

RIDICULOUS REDEMPTION

Powerful Testimonies of How God Redeems

Stouthearted Publishing

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To those seeking redemption

RIDICULOUS: Preposterous, implausible, impossible, bizarre, incomprehensible

REDEMPTION: Atonement, penance, absolution, compensation, rectification

{ FOREWORD }

By: Mandy Fender

Psalm 107:2 "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."

Sometimes it seems as if we are swimming in a sea of our own mistakes, drowning in the things we wish we could take back, the words we wish we could unsay. Often times, people judge us based on who we used to be and what we used to do.

Have you ever had someone judge you because of where you came from or what you had done in your past? Do you have people count you out, say you're not enough, or throw accusations at you? Have you ever felt or had someone say God can't use you because of who you used to be?

We actually all have an enemy who is called the 'accuser of the brethren' dredging up old things to make us feel bad, stumble, and fall. The devil would love to keep us down by bringing up the past or present circumstances that God is able to forgive us of and fully redeem us from. Guilt and shame have a way of backing believers into a corner and boxing them in so that they cannot live to their fullest in Christ. We have to get to the place in our lives where *enough is enough* and we come to the realization that God is able to redeem us. God can redeem anyone from anywhere at any time.

Life has a way of tearing you down. God has a way of lifting you back up!

Ridiculous Redemption is about shining a light on the power of the blood of Jesus Christ and God's willingness to restore and redeem those who come to Him. God's redemption is so complete and full that it is really ridiculous, I mean seriously, He has seen the darkest part of our hearts, yet still chooses to love us and use us in His Kingdom. It doesn't make sense that He would use who He uses to bring Him glory. When we look at the Bible we see He uses incredibly weak and imperfect people to accomplish His extraordinary and perfect plan. And He is still doing that today. I have no idea why He still uses me after all I have done. I have things in my life that should have, could have, and would have taken me out if it had not been for Ridiculous Redemption. I believe in God's ability so much

that I had to stop counting people out based on my own thoughts and feelings. I learned when it comes to God's redemption, I can't count anybody out.

To the world, it doesn't seem reasonable that God would redeem those who are so far from Him. How could anyone redeem someone so lost? I don't know how God does it and sometimes I don't know why, except for the fact that HE LOVES US.

I want to give you Biblical examples from both Testaments to show you God's heart from the beginning all the way to the end. I mean, God is for us! He proves that time and time again. His willingness to use us despite all of our failures and all of our flaws is amazing. He keeps on redeeming!

Example of Ridiculous Redemption in the Old Testament:

2 Chronicles 33:9 (NIV) "But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites."

The Bible goes on to say that Manasseh even goes as far as ignoring the voice of the Lord when God spoke to Him. I think we can all say we've been there. There have been times when we didn't listen like we should. But the good news is that God is still speaking, still whispering into the hearts of men.

Manasseh's story does not end there.

Verse 12 "In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God."

Even after all that, the Lord was still willing to redeem Manasseh in his old age. I think it's crazy that the Bible goes as far as saying that God was still *his* God despite all of the evil he had done. It's ridiculous. It doesn't make any sense to the natural eye, but God's redemption is not like man's. All it takes for God to redeem is a sincere cry out from a repentant heart. And after a sincere plea to God He sees you as His, not who you used to be.

Manasseh is recorded as one of the vilest men of all time. All I know is that if God is merciful and gracious enough to hear *his* cry, He will also hear *our* cry. All we have to do is humble ourselves.

Example of Ridiculous Redemption in the New Testament:

Luke 23:38-43(NIV) “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

“But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Even when we deserve what we are getting, God chooses to redeem us. He doesn't have to, He chooses to. The cross is enough to redeem! The blood of Christ is strong enough to cover even the “biggest” of sinners – the murderers, the thieves, the liars, the adulterers, the drug abusers, the prostitutes. It may sound ridiculous, but that is exactly why He did what He did on the cross. He bled, so we could be redeemed. And I can't thank Him enough for it.

As we see in these two examples, it doesn't matter whether you are an old man on your death bed or a young man awaiting your death sentence, GOD REDEEMS!

I know this because I am a sinner, not perfect in any way, yet God sees me as a masterpiece because of Christ. I want to encourage you; you are not too far from God's reach! I don't know what you've done but I do know what Jesus has done. Jesus took our blame. The accusations against you are on Him when you accept Him as your Lord and Savior.

We are all imperfect people who need the perfect Savior and Redeemer. The worst parts of our pasts teach us about God's love. And it is from my deepest shame that I learned the depth of God's love and the power of His redemption. Let your past be the strength of your testimony and not the chains of your future. Through the cross, Christ has redeemed us. He bought us back. Freed us from ourselves *and* our pasts. He repaired and restored. He atoned for. In Him, we are new, white as snow. We must live in His redemption every single day. Our redemption is not about how we redeem ourselves but how Christ has redeemed us at the cross already.

