capable of loving people. What I didn't know is I was trying to love the wrong people and things. I loved money and people who I knew were not right for me. At the time, I thought I was making the right decision. On the surface, I figured I was, but my inner God voice was trying to tell me to go a different way. I was not listening.

I was self-centered and thought I could take on the world and win. In hindsight, I realize that winning in this world is not for me. The world I want to win in is Heaven with Jesus. This world is not made for followers of Jesus. We don't want to lie, cheat, or steal to get ahead in this world. The world almost broke me, but God saved me.

I used to wonder what my life would have been like if I had stayed on the right path. I wonder what kinds of

blessings that I missed because I snubbed God. My trails would probably not have gotten to life-threatening stages. Maybe my life would have been much better if I followed God's instructions. However, I may be a different person now. I know who I am now is who I should be with bruises and all.

God knew I would be rebellious and not listen. He knew everything I would do before I did it. Some things He did stop me from doing while other times He let me experience the heartache from bad decisions. In the end, He used it all to shape me into the person I should have always been. It took me a bit longer than most people because I was stubborn as a mule.

You can spin your wheels playing the what if game all day until you drive yourself insane. It is like playing the game of Life. What am I going to do? Should I go to college or skip college and get a job? That one decision can impact the entire game. Would your life be better if you changed your first decision? Perhaps you needed to take the long road to shape you into your best self like me.

I often took the wrong path, but God wound that path to put me back to where I needed to be. My weakness provided God with a vessel to fill up with His light and strength. In turn, I have become proof of God's love, mercy, and redemption.

There is no cure for my mental illness. Trials still come to challenge me. There are times that I feel like I cannot bear the pain and suffering. I know that God will never leave me. All I need to do is ask God for strength and guidance.

What we need to do is change our attitude how we view the hills and valleys of life. We need to look at life as our training camp. Each trial and tribulation are merely an obstacle to overcome. We can overcome anything when we rely on God for our strength and help. Once our training course is complete, God calls us home to Heaven for eternity.

A Sinful Life

I spent years in turmoil after leaving the church. I turned off my God voice and put my voice in charge. Let's see how well that turned out. I bounced around looking for answers. I thought money would make me happy or a new relationship. I figured if I had the perfect man and the right bank account, I could achieve peace and security. How many of us have found long-term security in either? I would say none of us considering the divorce and debt rate in our country. We are all looking for the same thing, but we cannot find it. It is like the mouse on its exercise wheel. Where are you going? I have no idea, but I am going to run myself to death trying to get there. No wonder a portion of society is on anti-depressants. It is an exhausting life to lead.

I looked at other religions and found nothing. Oddly, I could deny God, but I couldn't reject the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. That is why I couldn't get into other religions. I often wondered who was right, and why they

believed in different religions. That is a topic for another day.

Like most people, I fooled myself into thinking that I was in control. I ignored my sense of personal right and wrong. I started to live for the world. Being cool and partying in high school and beyond became my primary objective. God was not my primary concern.

I am sure that three suicide attempts, three divorces, and my various other antics do not constitute having one's life under control. I always went against my better judgment. I knew I was doing wrong, but I thought I was apprehensive for no reason. I would brush it off as nerves. I would ignore my God voice. God kept trying to bring me back to Him, but I kept running farther away from Him. I am pretty sure Satan was having a ball watching me flounder through life. I no longer give that fool that satisfaction. Each time I went against my God voice, disaster would occur. Lived my life in constant chaos making one bad decision after another. I was like watching a cringe-worthy reality show. It was not pretty. I thought that I was fabulous. I was more like appalling.

I thrived on self-induced drama and chaos. The sin that I created began to take its toll on me. I became numb at fifteen years old. I convinced myself that I had lived long

enough. I had no desire to continue living. My mental health deteriorated rapidly.

I used to cross the road to catch the bus each morning hoping that a car would hit me. I wished for death until one evening under the influence of a lot of alcohol and facing yet another bout of trouble; I proceed to take every pill that I could find in the bathroom.

God wasn't letting me go that easy. My mom found me, and with my best friend, drove me as I puked my way to the hospital. I don't suggest suicide to anyone. For one, having tubes shoved down your nose to pump your stomach is extremely painful. Second, our troubles are only temporary. Death is a permanent answer to a temporary situation. It is no answer at all.

