

PREFACE

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

—2 Corinthians 1:3–4

As a young adult, I was cruising down a somewhat self-centered highway to happiness when a few wrong turns led me straight over a cliff to catastrophe. Oblivious to the warning signs along the way, I do not even remember hitting the brakes as I crashed through the protective barricades and found myself spiraling down into a violent, rocky sea of emotional turmoil and chaos.

Because I grew up in the church, I went straight to the Bible and tried to find help there. But by trying, I would pray and open God's Word with the same sort of attitude as if I was playing roulette in Las Vegas, crossing my fingers that by chance I would get lucky and land on a winner! Not only did that crazy mentality never lead to winning money in Vegas, it never led me to find what I was looking for in the scriptures. God performs miracles—not magic tricks.

When I failed in my half-hearted and misguided attempt to find answers in the Bible, I enlisted a secular psychologist and spent countless Friday nights staggering around the buffet of self-help books at the bookstore intoxicated by pain and gorging on ala carte advice, wisdom, and relief. Anyone who has ever pigged-out at a buffet knows that gorging may feel good in the moment, but it never ends well.

What I found in these self-help books was a common denominator of me and my power to help myself. And I knew deep down that I needed much more than me. I needed to be spiritually nourished; stuffing myself on fake substitutes filled with artificial preservatives was simply not sustaining me. It didn't even satisfy the craving.

I knew I needed the bread of life—manna. I knew I needed a lifeline—Jesus.

As I recognized my need to be rescued by something bigger than anything of this world, I found my Savior who had been there all along, waiting for me to find Him. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Again, because I grew up in the church, I knew a lot *about* Jesus. I knew He was a real person, born to a virgin named Mary. I knew He lived a sinless life, and then He was nailed to a cross where He died. And I knew that three days later, He resurrected, proving that He was God as well as the Son of God. I knew He did this to save those who believe it from the penalty of their sins.

For as long as I can remember, I believed this. But claiming to believe it in order to secure your future in Heaven is not the same thing as breaking free from the chains of bondage and walking in it as truth. To bridge this gap, you must personalize it.

Although intellectually I knew that Jesus came and gave up His life to pay for our sins because God so loved the world, I did not understand that I *was* the world. I did not “get” that Jesus loved *me* so much that He came to free *me* and reconcile *me* to God. Me. And you.

Therefore, because I did not understand how much He loved me, I did not realize that my identity, worth, and life are found in Him and nothing else. I did not know beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was a beloved daughter of the King (God) and that this had nothing to do with what I looked like, how I performed, what I achieved, or what I acquired.

Not only did I not know who God says *I* am, I did not truly know who God says *He* is either. I did not see Him as a loving Father whose ways are to protect, free, and bless me. I did not understand that His sovereign character never changes. I had not yet realized my daily need of His grace. And worse yet, my relationship with Him was one-sided in that I knew what I wanted from Him, but I had absolutely no idea what He wanted from (or *for*) me.

Here is where it gets tricky: I thought I knew God. I thought I knew me too. But as it turned out, I did not really know either one of us very well. To take it even one step further, I did not know my enemy—the devil—who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Let me be clear and say that the devil is not some character with horns, dressed in red, and holding a pitchfork. Instead, the devil is an evil spirit who specializes in deception and accusation by manifesting in such things as fear, insecurity, pride, anger, anxiety, bitterness, envy, and greed. This enemy is an astute observer of human behavior. He is astonishingly clever and tireless in his pursuit of our destruction as he relentlessly attempts to wage war against God using us as ammunition.

That being so, the devil knew my weaknesses, and he duped me by twisting things around and confusing me, much like he did to Eve (Genesis 3:1), and much like he attempted to do to Jesus in the desert (Luke 4:2). In fact, as the devil often does, he paradoxically convinced me that I was not even committing sin (which, in its most basic form, is simply disagreeing with God).