There is also redemption from hurt others have caused.

Sometimes you go through things that are of no fault of your own that lead you down a destructive path. Allow God to redeem you from the darkness that others have caused you. Was it right what they did to you? No. Is God able to restore and redeem you even from what wasn't your fault? Absolutely.

God is bigger, stronger, and greater than any of us can fathom. He can use the darkest time in your life to shine the brightest light. In this book, you will see some very raw and real things that God has redeemed people from, including hardship that they had no control over. If God did it for them, He can do it for you.

God can redeem anyone.

God can redeem you!

From the man sitting in the prison cell – to the woman standing on the street corner – to the prodigal – to the one on his deathbed questioning eternity – to the one who just feels too far from God – to the one who is crippled by the past, God is able to restore and redeem even when it doesn't make sense.

Maybe you are reading this fully aware of how God has redeemed you; I pray these testimonies of Ridiculous Redemption remind you just how far God has brought you and how good He is. I hope it spurs faith in you to share your own story of Ridiculous Redemption.

At the end of the day, I pray we can all look up to the heavens and shout, “Thank you, God, for your Ridiculous Redemption!”

No testimony is too small or too great. God redeems us from little things that nag us to the big things that try to stop us. I truly believe in the power of a testimony. We overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony.

We have two choices when it comes to our mistakes – we can **live in** them OR **learn from** them.

I choose the latter. It is not easy to put yourself out there, especially the worst part, but that is exactly what these men and women are doing by sharing their testimonies and I praise God for their bravery, honesty, and willingness to share what God has done on their behalf. They share to glorify God and what He has done for them and in them, and that is truly inspiring to me. We all know what it is like to have a past, but now we also know what it is like to have a future in Christ.

Without further ado...

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!

From the Club to the Altar

Nicole's Testimony

I was 19 years old and on vacation in Cancun when I cried out to God for the first time in my life. Before that, I had been a self-professed Atheist – convinced that no deity or extraordinary power existed. The last night of the trip, my friends and I were having fun in a club and by the time I realized that something had been slipped into my drink it was too late.

I was severely ill and passed out for several hours. When I woke up, I was lying on the bathroom floor of that club. Someone said an ambulance was on the way, but it never arrived. I remember people were gathered around me, just staring at me as a stranger tried to keep me from passing out again. I began to feel so cold and all the noise around was fading into one muffled pounding sound. I could hear only my heartbeat as it slowed down. I still struggle for the right description, but it seemed as if my spirit and body were separating, being violently torn in two and I knew that I was going to Hell – I felt as if I was being ripped from my own skin. I knew that moment that it was true. Hell is real: it's hot, it's grotesque. The sounds that protrude from that horrid pit are alarming and obscene. The violent yells and tortured screams are gut-wrenching. It was so painful and so dark, and void of the presence of God and that is the prevailing punishment.

The only words that managed to escape my mouth were: "God, please help me!" because I remembered a Christian lady told me once, "Whoever calls upon the Lord will be saved." – So I did that, and He spared me.

With a loud gasp, I sat up. The moment was surreal like a scene from a movie. It was as if God breathed life back into me. He saved me, literally. When I returned home from that trip, I began attending church, and I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior in October of the year 2000 and have been living for Him and serving in His Kingdom ever since. When God redeems, He does it right!

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Drugs to Deliverance

JoAnn's Testimony

When I began experimenting with drugs and alcohol, I had no plan to spend the next 30 years of my life doing it. With every substance I ended up abusing, it started out with me just wanting to “try it”. However, it didn’t turn out that way. That’s the way sin is. Sin kept me much longer than I planned to stay; sin took me much farther than I planned to go. Sin made me spend more money than I planned to spend. The truth I want to make very clear is that it was always my choice, and I take full responsibility for it all.

During those 30 very long years of daily abusing substances, I knew what it was to wake up with a total blackout of the previous night; not being able to remember anything I said, or did, the night before. I knew what it was to wake up every morning, and the first thought I had was taking inventory of what drugs and alcohol I had for that day. I knew what it was to be in bondage and to be a prisoner of sin. Now, I wake up with my mind stayed on Jesus and a fresh praise on my lips to start the day!

Now (after having been arrested by God’s unconditional love), I am signed (in the Lamb’s Book of Life), sealed (by His Holy Spirit), and delivered! I know what it is to be not only delivered, but set totally free (John 8:36)! Now, I am addicted to Jesus and the ministry of His saints! I am 100% souled out to Jesus! I am an overcomer! I am a disciple of Christ Jesus (John 8:31-32)! My

past is redeemed! My present makes sense! My future is secure! I am a finisher! I am a praiser and worshiper!

