

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in the time of trouble.*

*-Psalm 46:1*

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I don't know where I would've been if it hadn't been for God on my side. I struggled from day to day to press through my life, to press through all that I was keeping inside. I didn't, no couldn't bring myself to face it or ask questions about it. Part of me feared no one would believe me. I had a hard enough time believing some of it myself. I didn't know how to utter the words from my mouth and I feared if it started coming out it wouldn't stop, I couldn't even identify what *it* was.

There were times when my cries for Jesus to help me were internalized. I wasn't able to verbally call on him but he heard my cry and he rescued me. Other times he sent people to minister to me, even people I'd never seen before, that spoke directly to my soul. Their speaking to my soul gave confirmation to my spirit. The Bible warns us in John 4:1 *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* Apply the word. Try the spirit by the spirit. The spirit speaks to the soul confirming the spirit. The body speaks to the body. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit.* Those that spoke what the spirit gave them, confirmed what the spirit gave me. They helped unlock what I saw but didn't understand. They helped me go back to my childhood and adolescent years to treat some wounds that had been covered up for many years.

Removing scabs in the natural exposes the flesh. In the spiritual it unveils the raw emotions and makes you sensitive when something or someone comes against it. Satan is *an accuser of the brethren*. He wants to *sift you like wheat*. He knows what wounds you have and he'll throw them in your face in attempt to trip you up, keep you down, and hold your mind captive. You may have repented. Your wounds may have been bandaged, but you may not be completely delivered from them, even if you thought you were. Some wounds need a bandage while others require further attention. I dare you to cast all your wounds on God. When it's over this time, you'll be washed by the blood of the lamb. You will be healed from the inside out and no scars will be left.

I suffered many wounds during my adolescent years that left years of emotional scarring. Like many girls I dreamed of having friends. Some proved only to be acquaintances but for the most part everybody had a couple home girls. I was taken aback by how my home girls laughed at and talked about me behind my back. They thought I was too naïve to know the

things they said and did. I found it hard enough to be in high school with people who were bold enough to tell me to my face they hated me. But being betrayed by those I thought were my girls was more damaging. Girls can be so cruel and the adults around them can be completely unaware. Sadly, on a few occasions I found the adults knew and some even contributed to the cruelties. Once I was invited to a sleepover as a joke and endured an entire weekend of humiliation. The mother who was present didn't speak against how I was being treated. At the time I didn't understand it, but Jesus was comforted me and told me to rise above.

Even though I'd grown up with all boys, who taught me how to be tough I didn't go around fighting. But I did have a terrible mouth on me. Though I was bold enough to lay you out using every curse word imaginable, I still was no match for what I endured and internalized. I found a mask to hide behind, stood firm and took it outwardly but inside what people said and did to me hurt and it tore me to shreds. It took me years to overcome.

I will never forget this encounter with sincerity amongst females. This one girl disliked me, why I couldn't understand. She told me point blank she hated me. It began in middle school and followed me through high school. She and a few of her friends were unkind to me on a regular. *[They poked fun at some of the clothes I wore not being named brand or trendy; they especially gave me grief over the long skirts I frequently wore, they would go into laughing hysterics over my hair not being as "fly" as theirs, they laughed at me for being in church while other girls my age were at sleepovers, movies and dances and don't let my "Holy Roly" mom be seen crossing the school lot wearing long skirts and donning that jheri curl]* The Monday after a tiff with them I found myself walking into our high school teacher's lounge with a guidance counselor. Words can't describe how I felt to walk into that room and find every last one of them sitting with their arms folded and this particular female standing waiting for me. No one could prepare me for, what she said or the transformation of speaking life that took place. I can remember the conversation as if it were only moments ago. I was stunned as I listened to her tell me that she still didn't like me, didn't know if she ever would but there was something about me that wouldn't let her mistreat me anymore. She called me out for showing off around my friends and she said "I'm glad you did because it showed me just how cruel we had been to you. But it ends here."

I stood right there and cried I don't even remember saying anything I just remember she hugged me. The rest of them spoke their peace and walked out. Internally I thanked God because it didn't have to go down that way, I really had caused a scene, one of them brushed against me at an away basketball game, I don't even know if she knew it was me but something inside snapped. I was tired of them, I was sick of them talking about me, and taunting me all the time.

I can't tell you that we became the best of friends or even associates but it really did end that day, I never had any more trouble out of them. The thing I'm most grateful for is as an adult that same female (who was once so cruel to me) and I had the opportunity to talk about the transition of God turning evil around for his good. We both blessed God for what he had done for his glory. The night before she passed away, not so long ago, I stood silently thinking about all of this and how fond I had become of her and the words she spoke over 15 years prior that changed my sad-ditude. At the time I thought it was odd for me to be thinking about all of this but the next day when I learned of her death I was grateful for the memories and the role she played in building my character.

