

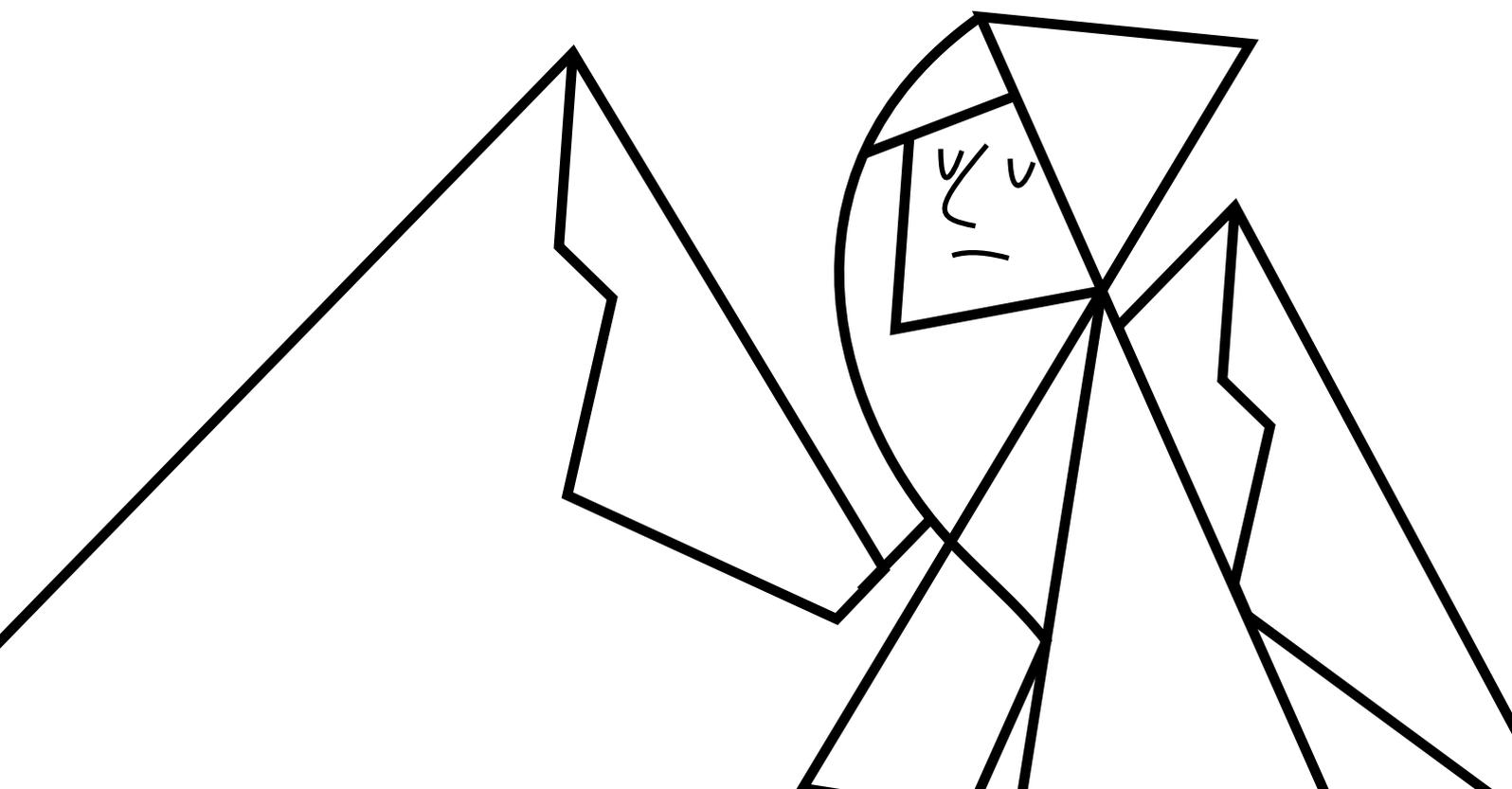
God,
Experienced.



God, Experienced.

40 true life experiences of hope,
love and faith

Collected and Compiled by
The LifePointe Church,
Lagos, Nigeria.



Credits

Editors

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Thanks to:

The authors of these stories for contributing their hearts and personal experiences.

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About Lifepointe

The Lifepointe Church is the young adult expression of The Elevation Church, Nigeria.

At LifePointe, our mission is simple – We are a resting place for the weary and a signpost for the lost. We also create vibrant experiences that point to God. We have a deep passion for God's Word and a commitment to developing true friendships and connections with each other.



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Foreword

There is incredible power in sharing our stories - as you will find by the lessons you go away with from reading this book. You will read of how God turned disappointments, pain, failures, sicknesses & addictions into opportunities to experience faith, victory and joy.

God can sometimes be found in the most unexpected situations and places; a battlefield with giant opposition for David, a burning bush in the backside of a desert for Moses or even the still small voice after the storm.

It is my heart's prayer that you will experience God in whatever season and circumstance of life you may find yourself currently be in.

Blessings,
Godman Akinlabi
Lead Pastor, The Elevation Church

Over the last 18 months, I have watched and listened with keen interest to people share their God Experience stories. I have marvelled at how God has journeyed with and shown up for people.

Life often comes along with different shades, colours, twists and turns. In this book, you will find a definite comfort in knowing that you are not alone regardless of the circumstances that you find yourself.

These stories may be an encounter with faith for you as you read through the diverse challenges our contributors had to deal with; stories which range from suicide to low self-esteem, heartbreaks, failures, joblessness, dealing with grief, depression etc. However, these stories also speak, even louder, of God's mercy, goodness and grace. They resound with hope, faith and love.

I trust that God will inspire a renewal of your faith and that you will find sunshine within these pages.

My warmest regards,
Idris Belo-Osagie
Resident Pastor, LifePointe Church



Introduction

If someone asked you “Do you know God for yourself?” what would your answer be?

Would you think, “Oh I am not 'Christian' enough?” Or maybe, “Surely that's for Pastors and Priests?”

However, the scriptures show that God earnestly desires a personal relationship with each of us.

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. - Acts 17:27

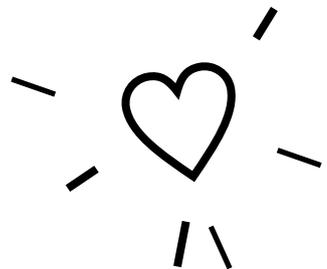
You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. – Jer. 29:13

God wants to be known by you.

Everybody has a story and anyone can have a God experience.

The stories in this book outline the authors' personal experiences of God. They show only a few of the diverse ways that God can show himself to anyone who believes in Him.

Our prayer is that as you read them, you are challenged to seek God for yourself and inspired to know Him more. May they lead you into a quest for a deeper walk with God. One that helps you confidently answer, “Yes, I know my God”



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abuse and
forgiveness.



The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all who are
oppressed.

Psalm 103:6 (NIV)

Bear with each other and forgive
one another if any of you has a
grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)



I grew up loving God and being in Church. I also had the best Christian mentors and made up my mind at an early age to keep away from premarital sex. I got into the University at 17, and was rather surprised to see many people involved in premarital sex. I could not understand how people were so flippant about it, so, I started a group called 'The Royal daughters' to inspire young ladies to stay sexually pure. By my 3rd year in the University, I was appointed the Vice President and female coordinator of my school fellowship. Things were going great! Until the first day of my final year when my hostel was robbed and I was raped. This marked the start of the most difficult period in my life.

I did not understand why God would let that happen. I thought to myself God said, "He would not let His people be put to shame". So, why did this happen to me? I mean I was the one who went about preaching sexual purity. Even worse was the fact that I had to go on with life like nothing happened. I carried on with fellowship duties, final year project and classes. I carried on, ignoring the emptiness I felt; the real me was gone.

Things went on like this for a while until I went for NYSC (Nigerian Youth Service Corps) and joined the NCCF fellowship there. One night, the NCCF lodge was robbed; laptops and phones were stolen. People were shaken by the fact that such a thing could happen to a Christian Corpers' lodge. When I was asked to lead devotion the morning after, I felt it was time to tell my story.

I was surprised to see people so encouraged after I shared and that was the start of healing and restoration for me. I realised that I was not meant to be ashamed of what happened to me. God started to give me answers to questions in my heart, and helped me discover that the experience was for

“I did not understand why God would let that happen.”

a greater purpose. I was also assured that *in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)*. Every event in the life of a believer is an upward call. Today, I still preach the message of sexual purity, and through my experience, God has given me an opportunity to counsel and minister to rape victims.



AD

Jennifer:

When we were 2 years old, our dad left the country in search of greener pastures, with plans to return for our mum when he was well settled. At first, things went great between our parents; they exchanged letters and phone calls which left my mum happy.

Our dad was pagan while our mum did not believe in anything. Even then, my twin sister, Gertrude, and I insisted on going to Church with our neighbours who were Catholics. This was how we first encountered God. Sometime during this period, a friend of our mum introduced her to Christ, and we started going to Church together.

3 years down the line, our dad returned home, insisting on a divorce because my mum had become a Christian, and introduced us to God. After he left, we watched our mum suffer from heartbreak and depression. She cried every night and we cried with her burdened with our inability to console her.

We later moved to Delta state to be close to her family and while there, we rounded up our primary school education. However, our mum could not afford to send us to Secondary School so she reached out to our dad who insisted that we moved to stay with his family before he would help. Therefore, we moved in with his brother, our uncle. It was a terrible experience as we suffered abuse and all kinds of torture during that season. We were glad when we got an opportunity to go off to boarding school - where we also joined a school fellowship. We met good people who encouraged our walk with God. All through this, we kept trusting that God would come to our rescue, and make a way for our mum, so we could get

“We, however, hated our dad and did not want to have anything to do with him.”

out of our uncle's house. It was always dreadful thinking about going back home for holidays.

Finally, our mum was able to afford an apartment close to our school, and we moved in with her. It was a struggle to get through but we survived. We later got into University and managed to get through financially.

One day we went for a Church meeting and forgiveness was being taught. We were asked to search our hearts - to see if we had anybody we had not forgiven, because unforgiveness hinders us from becoming all that God has destined us to be. About the same time, the message of forgiveness started coming from other people - even our mum.

We knew we needed to forgive our dad especially because we wanted a better relationship with God. My mum also kept insisting on this because my sister and I were never happy. She knew we needed to let go of everything. We, however, hated our dad and did not want to have anything to do with him. We avoided going to see him because each visit usually ended up in a fight. We knew we could not forgive him by ourselves, so we decided to start praying that God would help us forgive him.

Gertrude:

About this time, our dad had a life threatening illness and had to undergo surgery. He was really scared. He called us weeping and asking that we forgive him, and pray that God would heal him. We were really shaken by the news because we never had a relationship with him and we were scared that if anything happened, we would not have had any relationship with our father.

So, we started praying for him. We prayed that God would heal him. Eventually, to the glory of God, he recovered fully. The process of forgiving him was not easy but God helped us in that regard. It took time for us to

learn to love him again, and let go of all the hurt from being mistreated by his family. However, today, we have a better relationship with God and our father, who is also now a Christian.



JENNIFER &
GERTRUDE

I was born to a Muslim father and Christian mother. Growing up, I attended both the Mosque and Church. I moved around a number of states in the USA, but grew up mostly in Chicago.

In 2010, I moved to Nigeria, and found myself more in the Church than at the Mosque. September that year, I lost my mother. After this happened, I buried my head in work, and continued this way until 2016. In between all this, my father re-married and this really upset me. I chose neither to speak to him nor see him. I would only call him every now and then.

In June and July 2016, each time I tried to pray, my father would come to mind. I would talk to my friends on phone and they would randomly ask about my dad, and I would reluctantly reply “what's your business?” One morning after praying, it was laid on my heart again, and I decided to call. I did, and he verbally abused me for not calling or visiting him for a while. I let him finish.

When he was done, I started to express all of the feelings towards him that I had held for the past 6 years. I recounted my pain from the day my mother died to the very moment I was speaking to him. He did not interrupt me. When I was done, he explained that it was not his intention to make me feel the way I did, and affirmed his love for me. He apologised — I had never heard my dad say “sorry” before.

Two weeks later, I called my dad and invited him to lunch - this would be the last time I would see him. Approximately two weeks after our meeting, he passed away in August. It was significant because it seemed like a repeat of what had happened with my mum: the moment I tried to reconnect, God decided to take him. After so many years of unforgiveness and stubbornness on my part, he was gone.

“After so many years of unforgiveness and stubbornness on my part, he was gone.”

At this point, I was grieving and upset but I wore a brave face; I remained strong and independent. One day, I sat down with a friend, who unknown to me, has the Gift of Prophecy and Word of Knowledge. As she spoke to me, she mentioned things that I had never shared with anyone, including the conversation I had with my dad. On hearing this, I broke down, and was completely shattered.

It was at that point I decided that I could no longer do things on my own. I had been going to Church and had given my life to Christ before this discussion with my friend. I just did not actively believe God. I guess, in some way, before that day, I was just hopeful because I really did not have any other option. With matters like speaking in tongues and falling under the influence of the Holy Spirit, I had been rather skeptical.

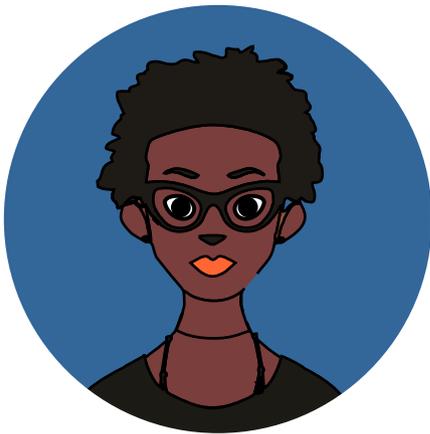
The weekend after my friend gave me the Word, she introduced me to a weekend programme and asked that I go only if I was willing to open up my heart to God. I attended the conference, and on the last day, there was a teaching on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The preacher spoke on the strongholds of the mind and the spirit of unbelief. The gift of the Holy Spirit was unravelled, and shared as a gift for every child of God.

An altar call was made for the Baptism of The Holy Spirit. I had never prayed in tongues, and so, I stepped out to be prayed for. Right before the Preacher said Amen, I had started speaking in tongues. I felt a charge, like I was holding a machine gun in my hands; my hands were shaking so badly. I felt something push me back, and though I was trying to push forward and resist, the Holy Spirit kept pushing me back until I was on the floor. No Pastor had laid hands on me, yet the anointing of the Lord, countering my skepticisms, took me to the floor.

This encounter was 6 weeks after my dad died. I became a totally different person; I was smiling from ear to ear. I was on a natural high for the next 2 weeks. Nobody could stress me — not even Lagos traffic! I was smiling as a result of the love of God! All I had to do was open my heart to receive Him - this was to be the beginning and first floor in God's tower.

I continued to seek Him and desire more of Him and since then; He has shown me so many more levels of His love and goodness. God has met

me at every single point of my need. Spiritually, I can say that I walk and fellowship with the Spirit. He is always with me and He has never left me. Even when I was not aware of His presence, He was there. All I had to do was open my heart and reject negative thoughts like- I was not deserving of a gift from Him.



M

I was born in a polygamous family; my dad had 2 wives, and my mum was the second wife. Though my dad was very successful and affluent, he was not generous towards my mother or us - his kids. We did not get the best of clothes or food. My dad took us shopping once a year and that was the only time he ever got us anything. School was not a pleasant experience because we always had torn uniforms and shoe with open soles.

I would later understand that all of this hostility was because my step-mum, his first wife, was unable to conceive. So, my dad was cruel to my mum as a way to appease his first wife. He treated my step-mum's relatives so much better than he treated us. My mother tried to console us by telling us that his actions were intended to toughen us so that we could have a better life in future.

My dad's maltreatment of my mum got worse and at some point, my mum had to leave the house when he and his first wife decided to legalise their marriage. When my mum left, we realised that her presence had shielded us from a lot of the hatred in the house. She normally blessed us after my dad rained curses on us. She made us believe in God; she had planted the seed of love in our hearts but after she left, all we felt was hatred.

One of my older brothers went on to become a Pastor and he led me to Christ. Gradually, I started understanding that God would always accept me and love me. I was also taught to honour my father and mother, irrespective of who they were or what they had done.

Whenever my dad rained curses on my brothers and I, we would always speak the Word of God over our lives saying “no matter what is going on around us, we believe You, God.” It was a constant battle. Through this, my brothers and I formed a bond that transcended what we could see

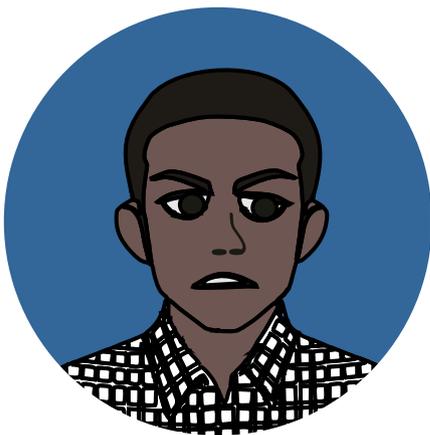
“We embraced her and through God's love and promises, we took care of her“

around us. We continued to focus on God and believe in His word for our future.