God saved me in spite of me. Then He filled me and baptized me with His Holy Ghost! What God has done for me, He can and will do for you, too! He's calling you. Do you hear Him? Will you choose to answer Him and call on the name of Jesus today?

I am an Overcomer by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the word of my testimony (Revelation 12:11). After 30 years of daily substance abuse (which included various illegal and prescription drugs, alcohol and cigarettes), I have been living a victorious and fruitful life in Christ Jesus for 18 years.

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Victim to Victorious

Justin's Testimony

My story is one not too uncommon, seemingly. Being raised in the South, Greenville, MS to be exact, there was always a strict religious standard as to what you can do and what you can't do. My parents were active in church, my dad, the organist, and my mother, the choir member. To put it short, our home was dysfunctional and falling to ruins. My dad was involved in adultery that destroyed their marriage. My mother, who was devastated, decided that she would move to San Antonio. She had more family there. I decided to stay with my Dad. It was a journey that altered my very existence.

At about 10, I was sexually molested by my brother's friend, a football player, who no one would expect. It happened in a bathroom while others played Dragon Ball Z. I never understood why God kept letting these things happen to me. I mean, couldn't HE control the universe, right? That's what I thought, at least. Then it spiraled. By the time I was 12, I was verbally and physically abused by my stepmother over and over until about the age 14. Then, already struggling with my identity, I was involved in a sexual relationship with a young man that led me down the road of prostitution. Over the span of 2 years, I lied about who I was and developed two different lifestyles. I lost so much of myself that Satan had planted seeds of doubt, depression, suicide, low self-esteem, and confusion. I thought it would end, and I was tired, hurt and broken. I needed help.

It didn't make sense for God to reach down into my mess, but He did. He stepped right in the middle of it to get me out. His hand reached down for me right where I was and He loves me so much He picked me up. I can honestly say that my journey to deliverance and confidence in Christ has been one that has challenged the very nature of God's plans for my life. I have experienced the redemptive power of Christ and learned the power of forgiveness and that

nothing can separate you from the love of Jesus – not a broken home, not molestation, not even prostitution took me out of His reach. You are not too far for God to save you. His arms stretch wide. His Son paid the price for every one of my hurts and mistakes.

I ended up moving to San Antonio to live with my mother where I went to a revival and got fully delivered. I got baptized in the Holy Spirit, and God radically changed my purpose in life. I want nothing more than to please God. There is no pain that Jesus cannot solve. Now, I am able to worship Him freely because of His Ridiculous Redemption!

God's got a plan for you! (Jeremiah 29:11)

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Outcast to Disciple

Chris' Testimony

A man by the name of Rex Johnson once said that we should 'mark our miracles', I believe that God's hand has been over my life ever since I was born and that if I were to write my whole testimony, it would be a lot bigger than what would be able to fit into this chapter, so I'll seek to tell you as much as I can, but mind you, it's not all of it.

If you were to tell me 10 years ago that I would be where I am today, I wouldn't believe you; I would've told you that I have desired to be an impact and an influence, but I would never expect it to happen in this sense. God works in ways that we don't understand at the time, but if we will allow God to take us through, He will show us what He was doing all along.

On May 4, 1997, I was born premature, 5 lbs. with a lot of major health complications. Not only that, but my father left my mom before I was even born, the future seemed very dark from a doctor's standpoint for me and my mom, but God simply refused, and He knew that I was called to be an 'exception' to the rule. God surrounded my mom with an amazing supporting cast: My grandparents, my aunt Tootsie and my Wella (great grandmother). They would be there for my mother and me anytime she called, taking me in as if I was their own son. I was loved and cared for by them throughout my whole childhood. Not everyone enjoyed the favoritism that I received from them. Some of my younger family found it unfair that my Wella would have a toy for me every time or that they spent a little more money on me during Christmas. Every moment my peers had alone with me, they would pick on me and refuse to play with me, making me the odd-one-out. Though I had love from my inner family, I sought to fit in with my younger family. I wanted to play the games that they played and laugh with them, but they would push me away,

and my speech impediment that I had early on didn't help. I didn't understand at that moment, but God would use that to prepare me for the calling He had for my life.

Late in elementary, I began my walk into pornography. Now mind you, my inner family members were strong Christians during this time, so I knew what was right and wrong, but I felt that if I hid it from my mom, then I wouldn't get in trouble. Yet, somehow, I would have this guilt bubbling up from the inside. This was something that I would hide all throughout middle school, and it would only get worse through it.