That didn't deter me from trying again over ten years later after being diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder, and my first marriage fell apart. That was all a long time coming. It was the perfect Tsunami that overtook my soul.

Looking back, I knew God wasn't going to let me kill myself. What I have learned is you can pull that trigger all you want, but if God isn't ready for you to die, nothing you can do will trump God's will.

You can only live in sin for so long. Eventually, you will sink under its weight. I was trying to swim with fifty-pound weights tied to each foot. I am surprised I didn't fall

faster than I did, but my will is strong, and I kept flapping my arms. I went nowhere, but in my mind, I was winning the triathlon.

The negativity will take root and fester like an infected sore inside your soul. This infection will spread and envelope you in a disease of the soul.

I put myself in many dangerous situations. I would drink and drive in high school. I would get into detrimental relationships. I would take unnecessary risks to see what I could get away with in life. My friends and I would shoplift for the thrill. If it was forbidden, I was going to be the one who did it. My grades suffered. I was suspended from school and kicked off the cheerleading squad. I became a parental nightmare, but no matter how much trouble I incurred, I could not be deterred. It became a game to me. Getting grounded became a waiting game until I could win back my freedom and see what was next in my bag of tricks.

All I cared about was having fun. I had a lot of fun, but it came at a price. I was no longer myself. I didn't like the person who I had become. It was not me. My antics caused myself and others tremendous pain.

God was always watching over me through it all. I know that because, for all of the harm I could have incurred, I made it out relatively unscathed except for

regret and shame. Through those experiences, I was able to guide my brother and son away from the life that I led. I would go through it all again to be able to save someone the heartache that I went through during my ill-spent youth.

When we stray from God's path, we often find ourselves in situations or doing things that are contrary to our best interests. Meanwhile, we convince ourselves that we deserve to have fun and enjoy life. You only live once, right? Yes, you do live only once, so make it count for something other than getting drunk at the next party. Where do you want to end up for eternity?

In my youthful rebellion, my main thought was far from eternity. Although, the idea of going to hell terrified me. I knew that if I kept on this path, I had little chance of making it to Heaven. Even that didn't deter me because although God, Heaven, and Hell were real to me, it wasn't my reality. I was living in the world. As we know, living in the world is a dangerous road to travel because Satan rules that road. He is there to deceive you into thinking that living in sin is the right way to travel through life. It is like buying a junker car and thinking it is a Ferrari. You know eventually, that car is going to break down and at the most inopportune time.

We live on earth in our human body only once, but our soul is eternal. To most of us, we hear that message, but

we fail to listen. That is why many people can go to church on Sunday and stab you in the back on Monday. God's message isn't sticking because we are too busy trying to be a successful part of society. We get trapped into thinking that the pursuit of happiness includes a fancy car, a big house, and a fabulous life. How many people are burnt out trying to achieve the unachievable? Real peace is given through God not the balance in your 401K account.

My first sin was letting my granny's passing and being mistreated as church turn me from God. Anger is not a tender guide. Anger will blind you to everything good in life. I began drinking and partying. That became my favorite past time. None of that led to anything good. Eventually, that sin pushed me over the edge, and I tried to commit suicide.

I remember laying in the bed at the psych ward crying myself to sleep. I was at the lowest point in my life. My depression consumed every fiber of my being. I had no hope in my life. I was a robot who was going through the pre-programmed motions of my life. I pushed myself further into the woods. Life became cheap to me even if I didn't realize it.

I still didn't turn back to God. Once I got out of the hospital two months later, I went back to my sinful ways. Life returned to normal. I was a bit more cautious as I

didn't want to end up back into the hospital. Not even near death woke me up.

I resumed my rebellious ways which led to my mom sending me to live with my dad and step-mom. At sixteen, I went back to Texas. I loved living with them and thought I would never leave Texas again. My life seemed to smooth out except for one incident of skipping school to go to the movies. Overall, I was doing well for once. It was a feeling of peace that I needed along with spending precious time with my dad.

As I said throughout this book, nothing lasts forever. A few months later, my father became ill and passed away. That was the third lowest point in my life at that time. I felt a vast emptiness inside me. It was like a small part of me died too, and I was left with a hole in my heart. I wasn't angry at God this time, but I didn't turn to him either. I remember being very sad for a long time. Now, I understand that his time on earth was over.