In 2004, my step-mum had a stroke, and all her relatives - now grown - deserted her. We were left to care of her alone, and we took up the responsibility. We embraced her and through God's love and promises, we took care of her. She and my dad were visibly shocked by our response in love. They began to see us as their children and this in turn led to reconciliation between my mum and step-mum, and we became one family.

My step-mum unfortunately died but in her last years, she became a very lovely woman. She would advise us while my dad on the other hand would pray for us. It took a while for us to accept that they had really changed but eventually we did. We grew to love her so much that we cried when she passed.

Though my mum, brothers and I had legitimate reasons to be resentful and feel nothing but hatred towards my dad and step-mum, we conquered evil with God's love. We could love them, because we had the love of God (John 15:19-20).



B.T

In my final year at the University of Lagos, I worked with an NGO as the head of marketing, and was very good at my job. I felt good about myself but I had a very nasty attitude. I did not care about people — they were mere tools to get the job done. I was convinced that the problem lay with the people that did not like me. In my eyes, I was always right.

I went home for a school break and my father noticed that I had changed. I talked back at him if he asked me to carry out certain duties; and did them at my own time. This made him very angry, and resulted in him taking measures to discipline me. When I dressed up to go out, he would dress me down with his words. It seemed like I could not do anything right. This carried on for a period and I became broken inside.

I was certain that my father did not love me. I turned to my mother and threatened to leave the house. She pleaded with me but she could not help me. I had no friends so I went back to God and cried for a love-relationship with my father.

On a particular day, I got a call from the organisation I was working for, informing me that I had been selected to go to Ethiopia for leadership training. I had never travelled out of the country and now at my feet was an offer of an all-expense paid trip. I thought to myself, 'this is it!' I was very proud of myself. I shared the news with my father but he responded, "Is that your priority right now?"

I was shattered. I looked at him but could not do or say anything. All I needed from him was his permission to travel — a yes! From the bible, I knew I had to honour my parents, so I grudgingly accepted his stance and did not embark on the journey. However, something in me broke even more and I left home for school. I remained in school for 3 months without visiting home or calling my father.

“I was certain that my father did not love me”

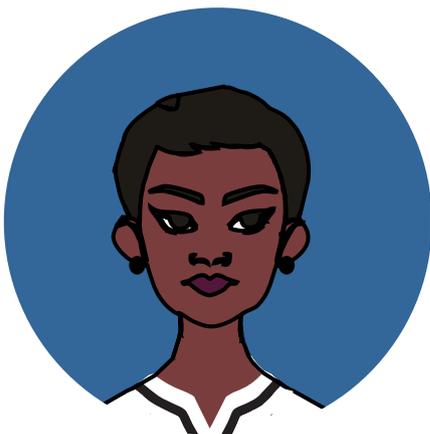
After the 3 months hiatus, my father called me home and without apologizing tried to explain why he said the things he had told me. He asked if I was okay and I said yes. I lied. I was not okay; I was very hurt. I would go on without talking to him and anytime people asked me about him, I narrated my hurts and experiences passionately.

It was not so much about Ethiopia. I was more upset that he did not 'release' me. Even though I had now graduated and could afford a ticket, I could not let go of the pain. I was quite resentful.

I returned home and the fight continued. Tired of fighting and contending with 'daddy issues', I started looking for answers. I then went to a Church service in which the Pastor said "if you pray for somebody that offends you, you can start loving the person, and God will change the person." So, I decided to give it a shot and prayed that God would change my father's heart.

As I prayed to God about him, God showed me issues with my character. He revealed the purpose in my brokenness and obedience to my father. I grudgingly started learning to obey God and listen to my father. However, nothing seemed to be changing with my father. I then realised that it was not just about the prayer but my heart. I knew I had to renew my heart towards him.

Over time, I made a conscious effort to love him and speak words of affirmation towards him. The more I did this, the more my hot-blooded father started calming down. It was indeed miraculous! He would hug me and tell me he loved me. I became even more reassured that God exists! I became happy and learnt to submit to my father - who I can now call 'dad.' My love relationship with God and my father transformed my life.



ESOHE

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acceptance.



“Can a mother forget the baby at
her breast and have no compassion
on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will not
forget you!”

Isaiah 49:5 (NIV)



I don't know why I didn't join a clique in my first year at secondary school. Anyway, by my second year it was too late. All the cliques had been formed and breaking in was tough, near impossible in fact. I felt alone like I didn't belong anywhere or have my own people. It always seemed like I had to do something or have something to show, and or act a certain way to belong. Nobody liked me enough to want me in their squad...for free. Subconsciously, I learnt wrongly so early in life that love had to be earned and paid for, that love was never free.

Fast forward to my second year in University. I had this friend, Uchenna, who had found the love of Jesus and he kept trying to convince me that Jesus loves me too, just like that and His love is unconditional - completely without requirements or expectations. "As in, he loves you for no reason and doesn't want a payback", he always said. It seemed too good to be true for my ears. There had to be a catch, I always insisted.

Eventually I gave in and found out for myself as I journeyed with Jesus that truly with his Love, there is no catch. It is unconditional, relentless and available to ALL for FREE! Although it was hard to believe at first, this truth, like a seed, was planted in my heart and gradually has taken root. The magnitude of God's love for me is sinking in and from being mere head knowledge; it has become the anchor of my faith in Him.

On days when the devil comes at me with condemning thoughts suggesting Jesus has fallen out of love with me for whatever sin I may have committed. I sometimes have moments of doubt, because I think

“I learnt wrongly so early in life that love had to be earned and paid for, that love was never free.”

perhaps the devil is right, that sin has disqualified me and put me out of reach of God's love. But my heart is reminded by the Holy Spirit that when God says u-n-c-o-n-d-i-t-i-o-n-a-l He means it to the last letter. As in, no height, no depth or anything in all of creation can separate me from the love of God. Gbam! (Romans 8:39). The doubts fade and the devil and his fake talk are thrown out of the window. I then make my way back to my Father, who is never far and His arms are wide open to receive me with overwhelming love...always.

Interestingly, today one of God's sweetest expressions of love to me is the people He sends my way. I now have an arsenal of amazing humans I'm blessed to call friends. I happen to meet the most amazing people so randomly, but I know it is not random, God drops them on my path like little surprise gifts or sticky notes to say, 'I've got you'. You know how you'd be broke and then stumble on some money folded away in the back pocket of your jeans? Yeah, that's how it feels sometimes when He blesses me with friends (for free). The timing and friendship so sweet.

My journey with God has shown me I'm never alone and there is a love that is perfect and free and available to all...even you. We are irrevocably, relentlessly and unconditionally loved by God and nothing, absolutely nothing can alter this truth. What a blessed assurance!



ADANMA

The greatest problem I had as a young Christian boy of 9, freshly into secondary school, was how to keep sporting my punk hairstyle. This was, however, unheard of by the Christians around me, who constantly said, quoting 1 John 2.15, “*do not love the things of the world or the things that are in the world.*”

I, however, wanted to have it all - that is, be myself, have fun and still have God, which did not seem possible. The years passed, and God looked more and more like a sadist, a killjoy that did not want anything good for me. The rules that came with being a Christian made it next to impossible for me to serve Him.

I still went to Church. I joined the choir and drama production team but I was a hypocrite. Although it looked like it, I was not going to church because of my love for Christ; I went to get the pretty babes in the choir.

I came up with a plan for what my University life was going to be like, which all summed up to me having fun. Since nothing that had to do with God looked like fun, I would enjoy my life to the fullest by doing nothing like that. I was going to go to all the parties, get politically involved and roll with the popular guys.

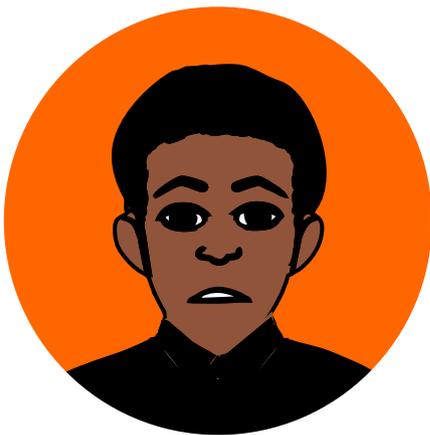
Now, we all know about the typical types of boys in every class: the born-again guys who sat in front with their unusually long trousers and smartly tucked in shirts (usually stripped or sky blue). We had the happy-go-lucky guys at the back of the class who always said funny stuff, cracking every rib with the witty remarks during boring lectures. Then, there were those of us who wanted the best of both worlds.

“...rather than run from Him when one falls into sin, it is the best time to run to God.”

I was, however, perplexed when I started school and found one of the happy-go-lucky people leading Sunday school in one of the fellowships on campus. I found it difficult to understand how he could be a Christian, more so, be a Sunday school teacher! How could he eat his cake and still have it? I wondered.

This guy was the direct opposite of my 'ideal' Christian. He did not look or dress to fit the profile of the Christian I had in my head all these years. This would be the tipping point for me. In that moment, God led me back to Him, and I re-dedicated my life to Christ. I also discovered that rather than run from Him when one falls into sin, it is the best time to run to God.

On the other hand, growing up, I had dealt with issues of low self-esteem from being told I had a big head, poor dentition and being too dark skinned. When I rededicated my life to Christ, I learnt more about who God said I was - how it is not a function of anybody's opinion, for '*I am beautifully and wonderfully made*' (Psalms 139.14). This understanding helped me tackle these issues of low self-esteem. Today, I am married to a lovely woman, one who also sees me the way God sees me.



BOWALE

My mum was 14 and my dad 15 when I was born. My dad was born into a wealthy family while my mum worked as a maid for my dad's neighbour. It was chaotic when my mum got pregnant because my dad's family wanted nothing to do with it. They believed it was all a lie, so they booked an appointment with a family doctor for an abortion. Halfway to the hospital, however, my mum's boss said she could not go through with it and did not think that they should go ahead. Therefore, I was born. My mum - being a maid - could not afford to take care of me, so I was taken to the village in Delta state to live with her mother, while my mum continued work in Lagos.

Growing up in the village was fun for me! We went to school bare feet and wrote with chalks on slates. We ate *Fufu* and *Nsala* soup for breakfast, and were taught in Igbo. I could only speak *Igbo* language but I loved it there. When I was 9, however, my mum brought me to Lagos. She took me to her sister's place where I was enrolled in a roadside school but could not understand anything taught. I could not speak nor write in English. I was very unattractive - born with knocked knees and just did not fit anywhere. Nonetheless, my mother would not let up on trying to get me educated. She took me to my dad's parents who could afford to put me through school. They rejected me. It took series of family meetings and DNA tests to change their minds and they eventually took me in. This would turn out to be the most depressing period of my life.

I could not communicate in English and felt no love or family. I was coming from a place where we all ate together on the floor in bowls but here, everybody ate by themselves. I also dealt with subtle rejection from them.

“...never felt like I was worth anything or would be anything.”

It was years of loneliness and emptiness, and I cried every day. I never felt like I was worth anything or would be anything.

Despite my educational challenges, my paternal grandmother got me straight into primary 6 because she owned a school. As expected, I failed all my classes and Secondary School entrance exams. My grandmother convinced her friend who also owned a Secondary School to accept me in her school. I was last in class for 3 years until I became friends with students who did very well, in my 3rd year. They taught me word for word, and I read for hours and hours.

After a little while, I started to come 4th in class. It was amazing. I was however still empty. I also faced rejection from my peers. My first school mother dumped me saying I was too 'razz'. I later met another wonderful person who became my school mother. She took care of me because I never had enough pocket money or have anyone visit me. My mum came to visit bringing only food because she did not have any money.

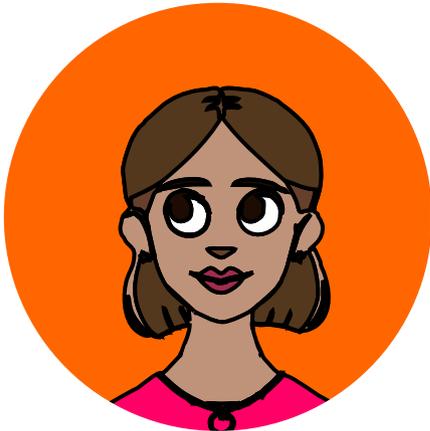
Then something significant happened: I got admitted into Covenant University. That is where I believe my whole life changed. We were told over and over again 'You are kings and queens. You are a leader and a different generation regardless of where you're coming from.' We heard things like "your background should not put your back on the ground." "You can be anything that you want to be."

These words were life to me! I felt loved and accepted; I felt like I could do anything. Our Bishop told us how he used to live with his grand mum in the village yet turned out to be a very successful man. I gave my life to Christ and I saw my life began to change. I started learning forgiveness and how to accept myself and love myself.

I started learning to work hard. I was aware that though I was Christian, some struggles remained. So I started businesses in school and read many motivational books. God was teaching and leading me. He gave me great friends who were there for me. I graduated with good results, and immediately started work at a Bank. Things were good.

After a while, I started to feel like I needed more. I knew somewhere deep

inside that I wanted to be an Entrepreneur so I resigned from the bank. I started my own business and life became better! Today, I also run an NGO which provides free education and healthcare for less privileged children. Sometimes, I look back at my life and I am amazed because I cannot say that I did anything special to deserve this favour from God. All I did was accept His love. God told me 'If you let me love you and give me your heart, I'll give you a future that you never dreamt of.' I hear about my village peers who still have it very hard and I can only be grateful for my life. I know God is just starting with me.



At age 5, I lost my mother. Things got worse as my father lost his job the same year. He could not afford to raise my brothers and me so I left Port Harcourt City for Ibadan to live with my cousins to get an education.

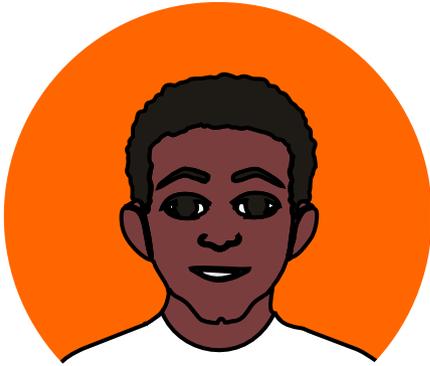
Growing up with extended family members, I suffered rejection and did not feel loved. I was spanked for little unintentional mistakes that could be overlooked like breaking dishes. The times I visited my immediate family in Port Harcourt, I felt like a stranger in my father's house because I left home at an early age. I acted weird. I felt a vacuum that I could not explain.

I excelled in my primary education then proceeded for secondary school where I also excelled in my final year exams. However, my hopes were dashed when I was told my relatives were done sponsoring my education. Then a friend of mine told me about a pre-degree programme in Federal University of Akure. I liked the idea and discussed it with my dad. Miraculously, he was able to raise Fifty Five Thousand Naira (N55,000) needed for the programme. During that programme, I joined a drama group and featured in some of their stage plays. I did very well as an actor and people enjoyed my performances. The fact that I was cheered by the audience made me feel loved in the moment but I always felt a vacuum after the performances.

In my first year, I joined a fellowship called Rhema Campus Fellowship. It was founded by Pastor Godman Akinlabi of The Elevation Church. In fellowship, I learnt more about God, how to study his word and how to fellowship with him. I saw Jesus fill the vacuum in my heart through consistent fellowship with Him. I felt loved even without being accepted

“I felt loved even without being accepted by other people.”

by other people. Along the line, God used senior friends to supply all my needs. In my 3rd year, I became an associate pastor and in my final year, I became a senior pastor of the fellowship. I excelled in my first degree, and then proceeded for another degree, where I also excelled. In the beginning, the future looked bleak but God saw me through and gave my life meaning.



JOHN

I gave my life to Christ at the age of 11. After that, I struggled a bit with wanting to run my life myself. I sought freedom the wrong way and started living out of God's will. Then, I began to feel worthless. I felt like I did not have a purpose here on earth. I would question God and ask Him to kill me because I was useless here on earth. I felt like I had nothing to offer anyone, like I was a dullard. My parents made the situation worse by comparing me with other kids when I did not do so great in school. I walked the streets with my head bowed; I could not look people straight in the eye. I struggled with timidity and low self-esteem.

Then, I rededicated my life to God in the University. I wanted to serve God in my fellowship, so made moves to join the drama unit because I could act. However, I was advised by someone to join to prayer team, so I could build my relationship with God- and I did. This was a turning point for me. As I started to give myself to prayer, I began to understand my purpose. I did not know all of it because God did not reveal everything in full; but one step at a time. However, my confidence grew. I am grateful to God for beautifying my life.

I once felt I did not have a purpose, felt like I was useless but God touched me, gave me beauty for ashes, gave me confidence.