Middle school was the time that the ball field stopped being even. People were now known for being popular and those who weren't were left out being lame and mediocre. Instead of everyone getting a valentine on Valentine's Day, only the ones who were pretty or in a relationship were celebrating.

You were either popular or lame, and I would find myself as the lame one who was also the outcast. You know how they say that you attract what you are, well, that was about me. I sought to fit in anywhere, and the only ones that I could find that I could fit in with were the ones who were always talking about sex, whatever conversation we would have it would somehow have something to do with what a girl was looking like or how...well...you know where this will go. It wasn't good.

The only things that would fascinate my mind were basketball and sex, which was all I studied, all that I would think about in class, at home, and even at church. The only thing that I cared about when it came to my school work was that my mom would kill me if I failed. If I had a 70, I was relieved. I was going downhill in all that I was doing, and my mom knew that if she didn't take action soon, all the things that she was fearful of when I was born would come true, so she decided to do something that she prayed would change my life for good: take me to youth ministry.

"I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name." Isaiah 65:1

My mom would take me to church every week on Sunday morning. We were the family that would come in late and leave early, not because my family wanted to leave, but really because I wasn't behaving right, either me or my cousins. I was a very rebellious child when it came to church. I would pretend to be sick, act up on the pew, whatever it took to keep my church experience at a minimum; I was very bored of church. One day during service my mom

suggested that I should check out the youth ministry called Generation X. I, being myself, was not interested in being a part of anything having to do with church, I knew that God would change my life if I let Him and I was very fearful of being one of those who would fall after attempting to live for Him.

After all, I knew who I was and what I had done, and I was too afraid to attempt to live for Him. My mom decided to pay no attention to what my thoughts were, and she made me go anyway, you could say that I was not too excited about it.

A couple of months went by though, and I began to enjoy the youth ministry, the one I knew the most there was the Pastor, he was the one who invited me to GX in the first place. I became very much of a fan of GX and it seemed that all was going well until one day tragedy struck.

In March of 2010, my Wella passed away. I was heartbroken; I couldn't believe that the woman who had been one of my greatest supporters in life was gone. For three weeks I decided not to go to GX, my heart was too heavy, and I felt as if I had nowhere else to go. I finally came back, and my heart was able to move on. Sometimes you don't know why God has things happen to you, and sometimes He wants you to trade what is good with something that is great. This next phase that was coming up was greater than any toy I could have, any love I could receive from family, or any moment of happiness that I could have in my own life.

That summer, our church was taking all of the young people to a summer camp called Discovery Camp and everyone was excited to go. I was eager to go, I was excited about all of the activities they would have: Basketball, swimming, go-carts. I wasn't much hyped up for having three services a day. I was more caught up in the games and not really church. I was very religious minded when it came to Christianity at this time. I felt as if I had to do a specific thing and be at a specific place, be prayed on by a specific person to receive what God had for me. I went, and for the first day, all that I was focused on were the games, the superficial. The fun here and there, playing hours of basketball was my most beloved idol that I believed was the epitome of success and accomplishment in life. I thought I was never going to let go of basketball until the next day at one of the worship services something changed. I remember the call to worship being made. Kids left their seats to go to the altar and I was in the very back. I was by myself and not expecting a lot to happen during service, but God began to move in me. He began to show me the value of His presence, and He began to fill me with the very life that I had denied. I began to hunger and thirst for Him even greater throughout the whole camp, even to the point that I received the power of the Holy Spirit in the cabins! My religious mindset had left, and all that I

had desired was Jesus, greater than the desires that pornography had brought me and greater than all the basketball games that I could play. I desired Him more. I didn't want to let go of what God had done in my life, so I made the decision to walk with Christ regardless of what others thought.

“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

My life was new! And no longer was I living in this void or this desire to play basketball for hours, but God put the desire in me to overcome my addiction and to be a success in school for God. I would be ridiculed by old friends for seeking this new life, and I was even more ridiculed by my old coaches for leaving athletics and seeking to better my education. In all that, it was worth it. I began to pass my classes with flying colors, got stronger in the Word, and I even got into the National Junior Honor Society. Life was great and that last year in junior high was exactly what I needed, and with high school coming in, I knew that I would need it.

My freshman year brought out a lot of fear in me. Being only four years away from leaving my mom and becoming an adult made me fearful of going to high school. Besides, I didn't even know what God had called me to do. Instead of praying and getting into my Word like I had done, I ran into a new idol called the XBOX. Instead of reading my Bible and praying, it would be hours of NBA 2K instead. I began to become very empty again. To top it off, theories that I heard in biology raged in my brain, and I went from asking God, “What have you called me to do?” to “God, do you even exist?” Depression began to hover over my abandoned spirit as I continued to seek things that I knew would not satisfy me. Something had to be done.