The overwhelming sadness that would hit me like a tidal wave at times continued for years. As with any loss, some days are easier than others. I moved forward in life because I knew my dad was not one to want me to wallow in my self-pity.

In retrospect, I realize I was mourning my dad and granny simultaneously. My heart finally melted enough to

allow me to grieve. The pain I felt at times made me want to sink into my bed until it smothered me.

With time, I began to heal the festering wound inside my heart. The emptiness that once engulfed me became bearable. Life continued as normal. I think when you lose someone the hardest part is to realize that life will continue. You feel like your world has stopped, so why hasn't the outside world ceased with you? I think that is part of the healing process. You must immerse yourself back into the world of the living to allow yourself to heal.

It does not mean that you forget the ones you love. The key is to realize that this separation between Heaven and earth is only temporary. I hold on to the hope that all of my loved ones will unite with me in Heaven once again.

The time we are apart on earth will be inconsequential compared to the eternity we will spend in harmony together with God. That hope makes the temporary separation a bit more bearable. I will suffer the loss to receive eternal life with them in Heaven.

Control

Everyone has a story of triumph and defeat. When I entered college after high school, I thought I would reap only victories. My party days were pretty much behind me. With my new-found independence, I focused on getting ahead in the world. I was going to achieve greatness. I failed to realize that no achievement is worthwhile without God. Nothing permanent can be accomplished without God. Everything we have is from God, but I was unable to understand that concept. All of our achievements should be done in the name of God for His glory.

I was spinning my wheels. I would take one step forward and three steps backward. I was putting in the maximum effort with little return.

College started out well. My grades were good. I had a goal to become a teacher. I wanted to teach high school English and be a cheerleading advisor. I lived at home the most of my first year until I moved to an off-campus apartment. I was working as a waitress part-time. I appeared to be a typical college student.

I met my current husband that year. We met at a crappy bar in the town where I lived. He was in the military

in North Carolina at the time. He was the love of my life until he broke my heart.

My life began to unravel a bit after that. I started to bounce around between jobs and boyfriends. School took a back seat, and I took a couple of quarters off. I felt like my plan no longer fit my life. I fell off my path.

I thought rules were meant to be broken; I was good at breaking them. The only person I needed to answer to was myself. I only listened to what fit my narrative. If the situation didn't suit me, I would manipulate it until it did. I was proud that I usually got my way. I thought that I was brilliantly talented.

I lived my life without consequence. I could resolve anything with time and an apology. Since I don't usually hold grudges, I felt no one should keep one against me. I believe that everyone deserves second chances if they are genuinely sorry for their offense toward me.

Most people do not operate that way. They become bitter and angry at you. They don't forget your offenses toward them. Forgiveness does not come quickly to the majority of the world. There is nothing healthy about dwelling on the negative. Although, there are times that I get caught up in the negativity ride and cannot get off of it. I prefer to learn from it and move forward. However,

everything I learned was outside of God. I was not learning the lessons that God was trying to teach me.

I lived my life as everyone should forgive me whenever I am wrong. I was not concerned with the fall out of my actions. I didn't have time for consequences. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Now, I understand how my actions affected other people in my life.

My selfish and manipulative behavior only invited trouble and drama into my life. I wove many tangled webs of lies and deceit. It was a game to me. I thought I was winning.

I was feeding the beast, and the creature increased. My lust for drama and attention were insatiable. Most of my problems were self-created. I now realize that none of it added any value to my life. In actuality, I was demeaning myself and ruining my character.

I listened to no one and always had to be in charge. I did what I wanted without regard to other's opinions. I was allowed to get away with things that most people get into trouble. My senior year in high school I was late every day to homeroom. Did I get into trouble? No, my teacher didn't take attendance until I showed up. My cousin, who rode to school with me, didn't fare as well. He ended up

with a Saturday detention. I felt a little sorry for him, but mostly, I found it funny.

During my senior year in college, I took a sociology/geography class. It was my last quarter, and I was exhausted from being pregnant and working full time. Studying was not my first concern. I went to class and was surprised to learn we had a quiz that day. I barely showed up for class much less opened the book. Much to my astonishment, it was a short answer essay quiz. I had no idea if my answers were correct, but I started writing. When I received my test back, there was a note on the exam saying she gave me an A not because my answers were correct, but because they were so well written that they could have been right.