ROLI

“I felt like I had nothing to offer anyone”

I was born into an Anglican family and my folks were consistent church-goers. My perspective in those days was that my mum was very rigid and bitter. I loved my dad because he was always willing to listen to my fears and struggles. Naturally, he became my hero and favourite parent.

Growing up, my siblings and I only really watched Doughnut Man, Sound of Music, Cartoon Network and on some rare occasion, my parents' wedding video. One afternoon, while watching my parents' wedding video, I noticed that my mum had a protruding belly. Out of curiosity, I asked my aunt who responded in a very unexpected manner that set my life on a different destructive path.

She said "Your mum was pregnant with you at the time; that's why your parents had to get married."

I don't understand why someone will say that to a 7 year old child.

After that, all I could think of was how I was the only reason my parents were together, irrespective of their desire to. At that age, I felt a great burden to ensure the peace of my home and beat myself bitterly if there was any contention or strife between my parents. My mind was constantly under pressure to impress my parents and I thought giving my all to please them would solve the problem of their marriage - "me". Unfortunately, my mum was unimpressible; I couldn't seem to do anything right by her.

Thankfully, I found Christ in secondary school. It was pretty exciting at first as I thought God was automatically going to make me perfect and solve all my problems. I discovered profound peace and my mental strength grew.

“At the time, I never thought it possible for God to love me better than my parents did.”

My academic grades were not left behind, as I improved from being an average/bottom student to top 4 in my class. With this new found joy and tremendous improvement I expected my mum to be impressed. To my greatest surprise, she wasn't. I remember her saying "Why are you happy? Those in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions don't have two heads. Don't you know that people in 4th positions in school never amount to anything in life?" Those words immediately stabbed and killed everything within me.

I felt weak on the inside. When would my mum be pleased with me? Was I even her daughter? Was God going to sit there and watch while she frustrated me? There and then, I made up my mind to give up on trying to please her and doing things that were right by God. After all, He watched while my mother broke me repeatedly. There was only so much I could take. So I turned to God and said *"You have all the power in the world and created the world in 7 days and you sit there, cross your arms and watch this little girl who had no clue of what was going on when she was being conceived go through all of this? Since you cannot do anything to help me, I'm just going to leave you and go do my thing."* I did not think God loved me or cared much for me. I started to rebel and went out of my way to do things I was not meant to be doing as I concluded that God was not there, at least not for me. I sought for acceptance, attention and approval from everyone & anything - boys, school, doing stuff that would get me punished etc.

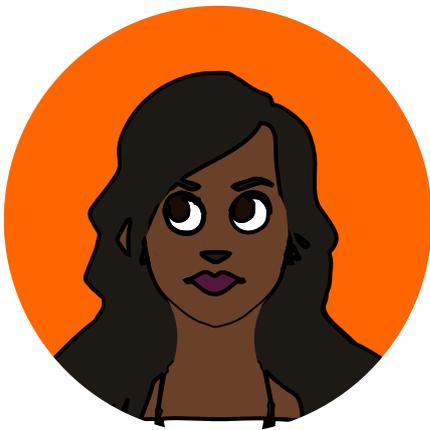
I continued with my carefree lifestyle in University though I attended fellowships in school. I was a 'Martharian' - (Like Martha in the Bible, I was devoted to service and not really interested in the message or word of God.). I was the kind of person that made sure everything in Church went on smoothly. I felt I had to work endlessly to gain God's approval. I felt the need to work for God to earn anything from him at all. If my earthly parents did not love me, I was not expecting much from God either. At the time, I never thought it possible for God to love me better than my parents did. Then I got to a place where I understood that God loves me and he wants to do immeasurably more than I can imagine.

I am thankful that I have now come to experience His unconditional love

for me. I held my Mum's actions against her all these years, but God helped me forgive her. I also found out that her hostility towards me had nothing to do with me and I do not blame her anymore.

Through my struggles with finding and accepting God's love because people I expected to love me did not love me, I came to receive God's unconditional love that is nothing like the love of men.

God's love endures forever and without a shred of doubt, I can tell you that He loves me.



R.L

My parents planned to have just 3 children but somehow my mother got pregnant again. My dad was very furious and it took the intervention of a doctor to convince him against abortion.

Still, my parents were not happy about the situation so I did not have a naming ceremony. No baby pictures, no first birthday party. All my siblings had birthday pictures every year of their lives but me.

At some point, my father decided that he wanted us to become Christians, so we joined a Methodist Church. I grew up there and even became the head of the ushering department.

Meanwhile, I was not a very intelligent child, and had very poor grades; I was also very stubborn and restless. My sister was the smart one, calm, cool, and the queen of everything. Queen of the school, queen of the street carnival, queen of everything and my father was so proud of her.

My school reports always had comments like 'she's always making noise', or 'she's not serious in class' or 'there's room for improvement'. My dad always complained. One day I told him that he did not love me and that was why he was so wicked to me. I asked why he would not accept me for who I am. He explained that he loved me and that is why he is hard on me- because he wanted me to be the best person ever. After that day, I made my sister my god. I wanted to be just like her- read, be calm and collected. That did not work out.

Eventually, I was shipped off to Police secondary school, Minna, Niger

“I've experienced it, and I know that
God is real.”

state. I was still very stubborn; I disrespected seniors, lied and did all sorts in school. However, in SS2, a man came to my school and talked about the story of two sons- One of the sons stole something from the father but the other son caught him and told him 'I will tell father if you do not do this for me'. So the other son kept collecting everything his brother had. However one day, the son got tired of it and went to confess his sin to the father who only said 'oh, it's yours anyway, you're my son'. That story transformed my life.

I realised that I was guilty of all my sins, all the bad things I did but I could go to God and He would accept me back. So I did just that, got baptised by the Holy Spirit and became a committed Christian in school.

I went on to have some spectacular experiences with God.

One day, I asked God to show me if Christianity was real and just as I was praying with a group of people, the ground shook. It was exactly like the story of Pentecost (Acts 2). Only without the tongues of fire. I felt the place shake under me, and the power of the Lord was so much, and I realised that this is real...so real.

After that, I could confidently answer any member of my extended family (who were still Muslims) or any other person who ever asked why I was a Christian. I told them "I've experienced it, and I know that God is real."

Another experience would happen later in my university years. I joined Sovereign Army fellowship from Day 1 of University in University of Lagos and became the head of the Bible Study department in UNILAG. I was praying to God, asking Him to show me more of Him. After a prayer meeting, I went to the back of the chapel to pray by myself and lay on the ground, as I was too tired to sit. Then I opened my eyes and saw snow-like white particles coming down from heaven like dew. It was amazing. I closed my eyes in disbelief, opened it again and it had even transformed into something more beautiful. I looked around to see there were other people praying, but they could not see it. When I got back to my hostel, I started talking to people about God, about my experience.

It was amazing.

I made it into Law school to the utter disbelief of my father who did not expect me to make it this far.

So I prayed that 'God, if you would just help me to pass through this, help me to become a lawyer, help me to pass my bar finals, just help me, so that my father would be happy at least, and he would know that he did not waste his money, and he did not make a wrong decision to allow me to live'.

And somehow despite the volume of books involved and considering my restless personality, I passed my bar finals. My father was so happy. He showed me off to his friends saying 'Ah! See my daughter, she is the lawyer'.

It was so great to see my dad speak of me like that. It is even greater to have a God I could cry to, that can make Himself real to me, change my life, and make everything new.



TY

I was depressed by the time I was 16 because I had clear evidence that I was a failure academically. I did not have a relationship with my father and was struggling with an addiction.

As the first of five children, I was the one my parents wanted to experiment with. For example, by the time I was in primary 4 I had tried out common entrance examinations for secondary schools. By the time I was in SSS 2, I had attempted JAMB twice, SSCE once and passed. I grew up very nerdy and socially handicapped. I had maybe just two friends in every set/class I was in at the time. I certainly did not have a girlfriend until I was much older. I loved books and read all sorts of books. I grew more insular – I could not go out. Whenever I went out, I felt disoriented and had to go back home to get myself together. I stayed by myself a lot.

I also tried to deal with the pressure that I was supposed to be very bright and do things very quickly.

I was fifteen and a half when I got into the University. So imagine a socially handicapped fifteen-year-old boy going into the university to be with people that had been two and three sets above him in the secondary school. I had no clue what to do. My parents were going round town, telling their friends that their son was a genius but they did not know that their son was socially handicapped and totally disoriented. One who could not understand what it meant to go to school by 5 or 6 am to get a seat, had no friends, was getting more depressed and on the other hand was struggling with an addiction to masturbation.

I had gotten admission to study Zoology with plans of transferring to Medicine by the second year if I got good enough grades. However,

“When people say that God can heal pain, He can.”

that year was a disgrace because I could not do anything academically. I was so disillusioned. I did my best but it did not work out. I failed that year and my dream of becoming a doctor ended. I made it into second year but it was never envisioned that this bright boy would be studying Zoology in year two. My parents were distraught. I was kind of silently pleased that I was going to year two after all. Until my father came home one day and says, "my friends say you can go back to year one and study a professional course".

The next day I was enrolled for Economics. By the time I was eventually able to get the inter-faculty transfer done, my actual mates from secondary school had then come to school. I spent the next couple of semesters in school just drifting and that was a fairly painful experience for me.

At the same time I was still struggling with masturbation. That was a big deal, not just because I sensed it was not right but also because it became addictive after a while.

However, one day on my way back from reading at night, I heard someone preaching with a mega phone "Do you know where you are going to spend life after?" and right there, I knelt down, prayed and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. I started to learn that God loved me; I joined a campus fellowship where I made friends and found a family, I was ushering leader and general-secretary.

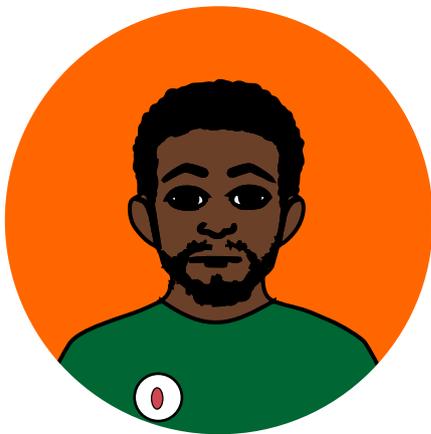
This experience was a process of reformation, there were things that were missing in my life, and a lot of pain but I began to heal gradually. My second year in school was not as good as well but I did better. I eventually went on to make an 'A' in the university and I remember crying when I found out. My grades got a lot better. My heart healed. However, because of how my first two years started, my grades required me to have an extra semester. Therefore, even my peers left the university and went off while I stayed for an extra semester. I prayed a lot through that season.

Miraculously, for the first time in our university they agreed to speed up grading for students with an extra semester. This meant that I got to go

for the national youth service together with my peers. It was a miracle and also the beginning of a formal restoration for me.

I went on to serve in Lagos at a prestigious firm. Since then, I have worked with a couple of multi-national firms including where I work now. In addition, God helped me break the habit of masturbation along the way. I got married to my lovely wife, have two kids and now pastor a church.

Through all, I found that God is a miracle worker. When people say that God can heal pain, He can.



EHIGIE

I was born into a Christian home, and a Pentecostal African Church in Warri, Nigeria. I was living in Warri when the crisis started. It was very, very tough. It was just my mum, my 8 siblings and I. Every morning we woke up to blood trails or dead bodies on the streets. It was really hard.

My mum decided to split the family and sent me to live with my sister in Lagos. My sister was married to a devout Muslim man; and to protect her marriage, would not let me go to Church like I was used to.

Therefore, sometimes as early as 4 am, I would sneak out of the house to find somewhere to pray saying 'God, help me. Help me God'.

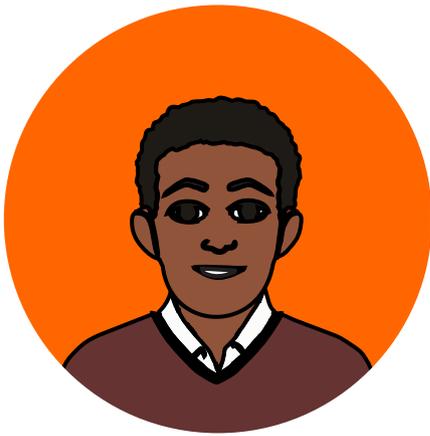
While this was going on, I went with the family to the Mosque. I would dress up in a *jalabiya* and cap and was greeted with *A-Salaam Alaikum*. I sold Islamic calendars to make my sister happy. However, there was something burning inside of me for Church.

Then I found a Christian fellowship in secondary school where I gave my life to Christ. I started preaching to people in school about God, and my life grew with Him. Lives got saved; I was ordained as president of the Christian fellowship in school. After secondary school, I enrolled in film school to study film and TV production but here, everything turned around for me. It became so difficult to pray or go to Church. As a cinematographer, I worked every day and went for video shoots; I got carried away.

Until a particular day, the head of department in film school took me to the Elevation Church, where I heard a message preached '*do not waste your pain*'. Somehow, to me, it meant there was hope for me.

“It became so difficult to pray or go to Church.”

John 14.13-14 'if you ask Me anything in my name, I will give it.' I realized that no matter what we get up to, God still loves and cares for us. He's always ready to give himself to us as long as we open our heart to Him. I came back to God and He accepted me.



OJEVWE BIGHORO

Growing up, we worshipped at the Celestial Church of Christ. My dad was a senior member of the Church, so you could say that I was born in the Church. It was a tedious routine, with us going to Church at 10am, and not leaving till 3pm. There were times I felt something special but most times, I could only feel time passing. It was not until I was 13 that I gave my life to Christ. I was walking around with a friend of mine in school when we were invited into an ongoing Bible club. It was a room full of girls so we did not think too much about it before we joined them. They made an altar call, which seemed like a set up- Everyone was asked to stand, and my friend and I were the only ones standing when everyone born again was asked to sit down. So we gave our lives to Christ and born again, we were - for about two or three terms. I got into University at 16 and it was a very interesting period for me. I was exposed to a lot through my University days. I could no longer say I was a Christian and the friends I had did not help. We would do silly things like drive across a junction that had streets or roads connecting to it, at top speed, without looking left or right. We lived recklessly. One year, my dad got very ill, and was hospitalised. At this point, I became serious with God, and gave my life to Him, again. I started praying for my dad, and for the first time, did a dry fast for three days. However, on the third day, my dad died. I was so heartbroken but also comforted by the Holy Spirit. About this time, I found myself in a limbo: I was born again but what was I to do with myself? Back then, Church was very conservative. I had been heavily influenced by rap music, so I dressed the part - black jeans, Timberland boot and

“I was born again but what was I to do with myself?”

an oversized T-shirt. I did not fit into the Church crowd. I felt I was too cool for Church. On the other hand, I could not fit in with my friends - something like an identity crisis. It was a dark and lonely place for me. I had no friends, and nobody that understood where I was coming from. I, then, met this lady in my final year at University; she was a freshman. We got talking, and were able to connect on a spiritual level. I could talk to her, and she understood where I was coming from. On our second or third date, we went to a Church service, and this really helped me. She went on to become a pillar of support for me, and eventually, my wife! It was through her that God solidified my experience as a believer. I learnt to be myself, and discovered my identity in Christ. I realised the importance of being renewed and transformed in my mind. I started to understand that God was more interested in the journey and shaping my character, than just answering my prayers. Over and over, and through my experiences, I am sure that nothing can separate me from the love of God, and that His plans for my life are better than whatever plan I might have.



DIPO OLAGBEGI

My mum remarried and a couple of things changed for me. I was 7 years old, and had to live in my step father's house. I transferred schools and was admitted to primary two in Corona. Though I went to the best schools, had good toys and travelled often, I had a difficult childhood because I did not feel loved. I woke up every morning regretting being born. I did not get the attention I longed for but my step brothers did. I cried every week.

This took a toll on my academics. I started reading very late, and would often take the last position in class. If I happened to come second to the last in class, we would celebrate at home! So, I grew up not feeling good enough. I was hardly ever commended on anything at home or school. The only thing I thought I was good at was playing the piano but that in itself was not good enough; my parents never came for any of my performances in school.

I was always compared with people I was much older than as well as my peers. I came to the conclusion that I was a mistake. I moved on to Secondary School, and maintained the last position in class. For some reason, I was always favoured in class despite my poor academic track record. All my teachers would appoint me the class prefect. However, at some point, I had to repeat a class. My mum, ashamed, transferred me to another school in Port-Harcourt.

In this new school, things were different. There was a presence I started becoming aware of; I felt peace for the first time. Even when I cried, I felt a presence around me that comforted me. I could not understand it, but things were changing rapidly. The only explanation I could come up with was God. I started coming first in class and maintained this position all through my education there.

“ I woke up every morning regretting being born.”

After I completed my Secondary school education, I expected to go abroad for University, but as usual, my mum put my younger brother before me. She had no such plans, and this was even more painful because I had to re-write Jamb. I was hurt. Little did I know that it was all in God's plan. So, I went to Covenant University.