Discovery Camp was coming back around, and I knew that I needed something to get me out of the hole that was my life. As it began to get closer to the time DC would come, my Spirit would jump a little bit as if it was telling me to get ready for something magnificent, like as if something in me knew that something grand would happen. I began to pray, fast, serve, and do whatever my Spirit had urged me to do to get ready. The first two days of camp were okay but somewhat disappointing. As everyone got their miracles, I found myself again as the odd-one-out. I remember after everyone would go to sleep and all the lights were off, I sat up praying to God with tears flowing down my face:

“God, I thank you for this past couple of days that you have blessed me with at camp, and I really do appreciate it, but God, I feel that I am missing something. Like as if you still have

something in store for me. God, I don't care anymore about what my pastor thinks or even what my peers think of me. Just give me Jesus, that's all I want, Lord, I'm ready. Just give me You."

The next day, I heard God tell me, "Get ready, cause I'm about to do something to you that you have never seen before." All throughout the day God's hand was heavy on my heart and the night service was the place He was leading me to. As they began to do offering and tithes God had put in my heart to worship. I worshiped, and God began to break barriers, but my mind began to tell me, "Chris, you'll never get back to the place God called you to be." But God began to speak to me in the midst of worship, "Chris, what is impossible with Me?" and with a sore voice I said, loud and clear, "Lord, nothing is impossible with You." All of a sudden, God's Spirit began to flow through me like never before, and God had finally shown me my purpose.

God filled me with vision: He desired me to open God's presence in the midst of my high school.

God's Holy Spirit would fill thousands as they opened up to HIS powerful presence. God began to do amazing things through me during that sophomore year, and it continues today. Everywhere I go people recognize me not as a kid who started a Bible study in high school or even started a prayer group in the courtyard and the flagpole, but as the young man who impacted them by showing them Jesus in a way they had never seen.

I thought that God could never use a young man like me – that He could never use an only child who was a social outcast, a porn addict, to be an influence and be used to be a declaring voice to His generation, but He has. In the times that I pushed Him away, He was pulling me closer, in the times that I spit in His face, He kissed my cheek, in the times that I doubted Him, He would believe in me. My story of redemption is all put into Isaiah 54 and 1 Timothy 1:15, which Christ came to save the desolate and He came to fulfill those who were in the black hole of sin. I am undeserving of all that Christ has done for me, but that's what makes it so beautiful, He paid the price for me because He loves me, and I believe whatever limitation you have, no matter what, that He wants to change your life too.

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Broken to Restored

Jarren's Testimony

When I think about my journey as a Christian, I don't see perfection. I imagine a kayak moving upstream against the current of rushing water. I imagine the Colorado River moving with great force through the Grand Canyon, paving a way through rock and dry land. I know what you're thinking, *this guy is making no sense*, but bear with me.

I vividly remember the joy of my childhood as well as the pain, the tears of a broken home and the restoration of a broken heart, the fall into pornography and the plummet into grace. However, my story as a Christian began not in the church, nor on an overseas missions trip, but on my hands and knees in despair. I surrendered to God at the age of 11.

Drug abuse tore my family apart. On my knees, I called out to a God that I did not know, and on my knees, I fought for my family. It was then and there that I truly realized how helpless I was to save my family. I cried out to God that night for the first time in my life. At that moment, I put what little faith I had in God, yet that was more than enough. As I slept that night, my life was changed. Christ spoke peace to my broken heart and said, "Because you had faith to call on Me, even when you did not fully know Me or believe in Me, not only will I help you and your family but through Me, you will touch the lives of billions." That was my cry out to God which led to salvation, baptism, and renewal. *From my pain, He gave me promise.*

For the first time in my life this past summer, I visited the beautiful Lake Travis in Austin, TX for a church camp. This remarkable camp site is surrounded by mountains and luscious green trees. While at this camp I got the opportunity to ride a banana boat. The goal of this group boating activity was to remain on board a fast moving boat that often reached high speeds and performed sharp turns. With great speeds that could flip several grown men all at once, I at

130lbs, stood no chance and flew off several times landing in the crashing waves of the beautiful lake. This experience reminded me of my beginning as a Christian. I had not grown up in the church and was not prepared for the flips and turns I'd encounter in life as a young teenager who struggled with my desires over God's, and as a result, found myself addicted to pornography, bitter towards my parents, and a slave to depression.