Incidents like that fed my ego. It fueled my lousy attitude. I was threatened for my bad behavior, but no real repercussions ever happened. I continued to push the envelope of my life. One day, I would open that envelope up and find my chances were used up.

My lifestyle was unsatisfying. I believe without a real focus in life such as on God; you can never find contentment. I was always looking for the next opportunity. If something new grabbed my attention, I would move on to that. This attitude applied to all aspects of my life

especially relationships. I was only happy if I was supplied with a steady stream of treats.

None of this was from God. None of it kept me lusting for more either. My real desire was God, but I didn't realize that until later. I tried to substitute God for earthly possessions. No amount of clothes or make up can fulfill the longing that can only be satisfied by a relationship with God. I was like a cup with a hole in the bottom. You can fill it up all day long, but it will always be empty.

Eventually, my soul became like a burnt out abandoned building in the middle of a decayed ghetto. I was either going to be rebuilt or demolished forever.

You can try to patch up the building, but underneath the thin coat of paint is a film of rust. The decay never stops. It continues to rot. The foundation has disintegrated to the point of collapse. Any moment the building will fall. It is only a matter of time unless someone intervenes. The only one who can save this building is the original builder Himself.

When we rely on our self and try to control our own lives, we tend to turn from God. We think we are strong and need no one. God will still watch over you, but He will get to the point when He steps back and lets you go. It is like the kid who rides their bike without training wheels for the first time. It is inevitable that the kid will fall.

When you are walking with God, those training wheels are not removed. We need to lean on God in all we do for our strength and wisdom. We were not meant to ride through life alone. We were not made to be far from God. We were made to live dependent on God. We need His training wheels to lean on when life gets hard.

You have to give God back control over your life. This dependence does not mean that you lose your ability to make decisions. God gave us free will so we can have choices. Sometimes those choices can be too much, or we make the wrong ones. Before we get trapped into a life of bad decisions, we can turn to God for direction. Now, God may allow you to make a wrong decision, but through that wrong choice, God can use it to teach you a lesson. Through those lessons, we begin to mature in spirit.

Growing with God is all a lifelong process. Even when you decide to let go and give it to God, we still want to control our lives. I believe that is out of fear of the unknown because we don't fully understand God. We have all read about God, but none of us have met God. There is always a fear of the what if. What if I give this unseen entity control of my life? How will I know if I am still doing the right or wrong thing in life? God will let you know.

I told my husband during a discussion that I was afraid to die. He said to me that I needed to get right with God. His words struck me to the core of my soul. It was like God was speaking directly to me through my husband. I knew he was right. I had a few more unresolved issues with God. When we give God the reigns, He will use different tools in our life to keep us on the right path.

God does not want to force us into a relationship with Him. God could easily control our lives and make us obey His will. Instead, God invites us to get to know Him and develop an unbreakable bond. Once I realized that God was better at controlling my life than me, a sense of peace and security began to wash over me. I knew I could depend on God to get me through any situation.

Decisions

I made one wrong decision after another. I spent most of my high school years starring in my own show called "One Grounding after Another." I was a professional at finding trouble. Mischief became my middle name. I hope you cannot relate. I managed to survive and make it out of high school and into college.

Men were my sore point. After my fiancé disappeared during my freshman year of college and crushing all of my plans, I bounced from one bad relationship to another. I never took a break to evaluate myself and figure out my direction. I replaced one man with another. I thought the best way to get over the old was someone new. That trend continued until I reunited with my first love and current husband.

I think a lot of people do that. We don't stop and look inward at what is wrong in our relationships. Although I was not afraid of being alone at the time, I felt incomplete without a boyfriend. I thought I needed someone to fill the void in my life. I didn't realize that only God could fill my void.

During my early twenties, I met my first husband. I had recently ended another unproductive relationship. I was tired and vulnerable. I was tired of the chaos and instability in my life. I wanted something reliable and dependable.

Enter husband number one. We worked together at a local restaurant. Later, I found out he got a job there to get to know me. I thought that was sweet. His actions reminded me of my college fiancé who would drive from North Carolina to Ohio to see me on the weekends. No one had ever gone to such great lengths to be with me. I thought husband number one might also fall into that category.

He was kind to me. He seemed stable and reliable. I was living about an hour away from him, and he would drive to my parent's house to pick me up for dates. He bought me presents and went above and beyond to woo me.