I gave my life to Christ in my third year at University. I started realising I was special to God. I could not believe that God had time for me, or could pay attention to me. I could not believe that God could love me. After service with NYSC (National Youth Service Corps), I had the privilege of going abroad for my Masters. So I started sending in applications. I had a school in mind – LSE - and opted for an Accounting course, though it was not what I wanted to do. I did not get the admission, and was so hurt because I was qualified for it. I applied to some other schools and got a part scholarship. A friend of mine then suggested University of Surrey, and when I checked the University's website, I felt at peace. It was obvious that Surrey was where God wanted me to go.

However it was ranked at number 14 and my mum had told me to apply to only Ivy League schools. Yet I decided to give it a try. I checked the course list and saw a course that had everything I wanted - it was just perfect! I went on to the University of Surrey and it was amazing.

My walk with God took another turn. God gave me a Word: “the path of the righteous is guided. Where ever you put your foot I will give you dominion.” He instructed me to put Him above everything. So, I had no choice but to do that. I served in the Children's department in Church, and was actively involved with the evangelism team.

Putting God first involved a lot of things and a number of sacrifices. Even if I had a test or an exam the next day, I would put my divine assignment first and foremost. I saw God come through for me in my academics because of my obedience to Him. He revealed the examination to me, and the Holy Spirit tutored me. This happened in a course I really did not understand – International Finance - I had the highest score in that course!

The Italian professor who taught the course asked to speak with me. He asked me “is all you do read?” I told him “no. it's all God. I do not know

anything.” He said “come off it. What's God? Everybody says God.” So, we started talking about God, and it felt amazing. I left His office knowing that a seed had been planted in his heart.

In a class of over 100 people, I was the best graduating student and had an open scholarship to do a PhD. This was however not my greatest joy; my greatest joy was that my Chinese classmates started to talk with faith. Initially, I would say things like “leave it in God's Hands, it is well. Praise God” and they would look at me weird. Eventually, they started using such lingo. By the time I graduated, my University was number 6 in ranking. Now it feels like I am the star of the family but God is the real star of this show. The struggles have been real and there will still be battles, but I know that my God will always be there for me.



I.E

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career.





Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Prov. 3:5-6(NIV)



Secondary school was a good experience for me. I gave my life to Christ and also got good grades. Something happened which made me leave Nigeria. I wrote the university entrance exam - JAMB but had my results cancelled. I did so well that it was assumed that I cheated - this happened to about four of us who topped the class. This left me with a feeling of bitterness.

I left Nigeria not wanting to come back until I could influence things and not be subject to a culture that did not reward hard work. I was later to find that this problem was not peculiar to Nigeria. I went on to the University of Cambridge where I realised that I was not the smartest and perhaps had been just a local champion.

Unlike in Nigeria where I was always top of the class, I finished near bottom of the class in University. It was just by God's grace that I finished with a second class upper. After that, I went into Investment Banking in London; I worked at some of the top banks excelling career wise. The next phase of my career was to go to Business School. I applied to the top 3 schools, and had an interview with one of them. I was, however, kept waiting. During this time, I was laid off due to the 2008 economic downturn but was given a nice compensation package so I did not mind. I also had my eyes on a lady who sadly turned me down. This led to a 6-month period of depression for me.

Fortunately, I was accepted into Business School and managed to pick myself up. I then went on to work in the South African office of a top tier-consulting firm. The whole experience, from University to being laid off, taught me humility and gratitude. I later travelled to Spain to learn Spanish and French and began to discover God better through the

“God helped me find my purpose in life,”

Spanish translation of the Bible.

I eventually moved back to Nigeria to start a Sports and Media management company focused on reviving athletics in Nigeria. In 3 years, we made notable achievements, including a documentary, a reality show and managing some of the top athletes in Nigeria. I thank my Heavenly Father for my earthly father who has been very supportive.

In addition, worthy to note is a recollection from my University days, when I was playing a game of Truth or Dare with friends. I was asked how many girls I had slept with! It took me a while to answer but I finally told the truth saying “None”. I understood how much of a shock it was but I was honest because I knew how much staying *faithful* to God's word in terms of keeping one's self for marriage had an impact on my life.

All in all, God helped me find my purpose in life, and discover what I should be doing while helping me not stray from His commands.



BAMBO

I heard God speak to me as early as 5. My mum often came to my room to pray with me around midnight. I noticed she always asked that we prayed that my dad would be changed. I later found out that this was because my dad was a member of a peculiar religious organisation.

A few years later, my dad woke up on a particular day and said, "Let's go to church." This is something that he usually said but would not actually follow through with until that day. From then on, he started going to church, and got saved. As young as I was then, I knew that God was at work.

Being very introverted, I kept to myself a lot as a young boy. The only thing I did was read books. I only wanted to talk about the books I read; I do not remember any fun memories at that age.

I was supposed to go to private secondary school but my dad lost his job and most of his money to a bad investment so he could not afford the fees. I was enrolled in a public school where I struggled to fit in because of my different background. I also do not have any fun memories about secondary school because I just went through school having an identity crisis.

University, however, came with a few fun memories. Although I was still withdrawn, I had friends to hang out with. I smoked just for the fun of it and was also an occasional drinker.

I went on to law school in 2013, it was still fun. I was the youth secretary for my church, participated in the choir, along with other leadership roles in church. I was very active – I was everywhere.

However, I did not surrender my all to God until December 2013, when I heard a minister, Chris Delvan was ministering during a church

“Caleb we love you and we share in your disappointment”.

concert. There, I surrendered my all to God. However, I started falling ill frequently. At first, it was just my eyes and the headaches, until I was diagnosed with a high blood pressure. That was the start of a series of hospital trips. I lived on drugs every day and I missed classes because I was placed on compulsory bed rest at intervals. This affected my preparations for my Bar finals exams. Later that year my friend called me from Port-Harcourt to inform me that the results were out. I checked and found out that I had failed the exams. I was devastated as I thought about how I came from a long line of lawyers and the disappointment that this was. I googled various ways to commit suicide but did not follow through with anyone of them because they were all painful. (lol) I lied to my parents about the results saying it was withheld and still went on to NYSC camp a week after the release of the result. Here, I was determined to forge ahead. My parents did not push because they were wary of my health.

In camp, I joined NCCF which was a wonderful family. For me, NCCF was like closure. I started preparing for the next bar exams. I wrote bar exams again in 2014, I failed. I wrote the exams again in 2015 and I failed. This was my third attempt.

At this point, I was tired of life. I told my mum this and she encouraged me saying that God has got my back and I should not give up. Finally, I scaled through in 2016. It was my fourth attempt at the exams. Amidst all of this, I was fighting depression, serious anxiety, fear, identity crisis, and shame. However, I saw God take me through a pathway of love. I got to know Him more, not just because I was seeking His hand but because I was also seeking His face. He surrounded me with friends. People I never met called to say they prayed for me. God raised an army of people that loved and prayed for me and I did not even know about that. I remember one of the messages my dad sent me when I failed my exams in 2015. He was in court when I called to tell him about the

result and I cried for about six hours. He said, “Caleb we love you and we share in your disappointment”.

God gave me parents that loved me that much.

He turned my mourning into dancing. He healed me of the high blood pressure. He changed my story.



CALEB

I was born and raised in Calabar, Nigeria. I lost my dad when I was 5, and this made my young years very difficult financially. Things went from bad to worse when my mum lost her job. Our rent expired; we lost our house, had to move into an uncompleted building and went without food some days.

My siblings and I hawked whatever we could - from firewood to papers to fruits - to support our mum. My friends in school laughed at me so I shut myself out from the world and grew up having no friends. I barely made it through Secondary School, and could not register for SSCE. I started work full time in hotels, restaurants, supermarkets – wherever I could find a job. From this, I saved enough money to write my SSCE, 4 years later.

My faith and trust in God was always a central focus of my life. I enjoyed serving God and surrendered my life completely to God at a very young age. So through all of this, my faith in God was very strong. I trusted Him to come through for us; I was very optimistic. I did not let my situation define who I was or who I was going to be. I was desperate for a change for my family and so decided to leave Calabar and head to Lagos, without a plan. I knew God would be there every step of the way. I moved to Lagos to work for a woman who had managed a hotel where I had previously worked.

I lived with the woman for a few months, as a nanny, but things did not

“...we lost our house, had to move into an uncompleted building and went without food some days.”

go as planned. I was maltreated for a while so I left her house. I then moved in with a guy I had met in my first few months in Lagos. He promised to help with a job. That also happened to be quite different from what I expected. In his words, "You have to use what you have to get what you want". He wanted me to sell my body.

However, before I left Calabar, I made a promise to God to keep my virginity till I was married. I turned him down because compromising was out of it. Things then went from bad to worse; I had to leave his house and was stranded. A friend offered me a place in Ketu, and I jumped at the offer. The little room had 7 guys and a girl living in it but I had no choice.

I tried to get a job but all I had was my O' level certificate which made that difficult. I eventually took up a job as house-help in Ijebu-Ode, but was sexually harassed by my boss every day and almost raped! So I returned to Lagos stranded again. At this point, it seemed everyone around me wanted me to compromise but I could not think of doing that.

All this while, I was self-educating; reading books to try to improve myself. I trusted God to make a way, and eventually, He came through. He sent me someone, who helped me get free temporary accommodation. Two months later, I miraculously got a job in an Oil firm with just my O' level certificate. Things began to take shape - I cleaned up nice, and started University, while working. I later got an apartment for myself with a loan from my boss, which he said was non-repayable. A year later, another friend helped pay for an even nicer apartment. It has been God every step of the way. The secret - I had the Word of God in me through all of this.

My favourite Scripture is Hebrews 13:5-6 which says *He will never leave nor forsake me so I can boldly say He is my Helper*. I am here, today, and God is being glorified through all of this. It is not all rosy yet; I have not

arrived. There is still so much I am dealing with, but I'm trusting God to lead me. He has brought me this far.



B.E

If I were to summarise my God Experience, I would call it “my wilderness walk” — one which started in 2015. At that time, I attended Daystar Christian Centre and the Church had tagged 2015 as “our year of radical promotion.” In that year, I was appointed an executive of my former organisation. However, I thought it was not “radical” enough! I wanted more and spent a long time asking God for the radical promotion He promised.

One Saturday in November, during family prayers: my family and I were meditating on God's Word on Joseph. The article used emphasised the reason Joseph was promoted every time - from the Pit to the Philistines to Potiphar's house to Prison, and then to Palace, thereafter becoming Prime Minister - as his ability to forgive quickly. I then deduced that to get that type of promotion I sought, I had to learn to forgive. At that time, it did not make much sense as I held no grudge against anyone. What I did not know was that God was preparing me for something ahead. Things were great at the office; I had lots of commendations from both internal and external clients. Less than a week later, my boss was discussing challenges the company faced. It was a tough decision but I agreed to leave, so I went on vacation and resigned.

I ended 2015 unsure of what 2016 would be like but one thing I was certain of was that I was not alone. In that same period, LifePointe was about to take off and so, I opted to serve. I joined the Parking and External facility team. I knew I could not afford to be idle. As 2016 began, my phones went from ringing all the time to not ringing in five hours! It often seemed like I was alone but God was always with me.

“My prayer, fasting, giving and serving did not stop.”

He surrounded me with praying parents, a loving wife, caring children, Pastor, friends and my Church cell group. Every time I felt I was in the valley, God had a Word for me. In January, I was praying and had a revelation about the type of job awaiting me. It was clear that it would not look like it on the outside, but on the inside, I would see provision - immeasurably more! So, I sent out my CV and applied to every opportunity that arose.

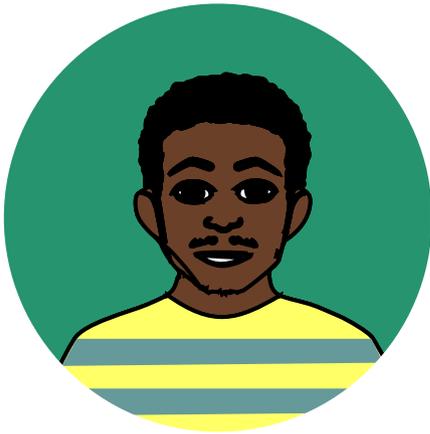
There were moments I got worried as I thought of the school fees I had to pay for my children, and the fact that my savings were dwindling. In those times, I would remember His Word: those who seek the Lord shall not lack anything.

I held onto my faith but sometimes, would ask God when the period of wait would be over. On March 30th 2016, Nathaniel Bassey ministered in LifePointe and had a word from God for me. It was Leviticus 26:10 which says: before the old harvest is exhausted, the new will come. I held on to it. I now had an idea as to when my new harvest would come. My prayer, fasting, giving and serving did not stop. Though I had no income, I gave; I would empty my wallet for those who asked. I considered my giving as a seed sown against lack and poverty. In April, my wife and I declared a week of praise nights. We would praise overnight. In that period, a longtime friend called to ask for some help. I did help him and mentioned that I was no longer with the organisation I had worked for. He was surprised but then asked me to call a friend to inquire about a job opportunity. I reached out to the friend and though they were not accepting any more applications, he asked for my CV.

Prior to this, I had not seen the vacancy and had no clue what position I was applying for until my first interview! I had five stages of interviews for the position and enjoyed favour at every step. For the fifth stage, I was told that I had to meet the chairman and that the appointment would

take at least three weeks to arrange. Three weeks? Things were not looking pleasant.

24 hours later, my appointment with the chairman was secured! What could not happen in 5 months had happened in 4 weeks! In June, I resumed the same position I had looked forward to in my former organisation. Today, my former organisation is one of my clients!



DOMINIC

I was born into a Christian or well, Church-going home. My family moved from Northern Nigeria to Ibadan, and would later move further West. With us not being so sheltered anymore, we went to Church more often. I started hearing so much about Jesus that I was convinced He had only recently died and resurrected! It all felt new. My sister and I then discovered a Church, which would become our family Church. It was there, during an open-air crusade, that I gave my heart to Jesus for the first time. It was a turning point for me. Apart from such periods of complete submission to Christ, my identity had come from knowing that I was 'different' and could do anything I set my mind to - though then, this had nothing to do with God. Thereafter, I took my life back from Jesus several times. There were minor challenges along the way but I generally aced through. I had my life mapped out, from finishing school to my youth service year, and my career. My relationship with Him was on the shelf, and I seemed to be doing great; further deepening my self-reliance. Next on my list was a wonderful job that would afford me a great life. I wanted nothing less than a global multinational like Mobil but after 4 months, I had not found anything befitting. My identity was threatened. I later accepted an offer to work for an engineering multinational, and became quite successful. The 18 months graduate training program was reduced to 6 months for me within my first 3 months. I loved what I did and within months of working full-time, I was known for easily solving technical puzzles. Life was good! For me, however, my reality was not progressing as quickly as my plans. I moved out of my father's house at 24, and grew impatient at the pace at which my career was progressing. So, I applied for another graduate

“God is love; He is crazy about me and has got lofty plans for me!”

program and out of 40,000 applicants, I was one of 12 candidates shortlisted. I hurriedly left where I had been working, and felt justified in my actions despite God's silence when I prayed about my decision. My new job was filled with challenges. Apart from its time-demanding nature, I was suddenly surrounded by very smart people, and the workplace was very competitive. This would call for games of sabotage by other colleagues; it was a year of struggle and emotional stress. It was also the year I realised my worst fear — the fear of failure. I lost my self-confidence and struggled alone. I no longer had time for God, and was rebelling; feeling like He had left me.

On completion of the year-long program, I was retained by the company. Half a year later, I got a below-average appraisal score, for which my then-supervisor explained was a result of the way the appraisal tool was fashioned, and not my quality of work. Although skeptical, I let it go. For the first half of the next year, I got another unfair appraisal.

This time, I took it up, and after much back-and-forth, my boss's boss stated bluntly that appraisals were subject to a supervisor's opinion, regardless of what it looked like on paper - that is, regardless of the fact that it was noted I was meeting all objectives and exceeding expectations. My options then became limited: to accept and move on, or leave.

On my part, I saw only one option — to leave. My previous experience had however taught me to seek God's opinion fervently. I did, and His instruction came in many forms and through several people: “Be still and know that I am God”. I could not understand how God would watch me accrue a track record of failure and injustice. I was emotionally jaded and could not find the answers. I chose to obey.

Over the next few weeks, it became obvious that the C-level officer wanted me out for reasons I could not fathom. I began to devise a resignation plan but God's instruction remained clear. That same month of my planned resignation, my aggressor was issued a warning by the Group's Leadership Council. My next appraisal was fair but I knew that

the war still on, though the battle was won. When an opportunity presented itself in 2015, my aggressor delayed approval so much so that the 1-week process took 5 months! Nonetheless, I held on to the word God gave me at the start of 2015, saying “all things work together”. Just like God repeatedly hardened Pharaoh's heart to prove His Word, blessings upon blessings flowed from the delay. God also unceremoniously uprooted my aggressor. One thing God had me do, though, was to forgive my aggressor. In all that happened, I grew as a person and a believer in Christ. I learnt that as His Word in Jeremiah 29.11 says, His thoughts and plans are always for my good. God also sent help in form of friends that I could pray with and who could encourage me regularly. I am learning to ditch my myopic views and have since adopted a new philosophy: God is love; He is crazy about me and has got lofty plans for me!