The comforting thing about the banana boat was that the minute you fell off into the coldness of the water, the driver of the boat, who was constantly looking at his surroundings, would instantly turn around and rush back to your location to get you back on. And so was the beginning of my faith. I called out to God in the midst of my anger towards loved ones, my addictions, my pride and Jesus rushed over to my side and helped me get back on board. He broke those addictions by giving me His perfect love in the face of my failure. God taught me that forgiveness was not an option we could choose someone deserved, but a commandment to let go of our thrones of hurt because Christ let go of His throne of holiness for us.

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” Jeremiah 33:3

Because salvation was a gift and not something you earned, I initially struggled to embrace it when I fell into sin. But, the more God showed me true humility, the more I began to stop doing things with the intention of getting into heaven and instead with the intention of simply pleasing God. Religion was broken, and a relationship formed. Now, there's no question about how many times I stumble because a righteous man may fall seven times, but he shall rise again (Proverbs 24:16).

Another experience I found extremely fun yet frustrating that summer was kayaking. On one shore of Lake Travis was a kayaking station where two people could sit in one boat and race around some floating barrels in a short kayaking relay against others. As fun as this initially seemed, I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

My faith was shallow as I came to Christ. I loved what He could do for me: the salvation through the atonement of sin and the resurrection, but I struggled to understand what He truly wanted to do in me. This 3D Christian walk was something I was eager to start I just did not know where or how to begin in a way that went beyond the 2D confinement of my Bible and myself. I desired encouragement and guidance.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Proverbs 27:17

A younger friend of mine named Logan asked to share a kayak, and I gladly consented. We were both given an oar to steer. That's when it went downhill. We ended up traveling backward instead of forwards; we crashed into other boats about a million times and found ourselves on the bank of the lake frustrated and at the end of ourselves. You see, the problem was not our poor ability to communicate; it was our inability to submit our authority. We finally sat still in our anger when the 'heavens parted' and a majestic idea popped into our minds: We would let one person count to sync our rowing while we both steered to propel us in the desired direction. And guess what... We actually glided through the water with ease. The remarkable truth was that alone we were not as agile, not as fast, not as effective, but when we became one in mind and heart, we finally made progress.

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." Acts 4:32 (NIV)

Attending and planting myself in a church showed me two important truths that I will never forget. One of which being the truth that Christians cannot thrive in this world alone. Jesus befriended and poured wisdom into His disciples while holding them accountable, so that they would pour into the rest of the world the power of Christ. The second truth was: the church is the hearts of His children as they unite in His name. We, His followers, are called to be the salt of the earth and one day He will return for the very Bride He died for.

As a born-again believer in Jesus, I now see hope. My family, who once was as distant as the sun is from the earth, has now drawn nearer to Christ. My high school has become my mission field, and I get the opportunity to witness innumerable lives receive Christ daily in places that condemned and were uncomfortable by my fire for Christ. When you are obedient to God, His will for your life is unstoppable.

"Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." Revelation 21:5 (NIV)

The Grand Canyon is said to be a beautiful, breathtaking sight for visitors often "making your problems seem small" in the face of nature. The issue observed by park educators is that only five percent of tourists actually drop down to the rim of the canyon to explore its depths. Thus, few embark on the experience of a lifetime by failing to descend further to discover the changes in the environment, climate, and even in general life. But that is not my story!

In Christ, I am that five percent. He is no longer a 2-Dimensional sight that I view from the guard rails, but a living God who dwells on the inside of me! The power of Jesus will sit like a

swamp, never transforming you if you build a dam of excuses against His goodness in your life. Or, you can choose to allow God to flow like a river of hope in your life as He has flown freely in mine. He can provide an abundance of restoration to every drought on the inside of you. He consumed my pornography addiction. He broke through the dam of my un-forgiveness and depression. He drowned out my pride. He made me whole!

Now, His desires have become mine. I will spread His love to all corners of the world in this next season of my life as a college student and missionary. Those who encounter me will know there's a God who is standing with arms open wide shouting, "Today is the day of salvation!"

I am washed. I am new. I am His!

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Suicidal to Purposeful

Yaneth's Testimony

I was born in a third world country to the best middle class family in the world. I was the only grandchild, so I was very well taken care of, never had a need for anything. At the age of 8, my whole world was turned upside down when a close family friend began to molest me. The abuse continued until the age of 15. At 16, I was raped and this threw my life downhill.

I didn't see the worth in my life so I began a promiscuous lifestyle as a teenager into my young adulthood. I was involved in heterosexual and homosexual relationships that lasted for years. I got involved in prostitution and became an alcoholic.

All of this only pushed me to my breaking point of wanting to commit suicide. I remember it like it was yesterday May 22, 1998. I remember thinking that it was time to take my life, but I also thought I better go to church one last time before I end it all.