All these beautiful gestures were sweet, but I was not attracted to him. I had to force myself to like him. If you tell yourself something long enough, it becomes true. I ignored my God voice and proceeded with the relationship against my better judgment.

On the surface our relationship was right, behind the scenes I forced a happy face. I found out later that he told lies to me. His lies were silly to make him look better than he was. I realize now his low self-esteem almost destroyed me. He projected his shortcomings onto me, and

I started to lose myself. He was controlling, and I became substandard. Nothing I did was good enough for him. I grew dependent on him. I didn't love him, but I didn't know how to be without him.

I felt stuck and angry, but I didn't want to get divorced. He was a police officer, and as bad as it sounds, I hoped that someone would kill him on the job. I was eaten up with guilt for wishing his death. I wanted out so desperately. I didn't think I would survive leaving him. My self-esteem was in the negative.

The end came about two years after we moved to Toledo for his job. I didn't want to relocate because I was in school, I had friends and a job. I was finally starting to recover a bit. He told me that I had nothing in Cincinnati, and I needed to move to Toledo. I thought I was a good wife and doing my duty to move with him. I left everything behind against my better judgment and moved to Toledo.

I fell apart rapidly after our move. I bounced between bouts of debilitating depression where I would not leave the house for days at a time. I would sleep most of the day and stay up all night. I would move from a depressed state to an energized state where I could barely sleep. I felt out of control. I could not get out of my funk, and I became afraid something was wrong as this was a new experience for me. I was always able to put out of these states.

A few weeks later, we went to see a psychiatrist. The doctor diagnosed me with Bi-Polar disorder. I was relieved to find out what was wrong. I read everything I could to learn about my mental illness. I was going to beat it.

The doctor put me several medications, and I started to feel better. I went back to work, but the medicines made me exhausted, and I started gaining weight. One day I went home for lunch and fell asleep sitting up on my couch for two hours. I was trying my best to hang on.

I thought a new job, a new college major, and buying a house would solve my woes. I became a camp counselor at the local YMCA. I switched my major to early childhood education. We bought a cute, little house down the street from where I worked. At first, we seemed to settle back down. I still had one foot out of the door, and he knew it.

I tried to hold it together, but I was miserable. I slept most of the time. I eventually quit my job and school. I spent days laying on the couch locked in my depression.

My husband was also in the National Guard and would go away once a month for training. We would always talk on the phone when he was away. This particular Saturday, he was not answering his phone. My fears kicked in because it was not like him to ignore my

calls. I thought something terrible happened to him, so I called him repeatedly throughout the day with no answer. Later that evening, he finally answered and started screaming at me. He told me he wanted a divorce. I was shocked. I never expected him to divorce me although I fantasized about divorcing him often. I was too afraid to do it. I have found that God will often force the things upon us that we are too scared to do ourselves to make us change. I was left to fester alone for the remainder of the weekend.

I was already fragile as I was fresh out of the hospital a few weeks earlier for being suicidal. I was already on the brink of self-destruction. The actual timeline is not clear now, but a few days later, I broke. I could not handle the emptiness and pain. I felt like my world shattered, and I was lost. I was tired, and I didn't want to be a part of the world any longer.

While my husband was at work, I proceeded to write my family a note goodbye, and take every pill in my medicine cabinet. I turned on the tv and laid down on the couch for what I thought would be my last nap. I quit my life.

I am not sure how long I was on the couch before my husband came home. He thought I was sleeping as usual. Our dog was frantically running back and forth between the bedroom where he was changing from work to

the living room where it appeared I was sleeping. My husband realized something was amiss and went into the living room. The dog was going crazy, and he found my note on the ottoman. He rushed me to the hospital where I woke up throwing up black charcoal all over myself hours later. You would think I would have learned from the last time.

After several days in the hospital, I return home to my car packed up and plans to move back to Southern Ohio to stay with my mom and step-dad. My heart shattered into a trillion pieces. I thought it would never heal. I never planned to get divorced. In fact, I never intended to get married in the first place. Something I wanted to work so desperately was over. Getting divorced was the ultimate failure to me. On the other hand, the farther away I drove from Toledo, a sense of peace had settled over me. I knew I had a long time to heal, but I knew I would be okay. In time, the pain would lessen, and eventually, I was able to wish him well.