WUMI

A couple of years ago, I learnt an important lesson about drift. I went on a Water Ski Trip with my roommates. When it was my turn to ski, I threw my skis in and jumped into the water! It took me about two minutes to put them on. By the time I looked up, I had drifted about twenty metres away from the boat! I could barely swim and was afraid when I realised that I was quite far away from the boat.

As a teenager, I was so close to God that I could hear Him speak. Reading my Bible was like a hobby; I literally practiced what I read. Then I got into university - this was when the drift started. I did not go wild or do anything particularly crazy, but my connection to God was not quite the same. I stopped praying regularly. My relationship with God became like an Automated Teller Machine (ATM) relationship. I only went to God in prayers when I needed something.

Further down the line and a few years into my career as a Consultant, I applied to two Technology companies. For each company, I went through a series of tough interviews. The Co-Founder of one company wanted me but he did not have the final say. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) did. However, the CEO did not want to have an interview with me. I applied to another company: it was a similar story.. It was really painful considering all the effort I had put in.

Subsequently, I applied to some business schools. This was tougher. All this while, my ATM business with God continued, as usual. During the application period in December, I fasted and prayed while everyone ate festive food. Yet, all the business schools I applied to rejected me. It was a

“My relationship with God became like an Automated Teller Machine (ATM) relationship. I only went to God in prayers when I needed something.”

difficult time for me, and I was very low. The seed of doubt crept in, and I began to ask myself, "Is there really a God?"

I applied to another school and got through to the third round - an interview - which people rarely make it to - I was excited! I did well in the interview but yet again, I was rejected. This felt like the end for me. For the next three years, it was a life of silence between God and I. Little did I know that He had something bigger planned.

He set me up for a lot more than I had expected; God was merciful. Those experiences prepared me for the future that lay ahead, and laid the groundwork for the company I currently run. Since then, those Business Schools I applied to have invited me as a speaker on more than two occasions. I have also made a conscious decision to start swimming towards God.



B.O

I was beyond elated when I landed a role as a Marketing executive of a company right after NYSC, despite the common mindset at the time that even with the right connection you could only get a job with a 5 figure salary.

I believed this was an answer to my prayer to God for a job with a 6 figure before the end of NYSC.

However, after only 3 months on the job, I found myself struggling with the role as a Marketer; I prayed to God for help and tried to continue for another 2 months. Eventually it became unbearable for me to deal with my poor performance and sadness. I resigned.

I stayed in Lagos for a month trying to hustle by myself but I was spending more than I could afford so I went back to Abeokuta to stay with my parents. I started a Laundry business that failed and started doing some work for my dad. However, I wanted to work to earn my own money so I kept looking for a job. I was home for 10 months searching for a new job; wrote several exams and interviews. It was a terrible time, nothing worked.

I thought it was over, I thought God left me but somehow I did not stop believing in Him. I remember waking up in the middle of the night on a particular day crying to God because I was not living the kind of life I had planned. On the 31st of Dec, 2015 during the cross over service in my Church, the bishop said- "So many people have said this year 2016 will be a struggling year - a tough year, but as far as you are a member of this diocese, go into the market, buy the best clothes and dancing shoes

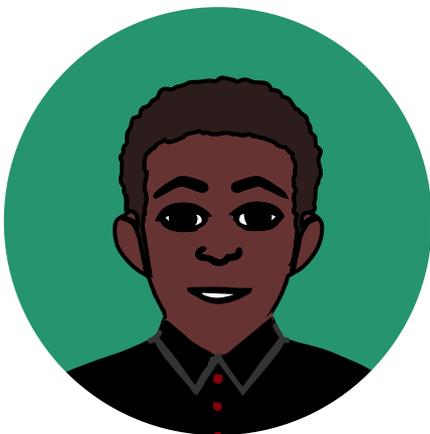
“However, I wanted to work to earn my own money so I kept looking for a job.”

because you will dance throughout this year." I held on to that as a prophecy and believed.

On January 11th, 2016, I got an Instagram message from the company I resigned from. "Hi Deji, we have been trying to reach you, please get in touch".

At first, I thought they needed something regarding the projects I worked on but it turned out the CEO wanted to see me in person. I remembered what my bishop said and I prayed. When I went to see her at the office headquarters the next Wednesday, she had an offer for me- the Group Executive Assistant of the company with a far better remuneration compared to what I was earning as a marketing executive. I was shocked.

Like that was not enough, after I had served in this role for only 4 months, my boss left the country and handed over her duties to me. She could have picked anyone else out of the many managers ahead of me (Experience and Age) but she handed over her duties to me. I went from being a frustrated marketing executive to someone that manages 3 branches of the company. I go to work happy every day! I have a lot to be thankful for. I learnt that God's plan is always the best and we should always wait for it.



DEJI

Although I was born into a Christian home, I told lies, cheated, stole a few times and was addicted to video games. Then at the age of fourteen, I found myself in the same class with transfer students. I grew to like them a lot because they were very real about their faith. They talked a lot about heaven and hell. One day, I thought to myself that I wanted to make heaven, and so my Christian journey started. It was difficult to cut off my friends and develop new friendships. But I did and it made a world of difference. My association with these new people rubbed off on me as I also became more focused in school. I did well and became one of the top students. About this time, I started listening to gospel songs and realised that I enjoyed them so much. I listened to songs by Integrity Music, Maranatha, Ron Kenoly, Bob Fitts and the likes. Those songs blew my mind. Then a particular song by Don Meon, Trust in the Lord, was released. I sang the song throughout my SSCE and it changed my life. After secondary school, I got filled with the Holy Spirit after I read '*Good Morning Holy Spirit*' by Benny Hinn. Graduating from the University with a second-class upper degree, I tried to get into schools in the U.S but was rejected; then one of the top engineering schools in the UK sent me an offer. I reluctantly accepted. That move transformed my life and opened me up to opportunities. I completed my Masters and also got a job. Before I started working, I did a term in a voice class which helped me to gain confidence in music. I moved to Aberdeen afterwards where I became one of the soloists and worship leaders in my Church. Not long after, I started going for Israel Houghton's conference in Houston. I pioneered the worship movement in the city of Aberdeen. I co-founded a talent showcase for young adults and teenagers. I did well. I got amazing reviews at work. I was making good money and hanging

“It felt like ground zero.”

out with Israel Houghton. I started to feel really good with myself and pride set in. This affected my romantic relationship leading to a breakup and even also affected my work eventually. At work, I was due for a promotion but my new boss halted it and that wrecked me. I also had to change parishes, as the current one where my ex was, became uncomfortable considering the circumstances of our breakup. I moved to the parish we had planted in Dundee just an hour away. I started leading worship in the parish.

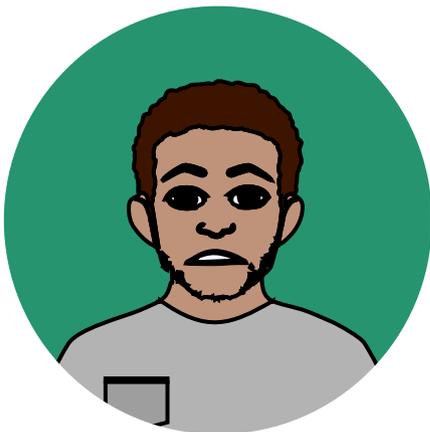
There was a world of difference. Coming from a Church where we had a full band to one where it was just me, one backup singer and the pianist who could not play a piano (lol) - all in a small room. It felt like ground zero.

Then I began to realize that it was not about the platform or the musical instruments. It was about the heart of worship.

I enrolled in a school of discipleship and in one of the classes, I heard 'restore.' I held on to it and prayed to God for restoration. I knew I had failed and gone from grace to nothing. I realized I needed to depend on God for ministry. It was about the grace of God and that made me conscious of asking God to use me before I led worship.

I failed but learnt my lessons. I will never go back to the place of pride. I understood that for my temperament – Melancholy Choleric, pride is one of my weaknesses. I am learning humility with the help of God.

I recently recorded and released a single which was well received in Nigeria, UK and US. It was played on television in the UK. God opened doors and connected me with producers I never thought I would ever work with. All by the help of God, life became easier afterwards.



F.S

I was born into a Muslim family but when I lost my dad at the age of 2, my mum became a Christian, mostly because of the love and care that she got from a neighbourhood Church. Growing up, the only father I had was God; He is the only father I have ever known.

My mother is an Amazon; she raised three kids alone in her early thirties. She trained us in the way of the Lord. I had a good and wholesome childhood. When I was six, my mum transferred to Ibadan because it was easier to raise kids in Ibadan. The air is cleaner, there is no traffic, the people are nicer, and things are cheaper

In primary school, I did okay. I was made the head girl. In secondary school, I was made head girl as well; I also did well. I decided to write JAMB in SS2 just because I could. I wrote the exam after studying for only a week and got a score of 252, which was not bad at all. So in final year, I felt there would be no problems smashing the exams. I even went for lessons, which I normally would not do as I thought I studied better alone. I wrote the exams but my results were withheld, and I was crushed. I like plans and strategies. I am the kind of person who sees five years ahead. This was not in the plan, especially for someone who had been the head girl surrounded by people with so many expectations. It was devastating.

Many of my friends were going into University, and I was just waiting. My mum insisted that we pay an official visit to the Director General (DG) of JAMB, to ask him why my results were withheld. I cried throughout the road trip to Abuja because it seemed like the end of the

“I started to cry because I had doubted God and I had doubted his plans for me.”

world at the time. But also on that trip, I looked out the window and saw the hills and thought of Psalm 121, 'I'll lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth'. I kept reciting this scripture over and over again amidst tears.

We met the DG of JAMB, but he told us there was nothing he could do so I went back to Ibadan in tears. My mum registered me for all the exams I could possibly write. In the space of 10 months, I had to write SATs, TOEFL, A-levels and another JAMB. My mum then jokingly said that if I made straight A's in my A-levels, she would buy me a car. To her surprise, I did get straight A's and to make it better, I did not even lose a year because I got into 2nd year in university with my A-levels. God changed bad into something good.

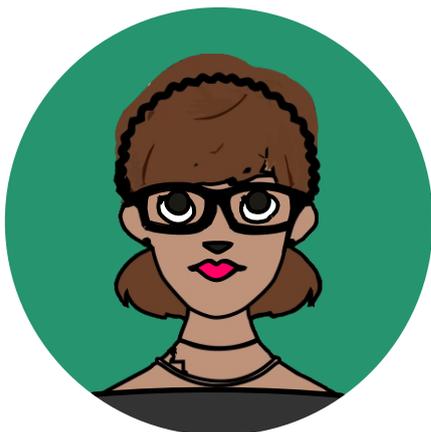
In the university, I graduated with the best academic result that ever been achieved from my faculty, so when I went to Law school, there was a lot of pressure on me as people's expectations were raised based on my success in university. I studied hard as usual but when I got my results, I did not have a first class; I had a second-class upper which I believed was a good result, but I must admit that I was disappointed in myself. So many people called me to say how sorry they were to hear that I did not get a first class. With the calls I received, you would have thought that I failed law school! I was humbled especially because I knew that I put in all that I could. It felt like a public humiliation. I asked God "How can I be using your name to boast and this is what happens to me?" I spoke to God and heard "God is good. No matter what you see right now, God is good". It took me a while to understand this, but when I did, I had peace. Shortly before my call to bar, I started receiving congratulatory phone calls. Apparently, I had won awards in 3 of all 5 subjects offered in law school!

I started to cry because I had doubted God and I had doubted his plans for me. I heard a still small voice say "So if you never got these awards,

you would not believe that I have got your back? You do not need to see it to know that I am doing what is best for you. Do not doubt me.” I also remembered that God had given me a bible verse years ago: Psalm 32:8 - 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch over you'. Even though I knew that, it did not stop me from thinking God left me all alone. That was a defining moment for me because it taught me that I do not need to see the end. God always has it all planned out and I need to trust His plan.

I planned to go for a master's degree immediately after my NYSC, but family finances were not as great as they used to be. However, God showed up! I was paid some money for a scholarship I had obtained years ago. I was able to use this money to pay applications fees, send transcripts and so on. I got admitted into two of the best schools in the U.K. and I got a full scholarship to attend one of them. I did not have to use any of my money for visa, plane ticket or even warm clothing. On top of that, it seemed like it was my season of remembrance as so many people supported me financially.

I look back and I can see that God was with me all the way. With God, it is not just about provision. It is about the journey; it is about the relationship; it is about trust; it is about teaching you; it is about training you; it is about chastising you; it is about loving you. Just as a father does.



MARIAM

I grew up in a family of 8. My family was not religious; we acknowledged God but did not go to Church. My dad was defrauded of all of his money and we hit rock bottom. We eventually had to move to the village where my dad tried to start another business but broke his legs. Yet again, we went back to zero, financially. At this point, my dad lost all faith in God and would not tolerate as much as the mention of 'God' around him.

Nonetheless, some Christians kept coming around our house in the village preaching, and eventually my mum went to Church with them and found God. She took me with her the next time, and I loved it. I wanted to know more about God; I also ended up convincing my dad to come with us on a Sunday. I later decided to change Church to a Catholic Church, and eventually, the entire family became Catholic. I started Secondary School at the age of 15, much later than my peers did because my parents could not afford it. Wanting more than the village life, I moved to Lagos where I joined a fellowship in school. I went on to film school but fell away into sin due to the distractions in the film production industry, but God reminded me that He had a purpose for me. I came back to God and He turned my life around. Today, I am comfortable and able to provide for my siblings. I found that God has a plan for us, and He will not let us carry a burden that we are unable to bear. "He will be with you, and will never leave nor forsake you."

“God reminded me that He had a purpose for me.”



MARTIN

I gave my life to Christ when I was 10 years old. From that day, I understood that being born again meant my words came with power. I knew that the power of God and His presence were within me. I moved to London at 14, and then to Cambridge and Surrey and joined Churches in all three towns. Moving around helped my walk with God — I now knew that God was everywhere. On holiday in New York, I was crossing the road, going shopping on a Sunday, and I heard Church bells ringing.

I looked back and it was a Church with its Reverend standing outside, smiling. So I went in and I worshipped. There was something that had been on my heart, and the Word that was spoken that day was so powerful; it spoke directly to me. I did not know what denomination the Church was but God somehow found a way to speak to me. This has been my experience with God.

When I was 19, I attended a women's fellowship. Before then, I had been applying for jobs. I had started applying that summer but it was quite difficult. I had previously worked in a Bank even though I was studying Computer Science because I wanted to be a Banker. I was not making the type of headway I wanted. I did not get the internship. It was in this time that I attended the women's fellowship.

The lady prophesying spoke to me about hotels and the hospitality industry, and said that I was going to do great things for God in this

“It has been a reminder that when God asks you to do something, He takes you to certain places.”

industry. It was such a moving presence. I had no idea about hotels except in my A-level college when we travelled the world and went to Australia, the States and various places. Other than that, I had never stayed in any hotel other than those we stayed.

From the moment that Word was spoken, there was a unique desire in my heart for it. I started researching and applying. I got a job a couple of days after with the Hilton, London Metropole - one of the biggest hotels in London. I thought 'wow, this is interesting'. I started talking to people about hospitality. Everyone thought it me being random. I knew it was something God had asked me to do.

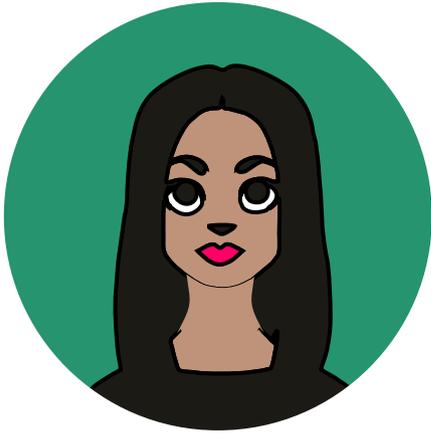
I finished my Computer Science course and did well. At the time, a mentor had assisted me in getting a very competitive job in a Financial Institution; all I needed to do was fill out the application. However, I did not fill out the application because I was sure that it was not what God was asking me to do. I told him: 'I want to be a hotelier'. He said 'you could be so good at my job'. I applied to the Four Seasons hotel, and got a job. Since He gave me that Word, I started seeing God opening doors for me.

I then applied for a Masters in Hospitality, and finished with a Distinction; I graduated top of the class. It was God. I knew that if God asks one to do something, *no matter how different it seems*, no matter how varied it seems, it was bound to excel.

I then applied to join the Marriott Hotel group. Out of almost 10,000 people that applied, I was one of the 100 people chosen to work in their top range hotel which was walking distance from my house. I was sure that for as long as I was on His chosen track, God would always be with me. I then set up a hospitality consulting firm and it also did very well.