When I graduated high school I was able to bless God but it didn't negate the fact I had been secretly bitter for years over the hurt I had endured growing up. People often took advantage of my kindness, I was kind hearted, would do all I could for anybody. Repeatedly I trusted people. I let them in many times over only to find out I was being used by the friends I thought I had, for their benefit. When I needed them and tried to reach out to them they overshadowed my issues with theirs by simply ignoring me or watering down the significance of what I had to say. Though I suffered inwardly I always spoke up for somebody else. I never wanted to be the person in any group who sat idly by while others treated people unkindly. I never wanted anybody to endure the hurt I felt.

*[Nothing in life happens by coincidence. All things have a purpose. Here I am revamping the chapter that unfolds the mysteries of coincidence that lead me to understand my cries for help weren't a coincidence rather a longing for purpose. It's no coincidence that in this book "Living My Life in Reverse" I'm at peace with all the chapters but the one in the middle. Isn't that how life's situations and circumstances can be, the middle is where the turbulence of uncertainty is. It's in the middle that we become anxious, we make mistakes, and we find ourselves with our backs against the wall. Thank you God for showing me that you are the wall, you're there*

*to support us when we finally get as far away from ourselves as we can get and we turn to you, our healer, our provider, our source, our joy, and our strength.]*

***Help Me Dear God, everybody knows I can't swim. Here I am drifting out to sea! Why can't they see me?***

When I reached out to those around me I talked around the issues at hand and the only answers I got was you do the best you can, it'll get better. Well better didn't come until I turned to the only person who could help me and that was Jesus! He had been there all along but I hadn't given him a chance to work on my behalf. I was trying to do it all by myself.

***Help Me Dear God, I'm drowning! Inside I'm screaming for help, but silently my lifeless body is starting to go under. Why don't I call for help?***

The phone is ringing, the bills are pouring in.

***Help Me Dear God, I don't know how to handle the pressure I've placed on myself not to disappoint my husband. We used to be able to take care of things financially. I don't understand where we went wrong.***

I desperately wanted to move beyond my past. Emotionally I began to shut down and the finances went right along with me. I didn't handle everything I was supposed to. As long as they flowed I was fine but when things got tight I treated the finances the same way I did my emotions I ignored them. Not purposely but when I didn't know what to do I didn't do anything just like I had done for years.

***Help Me Dear God, we've filed bankruptcy. We've had a vehicle repossessed. Surely I thought someone would throw me a life jacket and pull me ashore. But instead I drifted even further out to sea, as my husband worked hard at finding a solution to get the first vehicle back. I know I should tell him what's going on with me. Please help me remove this mask that's hiding depression.***

For years I quietly struggled with generational curses and undetected depression. No matter what signs, in hindsight I realized emerged, no one seemed to notice. Circumstances, low self-esteem and emptiness began to engulf me. I was on the verge of losing my mind. The stress began to affect me physically. I was living a lie by pretending I could handle all that was going on inside of me.

*Help Me Dear God, I'm peacefully resting on the ocean floor. Physically I'm only going through the motions but mentally I've checked out. I know you hear me but you can't help me if I don't surrender. Please be patient with me I'm trying.*

The phone is still ringing, the bills are trickling in, but our situation is better. We've found the hole in our pockets. It was the 100% curse for not paying the 10% - our tithes.

"Ms. Brown this is a courtesy call. Do you want to get any personal belongings out of your vehicle?" [I thought I was dreaming] "Ms. Brown..." *Yes sir.* I woke my husband, he got up, and went downstairs. Faintly I could hear him talking.

*Help me Dear God! Surely I've drowned instantly this time. After the second repossession I removed the mask, I talked to my husband. We got through it. We became better stewards over our money. Here I lay on this ocean floor once again, but this time I'm fighting my way back up, I don't want to be down here!... Maybe I'm dreaming. Could this really be happening? Did the "repo man" really call me to see if I wanted my belongings out of our vehicle before he hauled it away? [Wait a minute! Did I just hear my husband chuckle while talking to this man?]*

"No you're not dreaming, you asked for my help. Do I want you to lose things? *No!* Will I bless you through this? *Yes...stay faithful and obedient!*"

I just lay in the bed. Here it is, two days before I was to pay the two payments I set up to be withdrawn from our account, thinking about everything that has gone on in our lives as of late. Eventually I sat up, looked at the caller id on our phone next to the bed. [4:00 a.m. Unknown name] I looked at the bed. My husband's side was empty. My thoughts were interrupted by the rattle of the truck as it started. I got up, walked across the room, used two fingers to spread the blinds, and I peered out to see our vehicle chained on the flat bed. I closed my fingers, pressed the blinds back in their place, adjusted the curtains and went downstairs. I shivered as my bare feet met the cold linoleum floor. About then my husband entered the door carrying our belongings in a grocery bag. He opened the utility doors and placed the bag on top of the dryer, walked over to me, embraced me, kissed me on the forehead and assured me everything was going to be alright.

To God be the glory, somebody had finally thrown me an anchor and that anchor is Jesus. We can read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm; *The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want*. We can go to church every time the doors open. We can quote scripture all day long. But if we don't make Jesus Lord of our lives by completely surrendering all to him, we'll just keep dropping anchors into bottomless pits.