I had no business pursuing a relationship when I met my second husband. We were both getting divorced, and neither of us was ready to date. I fell back into my old habit of replacing one relationship with another. He was a sweet man, but he had issues. Not that I didn't come with my own set of problems as I can be a difficult person. All

three husbands have told me that I am a hard person to love. He was not a bad person, and I think he tried to be a father and a husband, but his problems got the best of him in the end. Divorcing him was a difficult decision because we had a child together, but I knew that I had to put the best interests of our son first. As painful as it was to get divorced again, I filed when our son was five. I became a two-time divorcee. I was knocking them out of the park.

He passed away a few years ago. I had hoped that my son would never experience the pain of losing a parent at a young age. Sometimes, I have found, that life repeats itself until we learn its lesson. I take solace knowing that he is now in Heaven living pain-free. One day, I will get to see him again, and have a good laugh together.

Anyone of us could end up overwhelmed by our problems, so holding a weakness against someone is not helpful. I try to keep in mind the good times we had together and let go of the bad. Our son is a beautiful reminder of something special we once shared.

My third marriage lasted about three months. I have no idea why I married him other than I settled. I prefer not to speak ill of him, but he was not a person that I should have dated or married. He was not an evil person, but he was not good for me. Again, I went against my better judgment. God had enough of me, and He tried one more

time to see if I would listen. Little did I know once I did look to Him, my world would turn upside down and inside out.

I was sitting at work one day when a voice in my head urged me to find Edward Greenlee. It was an intense and urgent voice. It was a voice that I could not ignore. It was one out of nowhere as it was an ordinary day.

Edward was the love of my life who disappeared on me over twenty years prior. I thought about him from time to time over the years. Once the internet came about, I tried to find him from time to time with no success. I had not thought of him in years. It was odd that I was thinking of him now and with an urgency to find him. I tried to ignore that voice, but it would not go away.

I didn't know where to start to find him. I decided to search Facebook. I saw him instantly. He didn't have much personal information and only a few posts that were months old. I was not sure if he was married or had kids. I was nervous. I was not sure if he remembered me or wanted to remember me.

I decide to send him a message. It was a general message saying hello. I waited in anticipation for a response. Days and weeks went by with no answer. Almost two months later he responded.

I know now that he recently returned home from a vacation to Las Vegas when he got my message. During that trip, he had decided that he was going to get rid of his apartment and take off driving through the desert and stop wherever the wind took him. He was going to live the life as a nomad. God had a different plan for him. After he made that decision to become a drifter, he received my message. He struggled for weeks on whether or not to answer me.

He finally answered me. We send a few messages and texts back and forth that evening. After my son went to bed, I called him. We talked for hours like when we were young. No time seemed to have passed between us. It was like we spoke the day before. He told me that he still loved me, and he was coming to get me. We started to plan our new life together. The next day, I informed husband number three that we were going to get a divorce. Four years later, our marriage is stronger every day.

More Decisions

Not all of my decisions were bad. Although, to the outside world I appeared irrational. Even my most irrational ideas were planned out. They are not always reasonable plans, but there is thought behind my action. When I am not going against my better judgment, my life tends to go smoothly. I am not saying that I don't have troubles in life. I don't have the self-induced dramas when I tune into my God voice.

I have learned that nothing in life is perfect. I am okay with that. I need to find what is ideal for me. God will let you know what He thinks about your decisions if you listen. I have seen the best direction I receive are when I take my plans to God in prayer. I ask God to bless my decisions and let me know if I should go in a particular direction. I pray to God that His will be done. When I try to go on my own will, my life ends up in disaster.

It took me almost fourteen years to finish college. I bounced around from major to major. I took time off. I went part-time. When I became pregnant with my son, I knew it was time to get serious and finish. If you are struggling to complete something in your life, keep

chipping away at it. Every class that I finished was one step closer to graduation. Each day that we live is one step closer to Heaven with God. Every goal starts with a step.

Each part we finish gets us closer to the finish line. One thing I have learned is never to give up. I may fall. I may crash so hard that no one thinks I will get back up. I know that God will always help me get back up and keep going. I am like Humpty Dumpty with Heavenly glue on my side. We all have that inner strength through God. We have to learn to tap into it on a daily basis. A continuous infusion of God's power is what keeps us going through the everyday trials of life.