It has been a reminder that when God asks you to do something, He takes you to certain places. It is also a reminder of the Scripture He gave me 15 years ago; one in which He told Abraham "*leave your household,*

leave your father and everything you know, and go to a land that I will show you'. At the time, it was definitely a land He was showing me because I had no idea what was going to happen. Since then and through every step of the way, I've seen the power and the Hand of God.



MARY

I got born again when I was 11. It was a wonderful and conscious experience I made at a Christian camp meeting. All through High School and University, I was what you would term a *God chaser*. In 300 level, however, there was a crisis at home that made me challenge God's love for me, and His ability to take care me. I felt like a ceiling fan: the switch was off but the blades kept turning.

NYSC and beyond presented a unique challenge as I was out of my support structure of campus fellowship and Christian friends. NYSC was in the far North. Shortly after, I began my work life in cosmopolitan Lagos. My job would take me across many states across Nigeria., I felt alone during this period and struggled with my Christian faith and virtues. I also struggled with trusting God with my life again. I then made a series of wrong choices. Each time I hit a new low, I moved farther away from God. I would try coming back but did not know how. In my head, I knew God's love for me was eternal but in my heart, the devil never failed to bring my shortcomings before me. The distance increased and my lifestyle choices worsened. In those years, my inner desire was for a rich relationship with God again.

In Lagos, it is easy to get lost in the haste and to keep up with the picture perfect facade because relationships are not as deep. Accountability is fleeting.

I once had a conversation about faith with friends, where I shared my favourite past times of Bible study, prayers and enjoying God's presence.

"I also struggled with trusting God with my life again. I, then, made a series of wrong choices."

Here, I confessed that I did not know how to find my way back to God. I was like a seed; growing but without roots. What I desired was Psalm 1:1-3: *The tree by the rivers of living waters which would not be moved in the face of temptation or adversity.*

Right after my Masters, I took a trip to Abuja in 2012. On my way back to Lagos, my flight was delayed. The airport was full, and the atmosphere was tense because of the incessant bomb blasts that made news at the time. In the midst of the crowd, rancour and my personal conflicts at the time, I met a well-dressed man who was waiting for same flight.

We struck a conversation and after a five-hour wait for this flight, we all went in free seating. When we hit the subject of faith, it felt easy and right to talk about it. I told him I was far from God and I did not know how to find my way back. My life was now my own, but I desired the leading of the Holy Spirit I had as a teenage girl. He said it was possible. So, I took the chance.

We exchanged contacts and I got a message from him on Facebook — an online Bible study started. I read Bible passages and gave him feedback on what I learnt. Slowly but *surely*, I began to grow. One day, I got a gift. It was a Bible. I began reading and marking voraciously. I was tired of leading my life. I knew God had a plan for me and I was ready to trust Him, and to receive His love again.

I began to build a relationship with God again. I received God's promises as true and began to walk in this truth. I believed my life could and would turn out beautiful. With my focus on His word, after my Masters, I continued growth in my career path, I believed God for a godly relationship and union, and a life of service to Him. In October 2015, I got married. Career wise, I am still growing.

After several years of being born again, I finally knew why God does not whisk us to Heaven once we become born again. It is because he expects

us to pay it forward; to be living testimonies of His grace. I never knew that my life could become beautiful and whole again after losing my bearing, but it is beautiful. Now, I know that IF I fail, it is an event, and not my constant reality.



OMENA

As a young boy, making the choice of which course to study in the university was a bit daunting. Coming from a family where everyone studied professional courses, I did not think I could study a course like Cinematography because it did not come across as 'professional'. So I applied for Economics.

In my first year however, I failed most of my courses. I did not understand anything in Economics until my final year. At the start of final year, I decided that I wanted to succeed. So one day in an Econometrics class, I took a seat in front so I could understand what the lecturer taught still I understood nothing. I cried. I failed the course and that cost me an extra year.

I opened up to my project supervisor at some point and told him how bad I had fared academically. He replied, *'You're a Christian. If you fail, it's your fault.'* Gboom!

That statement struck me hard.

I mean I was a young Christian in the university; I had a scheduled and structured relationship with God. I prayed to God ev

ery morning when I woke up, then moved to class and back to the hostel.

Then, one day, I ran very late to a Church service and had an empty Church to myself so I started a conversation with God telling him that the series of failures had to change. I could not be a failure and I did not want an extra year. It was also costing my family so much to put me through a private university.

"I thought it was too late. I was in my final year. How would God save me?"

While talking to God, I saw a Bible verse on the wall that read, "*Call upon me, I will answer you and show you great and mighty things you do not know.*" I fell on my knees saying, "God, I've been failing my courses since 100 level. Why did not I have anyone to guide, help or even tell me that there are courses in the Arts in which I could do better?" I told God everything that came to mind.

On my way out, I saw another Bible verse that read, "*The Lord your God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save.*" I thought it was too late. I was in my final year. How would God save me?

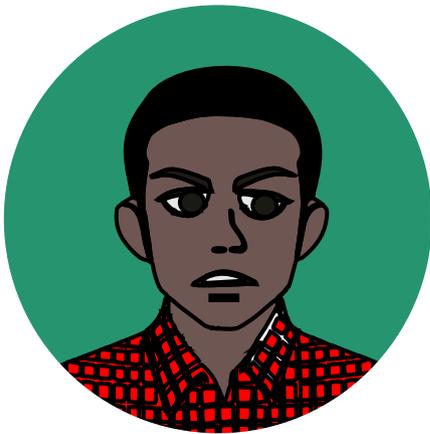
However, after that encounter, every night between 12 and 1, I would take a walk, talking to God. I told God how I spent my day, what the lecturer taught and the areas I did not understand. After my conversations with God, I studied until 5 or 6 in the morning. Then I noticed that as I studied afterwards, I understood. Gradually, I got a better understanding of my courses.

There was a test, where the lecturer had announced that only three people passed and I was one of them. My roommates found out and were also surprised saying "*Timi, What happened? You did not tell us you did so well.*" I responded, "*Well I'm not used to it.*"

My final year project, which held the weightiest grade, was the deal breaker. I asked a friend for help on the project but he was reluctant. Two days to the defense of my project, I went to a lecturer's house and he taught me a few things. I went on studying trusting that God would help me. I still had my conversations with God and told him everything about the status of my project. All through the project defence, I kept repeating God's word, "*The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty.*" Results were released and I was the best in our class.

I still had an extra semester from doing so poorly in the past years but it was not a struggle for me. I spent that time helping others with their projects.

Through all of this, I realized that it was not a structured prayer that saved me but an honest expression of myself to God. I learnt that no matter how bad it is, no matter how long you have failed for, God can still turn it around. The life of Christian is a victorious one.



TIMI

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health.





“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul”

3 John 1:2



I was first told by an OBGYN in the UK in 2007 that I had a small fibroid but the doctor said it was not a big deal.

For some reason, just before I got married in January 2010, I started getting this weird feeling that I would have issues getting pregnant. It persisted so much that I had to discuss with my Pastor who prayed with me.

4 months after getting married, I went to see another OBGYN who made me go through the longest scan ever. He eventually told me I had a thick endometrium which meant the lining of my womb did not shed monthly as expected. He went on to say people with this condition usually had a hard time conceiving and a sample of the lining would have to be tested for cancer.

I freaked out! This was supposed to be just a regular checkup.

My husband calmed me down but my father, who is always on the edge about anything health-related, made me seek a second opinion ASAP and perform whatever surgery was needed. My mother has a medical background and my sister was then a doctor in training. They both urged me to get a second opinion also so we decided I would go see another OBGYN when we travel to the UK for my sister's wedding which was only a month or so away.

But then God started to send random people with direct messages to me. I call them random because I did not have direct relationships with them. One of them was a member of the Church I attended before I got married. She had a dream and saw me trying to open a bottle of champagne with my teeth and I broke a tooth in the process. This

“This was the first time in my life I was doing anything like this but I had a peace that I could not explain to anyone.”

meant that celebration was coming but while trying to handle it myself, I would lose something! The other person was my mum's aunt who I cannot even point out in a crowd and who happens to be Muslim. She called my mum and randomly started asking, "How is Foluso? She should not have any surgery o. Do not worry, she will have children!" My first weekend in the UK, I attended Church with my friends. There was a bookstore in the Church and this was the first time I came across the book 'Supernatural Childbirth' by Jackie Mize. I bought the book and started reading it; the book is aptly titled as the lady in the book had been told she would never have children and ended up having FOUR miracle children as she calls them! It is an amazing book After reading the book and talking to God, I made up my mind not to have surgery, no matter what the doctors and my family said. It had become clear to me that performing surgery would end in me losing out on something and God was telling me to ignore all I was told and watch him work. So I proceeded in faith! This was the first time in my life I was doing anything like this but I had a peace that I could not explain to anyone.

The OBGYN in the UK confirmed everything his counterpart in Lagos said and she was even more urgent as she said we had to perform the procedure ASAP. She also added that I had something called a polyp which is similar to a fibroid. She said that it would be almost impossible for me to conceive unless a surgery was performed. She also wanted us to schedule a procedure so we could check the lining of my womb to be sure it was not cancerous.

My husband, mum, dad, sister all thought I had lost my mind when I informed them I would not be performing surgery and God had revealed to me not to. My mum and I got into a fight and they were all certain I had lost my mind. This trip was in July. We went back to Lagos since I refused to perform any procedure and we all went about our lives.

But less than a month after the UK trip, I conceived! My husband and I were not even 'trying' as they say! I found out I was pregnant and had

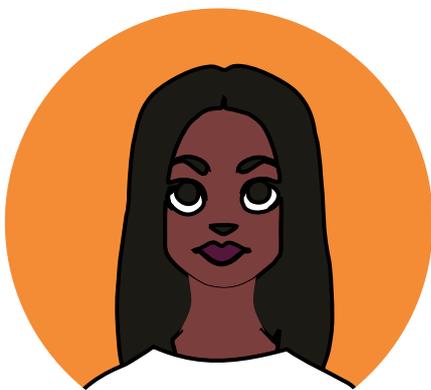
conceived in August. I gave birth to the most beautiful, intelligent little angel on April 17, 2011.

Since that experience, my relationship with God has been completely different! My faith has been built and I walk in obedience now! (well as much as I can, the flesh can be such a burden). Even when crazy situations come my way (and trust me they do), I just remember the words of Tye Tribett, "If he did it before, he'll do it again!"

I cannot imagine what the devil had planned if I had gone ahead and done that procedure. Bottom line is, like 1 Samuel 15:22 says 'Obedience is better than sacrifice'. Even with all the doctors' reports, I have never had an issue conceiving and have 2 beautiful daughters. In addition, I have no polyp, no fibroid and the lining of my womb is no longer unusually thick!

I learnt that when God is speaking to you about a situation in your life, He will send a word or words of confirmation. He will give you peace that passes all understanding and we just need to be obedient and watch him work!

"Why am I hopeful about the future? God and I have a history" – Jimmy Pena

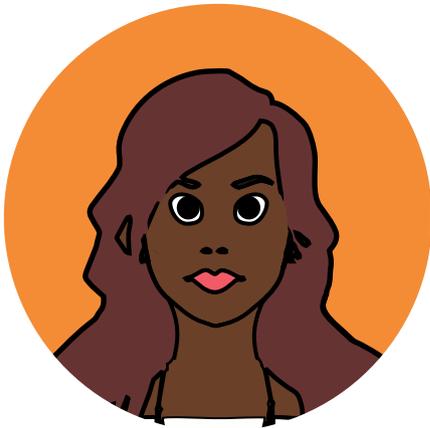


FOLUSO

After Secondary School, I went to England for A-levels, just like my brothers before me had done. England was a whole new world - away from my mother, new people, and new surroundings. My first year went well - I passed. My second year came and it was going well. But when it was time to apply to Universities, my teachers discouraged me from applying to some Universities; they said my grades were not good enough, and they would not accept me. Nonetheless, I applied and I got in - I said again, I have proven them wrong. Fast forward to results day, I did not get the grades I needed, and I broke down. I had worked extremely hard, studied every day and prayed fervently. Bearing in mind that my brothers had made the best grades and gone to the best engineering schools in England, it felt like a much bigger disappointment for me and my mother. Since I did not make the required grades, I went through a process called clearing, and got accepted into a different University. My mother, being a true Yoruba mother, said 'never'. She refused to pay International School fees for a 'subpar' University, and insisted I took the exams again. So, I moved to another city for the exams. Just before the exam, however, I fell ill; I was diagnosed with depression and given medicine. A month later, I was ill again and put on antidepressants for 60 days. I got worse and, started having nightmares. It got so bad that I was afraid that I would not go anywhere without falling and dying. Again, I was rushed to the hospital, but this time, I found out it was not depression. It was my body working very hard to heal itself as my appendix had ruptured, and the abscess was spreading to my ovaries. I'm like "come on, I'm not the only one!" I did an operation and everything went well. I then had to focus for the big one - over 10 Alevels exams. I re-sat the papers, and yet again, I did

“ I was afraid that I would not go anywhere without falling and dying”

not pass. I broke down. I felt I had made so many sacrifices; prayed and fasted. Through clearing, I then got into The University of York — this was beginning of the best three years of my life! By the time I started University, I was more mature and better prepared for living on my own. My course was an advanced course of everything I had learnt over the last three years; I started doing very well. I began to understand that what God really wants is for His children to succeed. By the end of the course, I graduated with a 2:1; top 3 for my course, and with an award. Indeed, His ways will always end in praise and He is really the planner of our lives. I learnt to let go and let God.



A

January 26th 2012:

I woke up, took a glance around the room, and I saw three man-like figures on my left-hand side. They appeared blurry but were in black attires. The next time I opened my eyes, I saw a bright light shining before my eyes — this would be the beam from a CT Scan over my head. My next encounter with consciousness saw me being wheeled out on a wheelchair by one of my roommates. A lady in scrubs was gently speaking into my ear. However, I could only hear “make sure you give them a call immediately you can” and then, she hands me some papers.

My roommate and I arrived at home at about 12:30pm. Though with some difficulty, I made my way up the stairs and straight to my bed to sleep. At about 6 p.m., I'm awoken by the chattering of five friends standing around my bed. A card and flowers handed to me, and then they start the questioning, “What happened?” The first thing that came to mind was “where is your car?” As I tried to get up from bed, all the pain comes flooding in.

The morphine has now worn off and I can feel a pain in my knees, my whole left-side and my waist. I struggle to make it to the door. I peep out, and there's no sign of my car in the driveway or on the street.

Now, I'm finally beginning to wonder what happened. All I remember is being woken up in the hospital, heavily sedated, and a police release form for my car. Now, I'm asking: “God, what in the world happened to me?”

I was literally in a dark place; I could barely keep my eyelids up. My right eye ball was now all the way to the right-side of my face. I could not

“In my search for answers, I found
Him for myself.”

stay in well-lit rooms because of the dazzling effect of the rays. My depth perception was off by a mile; my body and mostly my vision seemed to have been degenerating. The next Monday, I had to call in sick to work for two weeks. As at this time, I was not in the greatest relationship with God. I had probably been to Church about seven or eight times in 2011.

I finally visited an Ophthalmologist and was informed that I had a condition called "Third Nerve Palsy" — a condition caused by trauma which damages the optical nerves, and in turn, weakens the ocular muscles that hold your eye balls in place. He recommended surgery to strengthen the ocular muscles because otherwise, the healing of the muscles could not be guaranteed. I, however, told him "no surgery" and that I would see it get healed.

A week later, a police officer paid me a visit at home. He asks if I'm fine and if I had broken any bone or had an internal bleeding. Perplexed, I ask him why he asked, and he replied, "You will understand when you get to see your car." At this point, I am even more confused, and find myself back to wondering what happened. I attempted to resume work but could not concentrate because of the light. I had to leave, and was placed on short-term disability.

Two days after this, I went off to see the car. As we approached it in the junkyard, I was lost for words. I had no idea - and still do not have an idea - how I survived or how I was not in a wheelchair. I'm not sure how I only spent 9 hours in the hospital and made it without breaking anything. Shortly after, I received an accident and hospital report, and here is what happened:

At about 3am on January 26th 2012, I crashed into a re-enforced utility pole and my car was wrapped around the pole. A resident around the scene had heard a big bang, and came out to see what had happened. He called 911 and reached into the car to turn off the ignition while calling out to me. I was unresponsive, and in his opinion, I was not going to make it. I had to be brought out of the car with "Jaws of Life" and then taken to the hospital. There was also a significant dent on the rear

bumper which could mean collision with another vehicle. Till today, there is an unsolved mystery. I have neither memory of getting into the car to drive nor any memory of where I was headed. I did hit my head on the wheels, I have three chipped teeth to show for this but after two CT scans, no trauma/head injuries was evident. What I do know is that God was at the scene to cushion me, and see that I did not break any bones. Though it took five months and a lot of doubt, my eyes healed. Those five months away from work brought me before God in search of answers. It gave me a lot of time for real self-evaluation. In my search for answers, I found Him for myself. God had saved and protected me from life-threatening injuries. He healed me from the effects of the accident. Those five months of being all alone started a daily habit of journaling, which has been quite an experience with God. God used this experience to bring me closer to Him.