I walked into this church, it was a Friday night. There was not a service just a ladies meeting. I sat down and as I listened tears started to gather in my eyes. I did not understand what was happening but I know now Jesus was touching my heart.

When the lady behind the pulpit asked did anyone need to be born again I jumped out of my seat and volunteered. That very day there was an immediate change in me. No longer did I feel a heaviness on my shoulders, no longer did I want to commit suicide. I had joy that I had never known before. I had peace and hope that everything was going to be okay with me.

I felt brand new. Everything I did from that point on that particular evening felt brand new. I had been born again, *for real*.

Today, I look at my life of 16 years of walking with this man called Jesus Christ and I am so thankful that he heard my cry and answered me. I now understand that everything that I went through was not even for me, but it was for every person that will hear my story and say 'yes' to Jesus, and 'yes' to being born again.

Now, my life has purpose. My trials made me stronger.

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

Tiffany's Testimony

At 7 years of age I accepted Christ as my Savior at Wednesday night children's church. I vividly remember the call that was made for anyone who wanted to come. As I made my way down the aisle I felt the weight of the decision I was making and remember the tangible excitement in my spirit. I served God throughout my early education and into high school then I kind of fell away after I graduated and came back again when I started dating my husband and got married. Through my on-again and off-again relationship with Jesus Christ I had an understanding of what the resurrection meant for me and felt like I was a good person and so my spot in Heaven was secure. *I was saved, but I was not transformed.*

Early on into my marriage, having moved directly from my parents' home in Texas to Alaska with my husband, I found it easier and easier to not attend church. Prayer became an after-thought and slowly the relationship with my Savior began to lack importance to me. I began working and made new friends who were also young and newly married; their lives seemed so much more exciting and fun than mine. I began spending time with my new friends and soon began compromising my moral standards yet again. Soon drinking and partying was my priority; I really enjoyed and craved the courage that alcohol gave me in social situations. My shyness and the feeling of never really fitting in faded and on Friday and Saturday nights when we were all together I fit in; it felt good to be accepted.

I grew up in a loving home and was given every opportunity to do well in life. My parents took me to church every Sunday and encouraged me to do what was right in the sight of an all-seeing, all-powerful, and loving God. When I accepted Christ as my Savior I never imagined that I would stray from my journey of following Him - but it happened. Compromise after selfish compromise, I found myself in a place of experiencing extreme anxiety. I was so gripped by fear that I barely left my home. My husband was deployed over 6,000 miles away from me and my entire family was 4,000 miles away in Texas. I, for the first time in my entire life, was entirely alone. I soon realized that the illusion of happiness that I thought I was

getting from alcohol, my new “friends,” and newfound way of life was not going to sustain me and, in fact, was killing me.

I knew I needed my Savior, but I was so ashamed of the mess that I had made of my life, I felt totally undeserving. Alone and scared in my home, thousands of miles away from my family I cried out to God, “I can’t do this anymore. I would rather die than live another day feeling like I do.” I came back to Christ with all of the baggage I had collected: fear, anxiety, shame and hurt. He accepted me into His loving arms and exchanged my heavy burdens for His perfect peace. I had chosen to do wrong and God did not hesitate to accept me back, despite my major shortcomings. Immediately, I began to feel the peace I had missed so much and God began a transformative work in me.

My life today is full of joy! My marriage is flourishing and I have a peace inside of me that I know can only come from Jesus. The moment I allowed God to not only be my Savior but also my Lord, my life changed. I have been serving the Lord in gladness for over 5 years now and it just keeps getting better and better.

My testimony is this: there is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ. No matter how far you’ve gone or how many times you have turned your back on Jesus He stands with arms wide open, ready and willing to take you back. No matter how far you have fallen you can repent and your life can be dramatically and triumphantly restored!

God’s grace has a limitless reach.

If you have never accepted Christ and you desire the peace that I’m speaking of, it is available to you right now!

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Romans 10:9

The moment you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and allow Him to be your Lord you will experience a life that is full of purpose, peace, and joy! Once you pick up that cross, you will never be the same. Don’t look back! Experience the life that you were created for in Christ today. It is amazing!

I am complete in Him. (Colossians 2:10)

If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

{ AFTERWORD }

By: Veronica Lynn

I have been a Christian since I was three years old. From my earliest recollection, I have loved the Lord. That in no way means I am perfect or that I have been immune to trouble.

What it does mean is that no matter what I walk through, I am never alone.

I have been in situations that were horrible. Multiple people have utterly failed me.

But the Lord is unceasingly faithful.

Even when I've given in to human weakness, even when I've taken my eyes off of the Lord, He has never abandoned me.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He always seeks. He always saves. (John 10:11; Luke 19:10)

The church I attend has a motto. It is: "Your best is yet to come."