The help I was looking for had always been there. Jesus wrapped his loving arms around me and said "my child come to me". I began to receive the teaching I needed to deal with my mess. God is so mindful of his children, many of my issues I never even had to divulge to man. He had my pastor teach and preach to my very needs. I applied those teachings to my life. *I walked by faith and not by sight*. Through faith I was able to see where I was out of order and to ask God for forgiveness. Following my heavenly father's footsteps I put those things into perspective and turned from them.

Making the choice to live (spiritually) and not die I put on the full armor of God daily and speak life into my situations. People all around me have been dwelling on the statement "*In these economic times.*" I'm sure you've heard it too. It's used so frequently and its dispiriting connotation manages to make its way into almost any conversation on any given subject. Not living in paranoia is a choice. Imprinted on our money is "In God We Trust". I choose to trust my God, not my money. I encourage you to do the same.

Instead of being negatively drawn into the woes of this world, stand firm, and speak life. *I'm grateful that I know how to look to the hills from which my help cometh*. [It cometh from the Lord!] *I'm grateful to be alive*. [God has kept me.] *I'm grateful that when times are tight financially*. [I have something for times to be tight with.] *I'm grateful for the furlough days we were mandated to take*. [We still have jobs, thank you God!] *I'm grateful for every lesson I've learned along the way and embrace those to come*. *I'm grateful that there's a handbook that covers every situation under the sun...The Bible [Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth]!* *I'm grateful, I'm grateful, I'm grateful*.

Choosing life you find so much to be grateful for. But you have to stay focused. Like me I'm sure you've had a chuckle or two over the famous words of Jenny from Forest Gump saying *Run Forest, Run!!* It's no laughing matter though that we're living in a time where you better run for your spiritual life.

When you run for your spiritual life and put things into perspective you come to understand that financial struggle is not just a low or middle income problem. Struggling on the top of the pay scale doesn't feel any better than struggling on the bottom. Struggle is not about the pay scale, it's about knowing how to manage what you have. Someone once told me that everyone lives according to their means. What I've come to learn is that once you're taught the principles of financial management, you learn to live within your means not above them.

Moreover, obey the biblical principles of giving. Through *obedience* and *faithfulness* God will bless you with more than you could ever think. Tithing is my family's number one priority. Prior to faithfully giving we struggled constantly. We had faith that God would get us through and he did. Our faith was combined with work but we were exasperated (frustrated) from the many attempts to manage our debt. No matter how hard we tried nothing panned out the way it was supposed to. We never gave up hope and we kept the faith. But we were putting in the wrong kind of work with our faith. The work we needed was obedient work according to the word of God. We needed to pay our tithes faithfully! We were robbing God and 100% of our money was cursed. Once we put things in their proper order we saw that the 90% that belonged to us was blessed!

I truly thank God for the strength to stand. Even during the times when I can't see my way clear God is a very present help in the time of trouble. He consoles me and reminds me that when I am weak he is strong. Being strong-willed is good as long as you remember that God is the source of your strength. *It is He that has made us, and not we ourselves.* There will be times when the waves of life feel like they may overtake you. Keep your feet anchored in Jesus. The currents may knock you around, you may even fall. But get back up! You aren't the only one who has fallen. Don't dwell on it, seek God for understanding of all that you're supposed to learn from it and keep it moving.

*Though it tarries, wait for it.* Waiting is a process that must take place. Each day I rise to find yesterday gone, I gratefully thank God because I know it's possible and in spite of whatever it is, I made it through.

## *Quiet As Kept*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Satan crept in while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Temptation set in while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Old wounds and painful memories awakened while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Depression weighed in heavily while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Dreams faded away while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*A loved one was called home while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Your Bible covered over with dust while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Patience came over you while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Prayers were answered while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Love, joy, and peace surrounded while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Faith, strength, and power were restored while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept,*

*Jesus stepped in while you slept.*

*Quiet as kept, Quiet as kept, Quiet as kept*

*Wake up! Tell the World*

*BUT GOD!*

*While you slept*

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Quietly I was drowning. On the inside I knew something was going on but I couldn't express it. I tried on numerous occasions to vocalize my desperate need for help, but it was stifled, many times by the outcry of others and their needs. I'd retreat, allowing my needs to be suppressed. I continued this until I reached a point I was no longer able to help anyone, because I hadn't attended to my own needs in the process. God wants to use us, but he can't use us if we're not where we need to be in Him. He will supply our every need but we need to turn to him.

Don't get caught up in your struggles. While struggle doesn't come from God struggles are a necessary part of your growth to get to the next level. To overcome struggles, press beyond people and things. The third Heaven needs to be the dwelling place of your mind. When you are able to rise above, you'll find everything that had been weighing you down is now beneath your feet. Staying afloat in the spiritual is just like floating in the natural, sinking or swimming depends on your abilities. If you cannot swim and you lose focus while floating, you'll sink. But if you learn how to give it all to God he will carry you on eagle's wings. When you need rest during your swim to shore you'll find Him to be your protector, as things come that otherwise would have capsized your boat.

*Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

*-Matthew 11-28*