CRISPIN

I am the only boy and the last born of four kids. My parents are Pastors. My father had envisioned my life after Matthew Henry of the 17th century who was able to read at the age of three. Therefore, my father tried teaching me to read at age 3, unsuccessfully. By the time I was four, I was able to read anything presented to me. By the time I was six, I had read the Bible back to back. At age 14, I had read the Bible 8 times. However, it was more of an academic endeavor than it was spiritual. My education was equally fast-paced. I was home-schooled for my primary education and was done by age 7, then moved to secondary school when I was eight. The transition was not smooth as I was lacking in the social skills that I should have developed earlier. I moved from a classroom of one to a group with 60 people. I lagged behind. I recall praying to God for help. (That was my first experience with him.) God showed me a vivid vision where he took out my old brain and gave me a new one. By the time I was 12; I had done WAEC (final secondary school exams) and passed. I was done with secondary school by 13. At 14, I got into the University of Lagos to study Architecture. By 19, I was done with university and by 21, I had a Master's degree. Things were not all rosy. I consistently battled very poor health and was in and out of the hospital. I suffered from pains and palpitations. The pressure on me was so intense that it affected my health. My parents being Christians would always pray and by the time I was 14, my health stabilised. I also had a very short attention span. This phase led me to read stuff and search for answers to questions I did not know existed. While I was being admired for brilliance by others, I felt a deep resentment for my parents. I believed that my father was using me as an instrument for his personal glory. I felt my parents didn't know

“The pressure on me was so intense that it affected my health”

what I was going through mentally and were just glad I was doing well in school. Things were really tough mentally but I was very good at masking my feelings. I had an issue in my last year of university and was held back for a year. This was a really dark period in my life and I felt so alone. I needed friendship and love which I wasn't getting from anyone. Thankfully, I was able to get through that phase and finish university but during my Master's, bouts of those very dark moments came up. Again, no one knew what I was going through and the emptiness I felt. I finished school and got employed by a top tier firm. I told myself if I made more money, had a nice car and moved to a nicer neighborhood that the emptiness would be filled. It was then that the reality dawned on me that one could only buy so much. You can't buy love, friendship, family or happiness. That was when I decided to find God again. This scripture helped: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 (NKJV). I prayed for God to give me rest – I didn't want to go through what I was going through anymore. That's how I found rest, friendship and companionship in God and also in the body of Christ. The Church became a family to me and I found love and fellowship, things that I never really had. For that I'm grateful. During that period, I read Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." I realised my father had laid out my life but I decided I was no longer going to follow his plans. My life was in God's hands now. I wasn't going to be stressed over unnecessary expectations. God was the only one I had to please.



S.O

I was 8 years old when my father came home one day and declared that he was now a Muslim. It was a huge surprise to my mother who was a leader in Church and the rest of the family.

At first, this new religion was not in our faces; my dad being a marine engineer was away for months at a time. My mother was the leader of the good women's fellowship in Church and was more concerned about what people would say and how it would affect her standing in the Church. So we carried on with Church activities.

However, a few years later, my dad stopped his rotations and did not travel as much, and that was when I began to understand Islam as a religion. I watched him pray in a different language, and found it fascinating. My mum would see me do that and say 'you know you cannot do that'. I'd say 'yes mummy we go to Church with you'. A few years later, when I was 14, I had just graduated from secondary school and was waiting to get into university. There was a lot of time on my hands so I picked up my dad's transliteration of the Koran and started reading it. I also listened to his tapes and enjoyed it a lot. I started to learn Arabic and then later, going to the mosque with him. I became a Muslim at 15.

“The thing about depression is, because it has no physical manifestation, people can not really look at you and say 'oh this person is dying. This person is just about to die, somebody needs to save her'. “

I just wanted to connect to God in a special way through prayer. After a while, I realized that I still did not understand God. I did not understand him more as a Muslim than I did as a Christian, and it was a challenge for me. I did not understand how I could learn a new language and a new way to pray, even beat my siblings to it and get closer to my dad but never really closer to God. I also could not understand the concept of unanswered prayers. How can you say that God owns the world, the universe and then I ask him for something as His child and he says "no"? Even my dad on earth gave me everything. He never said no to me. For every request I made to God that he denied, He existed less and less for me. I think I was 18 years old when I completely gave up. I stopped going to Church, I stopped going to the mosque, and I stopped praying. I had no God in my life for the next 8 years.

I joined Facebook and became a big prosecutor of Christians online. I would just go up, post something like 'Oh Christians are so clueless', and walk away. And I came back in 10 minutes to 140 comments from people who agreed with me and would say 'oh Christianity in Nigeria is just rubbish. People do not even know God'. I became famous as someone who always had something interesting to say about the Church. I had so many friends on the internet. I believe I had like 3,000 friends when I stopped accepting friend requests.

However, my online personality was not exactly a reflection of my life offline because I really did not have any friends. I did not have anybody I could talk to. I was going through a lot; I cannot describe in words how sad I was. I stayed up crying for no good reason. The thing about depression is, because it has no physical manifestation, people cannot really look at you and say 'oh this person is dying. This person is just about to die, somebody needs to save her'.

Nevertheless, that is how I felt- As if I was dying. I was really sad. Nights were the hardest for me because I had to go to my bed and face my fears by myself. I knew that I had to get help.

So I saved up some money, and checked myself into the psychiatric hospital in Yaba. I took some tests and was diagnosed with SAD(Seasonal Affective Disorder). It was a relief to hear that something was actually wrong with me and I was not just making it all up. I was started on a series of prescriptions; it was so bad that I had to first try out an emergency drug, Tryptizo which stabilized me for a while. I went back home and eventually settled on something that worked which was Zoloft, and I was on Zoloft for 2 years. It made things easier. It balanced my hormones, but I still had some hard nights so I would take extra pills and just sleep it off.

This went on for a while. In 2013, after a brief illness, my dad died. I had to move to live with my sister in Ajah, where I met an old friend Jennifer who never gave up on getting me to go to Church. She invited me every day.

One Sunday, I woke up and got dressed. Jennifer had called me earlier inviting me again to Church and for some reason, I said yes. As I sat through the service, I just wondered “who are these people? What's going on here?” But I continued to go to her Church.

One particular Wednesday service or worship experience, I met God for the first time. It was amazing. I was sitting, singing and worshipping when I felt God's presence in the room. It was completely amazing. I had to dig my heels in the ground to stop me from just floating in the air. I wanted to reach out, grab this spirit, and put it in my pocket and just go everywhere with it. It was just amazing. My life changed from that moment. When that happened, I knew that I had to work on my relationship with God because I was just overwhelmed. It was also very humbling for me because I had become the very thing I mocked for years on the internet.

I'm convinced that God called me to unbelief so that my faith can just take on a different, newer, stronger form. And I just knew that there was no going back. I believe that ignorance is the opposite of love. If you do not know God you cannot understand him, you cannot love what you

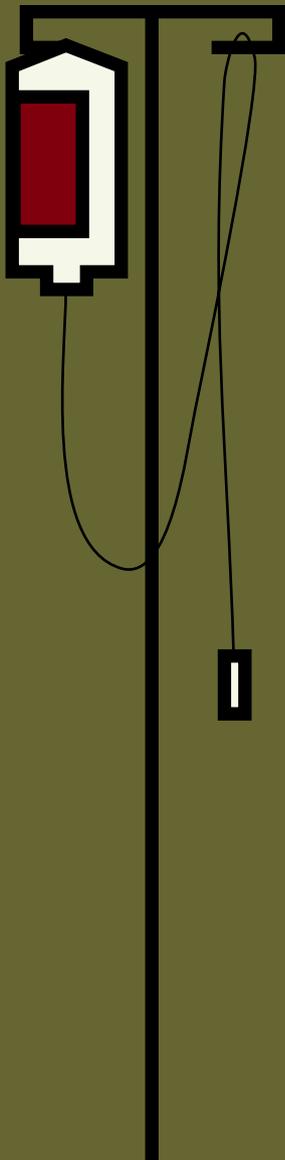
do not understand. At that moment I understood that I'm not a slave to my most grievous mistake. God's grace is sufficient and it has been sufficient for me all these years. I gave my life to God completely. I held absolutely nothing back. I understood God's purpose for my life better; there was no confusion anymore regarding what I was supposed to do with my life. God's presence in my life was not exactly the absence of fear or the absence of depression or the absence of confusion. However, I now understood that He is with me. I am never alone. I was alone before. I suffered alone before, but I no longer have to do that because I have God with me.



WUNMI

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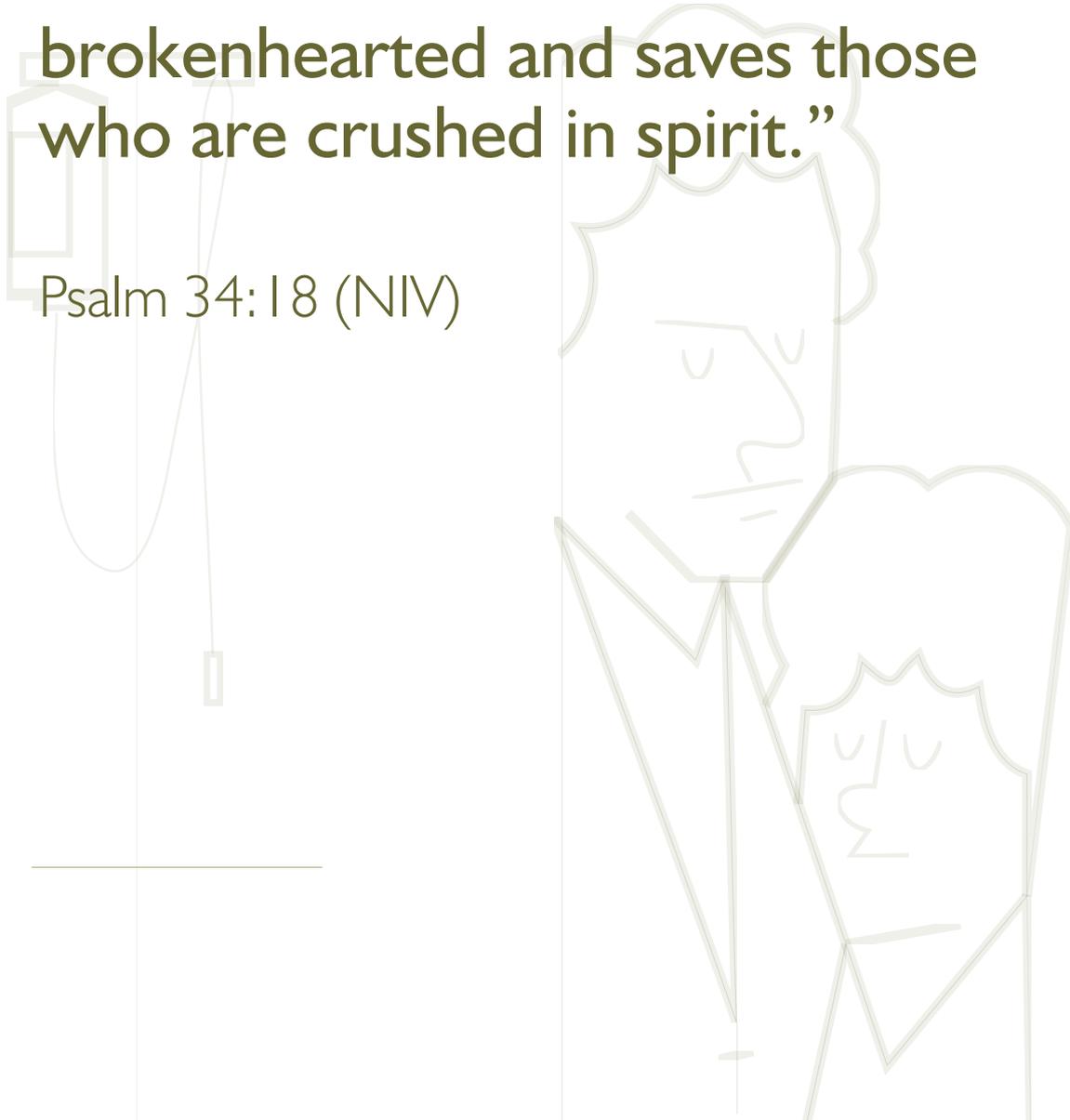
loss.





**“The Lord is close to the
brokenhearted and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.”**

Psalm 34:18 (NIV)



I was born and raised in a Christian home. My mum had a kids' bible club; we met every Saturday, learnt different games and played with other Christian kids. Together with my sister, I rehearsed and performed choreography routines to Christian songs. I had a great childhood.

However, when I was 14, I lost my older sister. I was an awkward child with only a few people I looked up to. My Older sister was the closest person to me as we were just 2 years apart. I have a younger sister but there are quite a few years between us. I did not understand God; why He would leave me with no one, not caring what was going to happen to me. I did not understand why He would treat someone, who served him with all her heart, that way. I did not understand any of it so I just left it. I was afraid to get to know God; scared that He would keep taking away all the people who mattered to me. So I grew very self-sufficient. I did not need anyone. I did not need God.

I went through secondary school and University without a relationship with God although I acknowledged Him. I went for Church services, Christian programs and even shared with Christian friends but it was not real to me. I needed the realness of God for myself.

To me, God had to do something. He had to give me my burning bush. He had to be a loud voice. He had to scream and shout. He had to let me know that He was real and that He loved me. Therefore, I said "God you are going to have to do something" and so I waited.

A few years later, I was getting ready for my bar finals and went for a

"I was dying on the inside and no one knew. There was no one trying to reach me,"

medical check-up. Then the doctors recommended a certain surgery. I said “God this is your time”. I remember taking a book and writing “God says He is the God who heals, I do not know how he is going to do it, but this is when you are going to show me that you are real. I do not know how it is going to be done, but I do not want to do any surgery”. I found a few scriptures from the bible to back it up. I travelled for the surgery. At my first appointment, my dad was discussing the process when the doctor just looked at me and said “but actually, I do not think you should do this surgery. I do not think it is necessary. I think you are young and you do not have to. Let's cancel it.” It had been scheduled for two days after but was cancelled. I went back home and fell on my face and kept saying “God really?” God is awesome. He will stoop to meet you. He meets us right there, where we are low, where you make request from Him and say “God you are going to show me” and He says, “you know what? I am going to show you”. At that point in my life I thought wow! God really met me where I was.

That was seven years ago and a very interesting start of a relationship with God.

When I was turning 29, being the kind of person that prepares for the worst situations, I imagined that I was turning 30 so I could go through my mental breakdown. People breakdown when they turn 30, they begin to think “oh my God! What have I done with my 20s. I have nothing to show for it.” I did have a breakdown. Especially because things were not so great in my life at that point; my relationship was failing again, I had invested all my money and lost it, I had left my job to grow my NGO and all the leads on the NGO were not working – nothing was working.

I started to battle in my mind. I got to a point where I felt I was struggling for my mind. I was fighting. I woke up in the middle of the night, shaking and screaming.

However, it was interesting that all that time, people would look at me and go “look at her, she is so pretty. She has make-up and she is this and she is that.” I was dying on the inside and no one knew. There was no one trying to reach me, I was struggling and at that point, I understood why people contemplated suicide. You kind of get their thought pattern of “what are we even doing here? This life is just struggle, struggle, and struggle.”

I had over the years walked many dark roads, most times alone, most times with the Spirit of God but this time I could not even explain it. I thank God for my Church because it was a critical point as my Church had just started and I had the opportunity to serve by helping to produce the Church's first stage play.

At some point, I told my Pastor that I was not going to do it anymore. I was so broken. I did not want to face anything. I did not want to face people; I did not want to interact with anyone. I just wanted to be on my own. I told him that “I wish I could fly away!” but he did not let me fly.

He encouraged me to keep at it. I then said to myself “it is an honour to be called by God to do something so I decided to power through.” As we went through the process of the production, I poured my heart and soul into it without realising that God was also working on me. On the day of the show, we stepped out on the stage and seeing how successful it was, I heard God said to me “even in your brokenness I will always shine through you.”

There's beauty that can only come from when you are broken, no pride, no nothing, you just bare.

My situations had not changed, I still did not have a job or a new boyfriend or money; I was in the same place but I found peace. You cannot trade the peace of God for anything.

God has been merciful. He has shown me great mercy and favour that I have not only overcome the challenges of that year but I am in a very

happy place with God. Many things may not be perfect but He showed Himself faithful.

I know beyond all doubt that God loves me. I know that when He says that all things are working together for my good, that it is not a lie.



OYJ

I remember standing in front of my mother's grave as her body was being lowered into the ground and wondering why I felt numb.

The past months had been a daze. One minute I only had the regular teenage problems like getting my crush to notice me, the next minute I was watching the strongest woman I knew being carried to the hospital after she collapsed in the living room.