The pastor says it consistently from the pulpit and the church parishioners say it frequently to one another.

It is nearly impossible to pass through the church lobby without someone reminding you, "Your best is yet to come."

For years, I parroted the salutation back to people as automatically as I would echo back "Good Morning" and "Nice to meet you."

The phrase was merely pleasant words to me and therefore the expression held no power to me.

But then one day, when I was in the midst of an unbelievably pain-filled week, I went to church and someone took my hand in hers. She looked me straight in the eye, and with a smile declared boldly to me, "Your best is yet to come."

In the moment, I merely nodded and moved on, but on the inside I was a mess. My heart and mind were raging within me. My heart was desperate to believe that there was indeed hope for me. My mind screamed accusations at me. It told me what my circumstances suggested, that I was unwanted, useless, helpless and hopeless.

I wrestled with the blessing that had been spoken over me. It felt as if I had been mistakenly given a beautiful gift that should go to someone else, as I had been handed a check that I was not qualified to cash. In the days that followed that encounter, my prayers were anguished. Over and over again, I cried out, "Lord, speak to me."

Finally, I ran out of words and waited quietly.

And then, I heard Him.

I heard Jesus as distinctly as if He had walked into my room. I felt Him as if He had literally taken me in His arms.

The Lord spoke to me and said, “Your best is yet to come.”

I was undone. I opened my heart to my Savior, offering Him unrestricted access to all that was inside me – the hurt feelings, the fear, the bitterness, the disbelief.

Before my heart could question, before my mind could protest, the Lord spoke again.

“Your best is yet to come.”

It was clear Jesus knew how much I struggled with that concept. I felt His love and compassion for me.

Kindly, but firmly, the Lord impressed it onto my Spirit yet again, “Your best IS yet to come.”

That is when I chose to believe Him.

I said ‘no’ to the accusations of my mind and ‘no’ to the threats of life and my circumstances, and said ‘YES’, wholeheartedly, to my Savior.

Suddenly, my mind lit up as if fireworks were going off inside my head. The Holy Spirit brought back Scripture after Scripture to my remembrance and illuminated them before me.

Boom!

“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Boom!

*“The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all”
Psalm 34:19 (NIV)*

Boom!

“But now, this is what the Lord says--- He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, your Savior.” Isaiah 43:1-3(NIV)

I looked to Jesus and I found beauty, peace, joy, and hope.

My circumstances did not change that day, but my focus did.

I set my eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of my faith (Hebrew 12:1-2). I repented of my unbelief and re-committed my life to Jesus.

The Lord kept me in His peace. He led me through and He led me out. I learned many things through that experience.

I learned that it is imperative that I always keep my eyes on Jesus, that I believe the Word of the Lord above all, and that I set my heart only on Christ.

I realized the incredible blessing of surrounding myself with people who refuse to let me forget the Lord's promises to me.

Maybe you're in the midst of a fierce battle. Perhaps you've been struggling a long time. Maybe no one has ever said to you, "Your best is yet to come."

I'm writing to tell you that regardless of what's been told to you, regardless of what you've done, regardless of what you've failed to do, **YOUR BEST IS YET TO COME**, because the Lord is and the Lord loves you!

Because of Christ's death on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the grave, all of humanity now has the final word over every hindrance that life presents.

That word is 'Victory!' And that victory is through Christ!

"In ALL these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Romans 8:37(NIV)

You can rest assured that the same Savior who performed every testimony you've read in this book is ready, willing, and able to save you too.

Know this and never forget it:

The Lord will fulfill His purpose for you if you let Him! (Psalm 138:8)

Jesus is! Therefore, let your heart forever sing:

MY BEST IS YET TO COME!

{ SALVATION & REPENTANCE }

In the Bible a man had the courage to ask, “What must I do to be saved?”

And Jesus’ disciples answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

While no one is perfect, we do have a perfect Savior, who paid the price for all who have fallen short, which is everyone (Romans 3:23). Believe on Christ as the Scriptures have said, repent and turn from wicked ways, and He will redeem you as He has each person in this book.

The Webster’s dictionary describes repentant as turning from sin and dedicating oneself to the amendment of one’s life, to feel remorse, and to change one’s mind.

If you are reading this, there is still time to get your life right with God. Everyone has gone off track at least once, but it is those who realize they have fallen that are able to get back up. Your future is not in your past, it is in Christ.

Romans 10:9 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

FROM THE AUTHORS

We are ordinary, everyday men and women who serve an extraordinary God. Thank you for reading our testimonies. We hope that they blessed you and encouraged you in the Lord! If He did it for us, He can do it for you!