I always thought I was on the right track. In reality, I was lost to the point where I no longer recognized myself. I was mentally and physically exhausted. I am surprised I didn't break sooner than I did. I was not who God created. God didn't create us merely to survive. He created us to thrive. My entire life was suffering. I kept trying to move forward, but I was only going in circles. I didn't realize it. It took God to take everything away from me and completely break me before I would listen. Sad as that is, He knew that was the only thing that would work for me. I was falling fast, and only drastic measures would work. I am not pleased with the way everything turned out. I know God has reasons for why things happened the way they did.

Eventually, I will see the big picture and understand His plan. Until that time, I have to trust His judgment over mine.

Into the Storm

We all go through changes and transformations in life. We are supposed to grow and develop ourselves as we age. I became someone I didn't know. I was sick, but the doctor told me that I was okay. I was overweight and always exhausted. My hair was thinning. I knew something was wrong, but all of my test results came back normal. No one listens when the tests are normal. I was far from normal. You could see it by looking at me.

I began seeing a new psychiatrist who switched my medication. I initially started to get my energy back and lose a little weight. That was short lived. The waves of exhaustion hit me again. I could not get enough sleep. I was stuck in the middle of an oasis but was only able to drink sand. I felt like I was slowly dying.

By the time my husband came back into my life, I was an absolute mess. I cannot believe he stayed with me, but he told me he knew the real me was in there. He was going to do everything to help me get back to myself.

The only person who could help me was God, but I was still distant from Him. My inner battle spilled over into my outside world. I was a shell of my former self. I felt

like I would never find myself again. Sometimes, it takes your whole world collapsing to figure out who you are.

I knew I needed a change, but I wasn't sure what. I decided that we should move to South Texas. I wanted to leave the bad memories behind for us all and start life over.

I began researching our destination. I started planning and saving the money we needed to move. I had a solid plan. I knew exactly how much money I needed to replace all of our belongings. I knew which stores we would buy our new furniture from after we arrived. On paper, I appeared to have everything seamlessly mapped out.

What I failed to do was to consult God on my plans. Often, our will for our lives goes against God's will for our lives. When those two wills collide, we lose. God always trumps us. You cannot go toe to toe with God and expect to win. That is why we are all living in sin on this earth today because Satan tried to fight God. Fighting God is futile. Your life turns out much better when you ask for His will to be done in your life. I didn't learn that lesson until later.

I had not consulted God on anything in my life before then, so I saw no reason to do it at that time. I got rid of all of my belongings only to keep what would fit into our two cars. I do not regret doing that. It was a lesson in finding out what is important and what one needs to

survive. I found that my happiness regarding material goods requires very little. As long as I have food, a roof over my head, and clothing, the rest is noise.

By doing that, lots of people thought I was crazy for getting rid of my belongings. I would do it all again because it helped me to break up with materialism. I realized that I don't need things to bring me joy. I opened my eyes to pure joy which is only found in Jesus.

While I thought I was running from something, in reality, I was running straight back to God. With every choice, there is a consequence. God can turn the ugly into beauty for our lives. He can take the worst tragedy and turn into our greatest triumph.

The stress of the move started to take its toll on me. Mania began to set in, but I didn't realize it. I thought I was excited and nervous about the move. As the days wore on, the mania began to grow quickly. I had no idea what was in store for me. I was determined to get to Texas. God was resolved for me not go, but I was not listening. I told my friend that I had a feeling that something terrible was going to happen. I shook off the feeling of being silly. Knowing what was in store for me, God began to prepare me.

The movie "Heaven is for Real" had recently been released. I had a sudden hunger to see the film. I became almost desperate to watch it. One evening, while everyone

was sleeping, I watched it. God was opening the door to me.

A few nights later, God opened the door. Everyone was asleep again, and I was alone in the living room. I had the urge that I desperately needed to "get right" with God. I started to pray like my life depended on it. Little did I know; my life did depend on it. I prayed about everything and anything that came to mind. I asked God to forgive me of my sins and to bring me back to Him. By the end of my prayer session, I felt renewed. I felt like it was something long overdue in my life. God saved me, but I had no idea of the horrors ahead of me. Without God in my life, I would still be lying in the hospital barely able to know my name.

The day came to leave Kentucky, and we packed up the cars and headed directly into my storm. Down the road, I went from chaos to redemption.

Coming up: Life Lessons from God: Finding Your Eye in the Storm. The story about my descent into madness and eventual recovery.