As I look back, I realize I was the perfect prey because I was not alert, not educated, and I did not give my enemy enough credit. So, like a hungry lion stalking a doe, he set his eyes upon me as a prime target for attack, and I never even saw it coming.

Though everything I needed to know about the identity of God, myself, and the devil is in the Bible, like I said, anytime I had attempted to read it, I had quickly given up. It was intimidating, it did not make much sense to me, and frankly, it seemed dated and even irrelevant to my seemingly “modern” problems. Therefore, much of my theology was based on my feelings and ideas instead of what was written in the Bible (His Word).

All of this confusion and ignorance led me to mistakenly believe with absolute conviction that God wanted me to enthusiastically charge down dangerous paths that promised a life ending with happily ever after. As a result, I got lost and ended up on a forbidden road that led to devastation with pieces of my life and the lives of so many others scattered everywhere. I know now that the only path leading to happily ever after is the path leading to Him. I also know now that the consequences of sin are usually widespread, hurting many others who get caught in the interpersonal explosion.

Despite this, what the devil intended for harm, God used for good (Genesis 50:20), because God doesn't waste our pain or suffering even when we cause it. He uses it all, and He uses it all for good (Romans 8:28).

I was lost, and He found me. I was in bondage, and He freed me. I was afraid, and He comforted me. I was dying, and He saved me.

Because of what God did for me, I write to those of you who also need

to be found, freed, comforted, and saved. To those who know that the mere pursuit of happiness is not nearly as fulfilling as the pursuit of holiness; those who realize there is more to life than simply living.

There is hope, and there is healing. And like me, you have a lifeline that is available to you: Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less. And no matter how far you have drifted, He has never left your side.

But here's the thing about a lifeline: you have to reach out and grab ahold of it.

This book seeks to help you do just that.

First, to help you discover your personal lifeline to Jesus, part 1 lays a proper foundation for understanding and applying the scriptures to your own life. We will dive into biblical stories of God's faithfulness woven throughout the lives of many others who were called against all odds into various seasons of isolation, waiting, and suffering.

Next, to help you learn to trust your lifeline, part 2 examines the marvelously vast character of God as continually and consistently described throughout the pages of the Bible by the Lord Himself.

Finally, because a lifeline only rescues those who grab it and hold on to it, parts 3–5 peel back the layers of Psalm 91 verse-by-verse to help you apply His Word to your own life. Psalm 91 is one of my favorite "go to" passages when I find myself desperate and tempted to let go of my true lifeline and try to solve my problems on my own. When I try to be my own savior.

As you read, know that I have prayed for you. I have prayed that God would speak directly and intimately to you through the stories in this book. I have prayed that He will imprint His words on your own heart and that the Holy Spirit will remind you of them anytime you find yourself lost or in the middle of a storm. And, I have prayed that you will courageously respond to His call.

As you begin this journey, it is vital that you acknowledge God's good plan for your life. But it is also necessary to acknowledge your three-part enemy (the world, your flesh, and the devil) who also has a plan for your life and will try to convince you that you have better things to do than learn and apply the truth of God's Word. Remember that this enemy wants nothing more than to destroy any chance you have of living a life of faith-filled peace and joy. And he knows that the moment you grab your lifeline, his plan to destroy you is thwarted.

So be prepared to fight.

Be prepared to dig deep.

But mostly, be prepared to see the victory and the transformation in your life that occurs when you choose to grab and hold on tight to your lifeline: Jesus.

POINTS TO PONDER:

- The highway to happiness often leads you over a cliff to catastrophe.
- God performs miracles—not magic tricks.
- The only path leading to happily ever after is His.
- God doesn't waste anything (including pain and suffering) but uses everything as He pieces together His awesome plan.
- Claiming to believe the truth of the gospel in order to secure your future in Heaven is not the same thing as breaking free from the chains of bondage and walking in it as truth. To bridge this gap, you must personalize it.
- The pursuit of happiness is not nearly as fulfilling as the pursuit of holiness.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)
- Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)
- Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)
- You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)
- Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)
- Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)
- Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