The next few months involved numerous visits to the hospital, doctors giving a clean bill of health, her relapsing, few more emergency hospital runs, then me at her bedside in a hospice with a bible in my hand, not knowing what to pray or say.

Her passing was a hard hit to our home; things were never the same after. She was the pillar and strength of the home making sure we went to Church, and had our educational paths mapped out. Primary and secondary school were a breeze with me finishing secondary school at the age of 14. I had just graduated from secondary school when she passed so I lost about 2 years while my dad trying to figure out what to do with me.

All this time, I was trying to find myself. My mum had done all the thinking for me so I finally had to start thinking for myself and figuring out who exactly I was.

I was carted off to boarding school at some point for A levels, and that was my first unsheltered encounter with my peers. It was hell! It turned out I was very timid, and so an easy target for bullies. I had no friends. However, after a particular encounter with a bully, I remember running into my room and crying my eyes out. Then I found myself fumbling

“Sometimes, there is still the loneliness ... but... I can see Him restoring my soul one day at a time.”

with my Christian devotional book and read a part that spoke about Jesus being a friend who would never leave you. I said the prayer on the book asking Jesus to be my friend. Although I had answered a number of altar calls before then, this one marked a turning point in my life. Somehow, from that point, I always felt like I had someone with me, the loneliness was not as great, and my confidence began to build. I now had a friend, Jesus.

I went on to the university, and kept growing in my faith by reading a lot of books and being very involved in church activities.

At this time, things were not so great at home. My dad was never quite the same after my mum passed; his finances also took a bad hit and we had to give up being as comfortable as we were used to. All this time I felt so sorry for myself, thinking I had it bad, that nothing could get worse

Then final year in University, I went on Facebook randomly and saw my cousin's post about her dear uncle who had just passed; it was my dad's name. I prayed so hard and cried twice as hard, hoping it was not true.

But my dad was gone.

I had just read a book by Joyce Meyer where she said something which changed my life 'You can be pitiful or you can be powerful but you cannot be both'.

I snapped.

I finally decided to take control of my life, well more like let God work and stop feeling sorry for myself. I would need that resolve and strength in the coming years as I later found.

Things got a lot worse so quickly after my dad passed that there was no time to even grieve. We had to squat with relatives, then we were asked to leave twice and literally started living from hand to mouth.

Before my dad passed, it looked like we had too many close relatives but somehow none of them could help us at that point.

Things got worse but that was when I saw God move in amazing ways.

We would get a call from some strange woman who we never heard of

while our parents were alive and she would undertake to send us money every month till I got a job. A relative we were not so close to would ensure we had home furnishings. And another helped me get a good job in a bank.

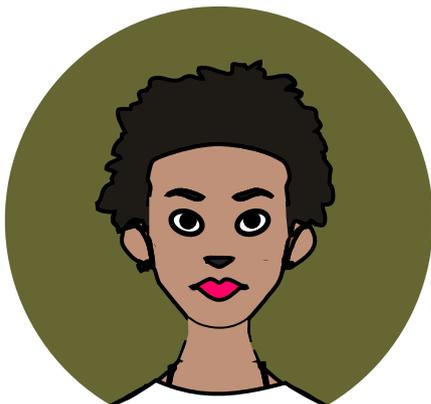
Most of this time, I felt like I was missing out on life. I had no time or money to hang out with friends. I could not hold a conversation with my peers because they wanted to talk about boys or hair or makeup but I could only think about rent, or how long we can leave the lights on per day so the electricity in the meter does not run out...My mates definitely did not want to talk about that

I felt like I missed out on all my young adult years.

However, God has more than made it up to me. He reminded me that “He who loses his life for my sake will find it” Matthew 10:39. I did not realize the extent of God's restoration and blessing until a few years later while I was talking to an acquaintance who then said “I'm sure you do not even know what suffering is, you look like you've never lifted a thing”. Of course that was hilarious in so many ways but was a strong indicator of how much work God had done in my life.

Sometimes, there is still the loneliness and I cannot say that the pain of the loss is all gone but just like He promised in His word, I can see Him restoring my soul one day at a time. By God's provision, we do not lack a thing, He sent people into our lives to help us through different seasons and sometimes He did it all by Himself.

Today, I can say that, through it all, my brothers and I have been well taken care of by God.



AKOR

I grew up Christian, loving Jesus; so much, so that our conversations could start as 'Dear Lord', and they can move to 'Oh boy, how far now?' My deeper relationship with God however started when I was 16 years old. I was walking home from school, and God said to me "if you are obedient to me and you remain virtuous, I will give you everything you've ever asked for, and more."

He dropped Jeremiah 29:11 in my heart: 'for I know the plans that I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.' This became my charge. When I started dating, most of my relationships ended because I refused to break my vows to God. I had a particular encounter where Jesus said to me, 'pick Jesus, or pick man'. So, I remained single.

After a number of back-to-back boyfriends, my oldest sister, Folusho, sat me down and said: 'You are 23 - one. Number 2, if you could marry you now, would you be happy?' In my head, it was like 'Gbam!' Because the answer was no. This made me face myself and realise that I had been holding on to the virtuous commandment that God gave me as the holy grail. I thought being virtuous would deter all my flaws and relationship problems.

So, I took a sabbatical of 2 years and I did not date anyone. As I was living my Jeremiah 29:11 life, disaster struck in my own life. My best friend, my buddy of life, my father was diagnosed with cancer. I went through bouts of confusion. I suddenly got this urge to abandon my self-development plan, and quickly find someone to marry me so that my father could meet him, bless him and walk me down the aisle. I got really nervous and really anxious.

This led me to a disastrous situation. I ended up in a one-way relationship - anything to make my Father meet someone, bless him and marry me, I said. I was focused on the wrong thing. Turns out that the

“God never turned His back on me”

new boyfriend was ignoring me, and also seeing my friend. At this point, I faced God saying 'You see, this is not the Jeremiah 29: I I life we talked about. Why are you doing this to me?' Through a friend, He responded to me: 'do not kill your father off in your head before he has passed. It is not your time yet'.

So I said, okay. My father's health kept deteriorating, however. He saw my brother and I graduate from Grad School but unfortunately, he passed before he got a chance to walk me down the aisle. I cannot explain to you the level of devastation that I felt. I felt alone and confused. I just could not understand why God would do this to me. It was really hard. When we came home for the funeral proceedings, my mum and I went to the cemetery to pick out my dad's burial plot. There this guy walks out and he's very handsome. I'm thinking 'oh! He's cute!' while almost rolling on the floor in iro and buba. I felt ashamed of myself for that being my focus in the midst of what was happening. He was a vendor for my dad's funeral. Shortly after that, he came to the house for a meeting but I was sick and was not seeing any vendors. This fellow then sent me a text message saying 'hey, I heard you were sick. I pray God heals you from the inside out. Have a blessed day.' I thought 'ewoo, I have found love.'

Moving on, we had a big fight during our client-vendor relationship. Nonetheless, we kept in touch. He eventually asks me out. I thought to myself that since I was not completely lifeless, it could work. A couple of days later, on my birthday, he made his intentions clear. I faced God, confused, thinking: 'when my father was alive and I was in a happy place, I asked you for man and You said 'not yet.'

I did not understand. So, I struggled with our relationship in the first couple of months. It took my friend and cousin having conversations with me before I submitted myself to the process. We kept dating and at the same time, I kept asking myself 'God, why do I deserve this man when I'm grieving the loss of a parent.' What I did not realise was that God had given me this man to help me get closer to Him, as I was not

talking to Him at this point. We were on hiatus, something like a break. Every time I would get sad, this man would pray for me and that helped break the ice I had with God. Fast-forward to a year and a half later, some ups and downs, on my birthday, the very handsome man asked me to marry him, and I said yes! That day was our 2-year mark from going from a client-vendor relationship to street fighters to dating. I'm just so grateful to God and I say Glory to God. When I think back on that situation, I realise that God was still looking out for me. When I was not spending time in His presence, God started speaking to me through people I loved and trusted. When I turned my back on God, God never turned His back on me. God wants you to know this: you're not here by chance; His hand formed you. He compares you to no one else. You are one of a kind. There is nothing His grace cannot give you.



BUKKY

As a child, I was “daddy's favourite”. I grew up believing that my mum hated me and this always caused problems between us. Sometime in my teenage years, my Uncle moved in to live with us, and he took advantage of the tension between mom and me. I was a very skinny child and my parents always made comments about how clothes did not fit me as much as they did my sister. My uncle told me I was beautiful, and would peck and touch me softly. I did not think much of it at the time, not until it went much further. He made it seem like I encouraged it and I wanted it; he then reminded me of the tension between mom and I and said that if my mum ever found out, she was going to kill me. I believed him and so the abuse went on for a while. He later moved out of the house, and although I hated the things he did to me, I got depressed when he left. I thought that the one person, apart from my dad, who “loved” me, was gone. This depression affected me for such a long time that I failed my first and second attempts at WAEC. On the third try, however, I passed! I called daddy dearest to inform him and he was so excited! He promised that we would celebrate as soon as he got back from the trip he was on at the time. Unfortunately, he died in a plane crash whilst on that trip. When we got the news, I remember praying to God that my dad would be one of the survivors. He was not. After his death, I got closer to my first brother and we became best friends. But 15 months after the death of my dad, he too died, in a car crash. Again, I prayed so hard that his life would be spared. It was not. Therefore, I just gave up on God.

“Everything went blank for a while and I thought that was it till I started hearing “I will bear you in my arms, I will carry you”

Some years later, I was home for the holidays and when it was time to return to university I could not find my international passport. My mum and I got scared because the policy in school then was that if you don't resume within a certain time frame, you will sit the year out and wait till the next year. Based on this mum took me to a Pastor who prayed and said that I would find it in 24 hours. I scoffed because I did not know how God, who was not interested in saving the lives of my dad and brother, would care about finding my passport.

Exactly 23 hours later, I was praying with my mum when I heard a voice say "Call Debbie, and ask her to check her bookshelf where she hides money; your passport is there." Debbie is my friend whom I had visited during that holiday. Debbie was the first person I asked when I could not find the passport and she had checked and confirmed it was not with her. I heard that voice three times before I decided to act on it and so I called and she searched her bookshelf where she hid money and indeed my passport was there.

For a while, I pushed this occurrence aside because I did not want to consider how that voice came. I was still quite depressed and lonely even though I had friends. So the following year, I decided to take time off school to go for a summer programme in Geneva.

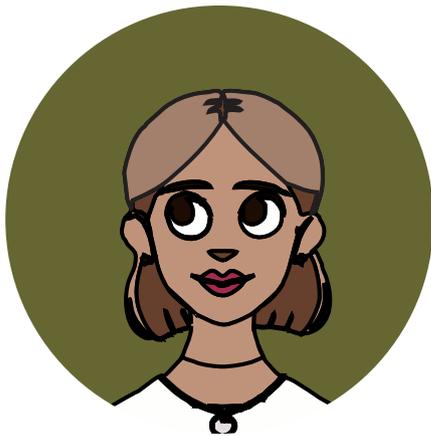
On a particular day, I was at my worst depressed state and so I went out to the rooftop and contemplated taking my life. I thought that if I took my life, I would probably become important to the people in my life and everyone would finally know how sad I had been.

I walked to the edge of the roof and walked off. Everything went blank for a while and I thought that was it till I started hearing "I will bear you in my arms, I will carry you". I heard that sentence repeatedly until I opened my eyes to find myself back on my bed. I was unsure as to how I got back to my room and my bed.

But I knew it was God that had saved me. I was angry because I wondered why He would show up now when He did not show up when I called on Him years ago. I later went to see a Pastor who gave me my first Message translation Bible; He told me to find out about this

God for myself. So I prayed to God and asked Him to show Himself to me in a way that would let me relate with Him as I did with my dad. I did not want to be scared of Him and I wanted to indeed know that He loved me.

Though I had never felt pretty or thought that anyone apart from my dad loved me, God has shown me that He loves me and that I am beautiful. I am a very happy person these days and mum and I are now best friends. Through this experience, God showed me that she actually loved and still loves me and the thoughts of her hating me were only lies from the devil.



CHIDINMA

I grew up in a Christian home where morning and evening devotions were compulsory. I could not be late to Church as my Mum was Head Usher and saw what time everybody came in.

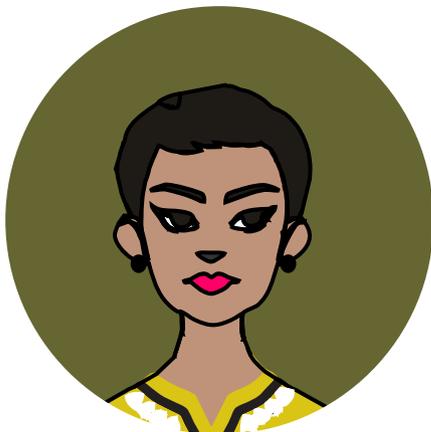
The first experience I had of God was at an open air crusade where the Minister talked about the parable of the lost Sheep. I felt guilty and responded to the altar call. That was the first but I would go on to respond to several altar calls until my Dad, who had been observing, told me that it didn't work that way. He taught me that responding to one altar call was enough, and all that was needed was to trust God to help me build a life of righteousness afterwards. So I decided to build my relationship with God. Fast forward to my final year at University, my Mum would normally call every morning of an exam to pray for me, but for some reason she did not call the morning I started my final year exams. I called my Mum's phone but it was switched off. I called my Dad but he said that he had travelled out of town. I kept trying to reach my Mum but my Dad was evasive anytime I asked about her. I started suspecting that something was wrong. Days later, I got a text from a friend sending condolences about my Mum. This was how I found out my Mum had passed. My heart was broken and I was grieved. I gave up on God because I equated Him taking my mum from me to Him not loving me. God knew what my Mum meant to me and did nothing to keep her. I decided I was done with Him and everything that had to do with Him. I cut off from Church and my Pastors. I saw every believer I knew as a co-conspirator with God to take my Mum from me. I stopped going to church and started to dabble into books about the spirit realm, looking for answers. This is what happens when you are that hurt: you begin to seek for solutions elsewhere. So, I read many spiritual books. I

“I had questions no one could answer,
not even my Dad”

had questions no one could answer, not even my Dad. I understood this because he was grieving *too*.

Then I went for NYSC (National Youth Service Corps) where I heard a Minister speak about "Staying Angry with God". He spoke about God knowing the end from the beginning; he talked about God having the full puzzle while we only have a piece. Even when it seems like God let bad things happen, he said, God still loves us. When I heard this, I started crying because I had gotten to a point where I could not find answers to the questions that I had even though I was reading several books.

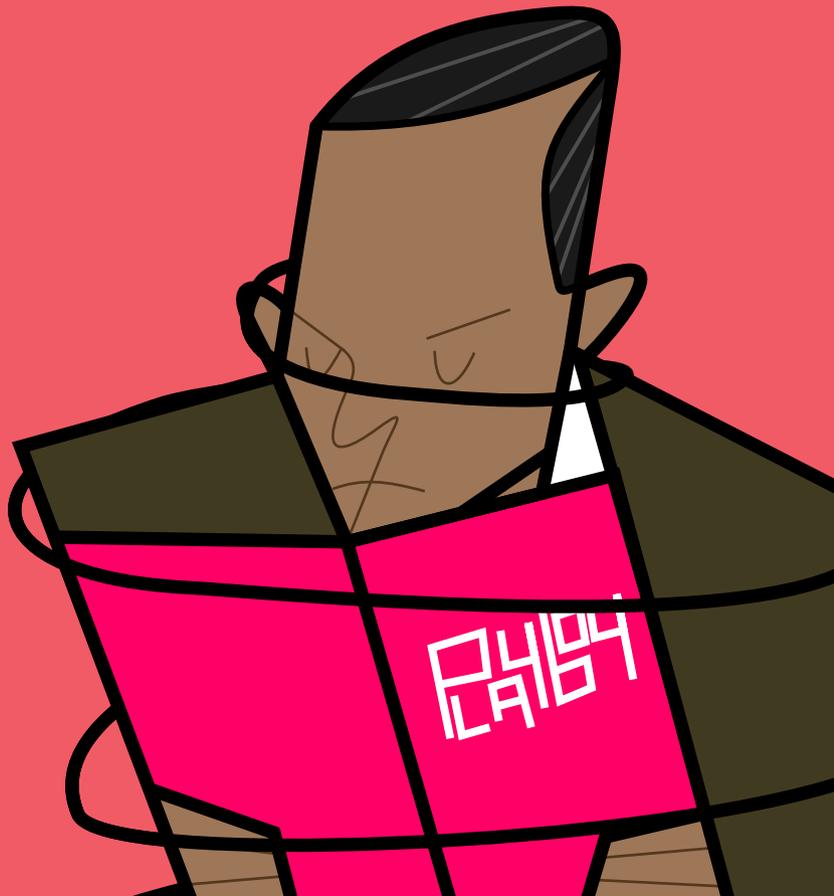
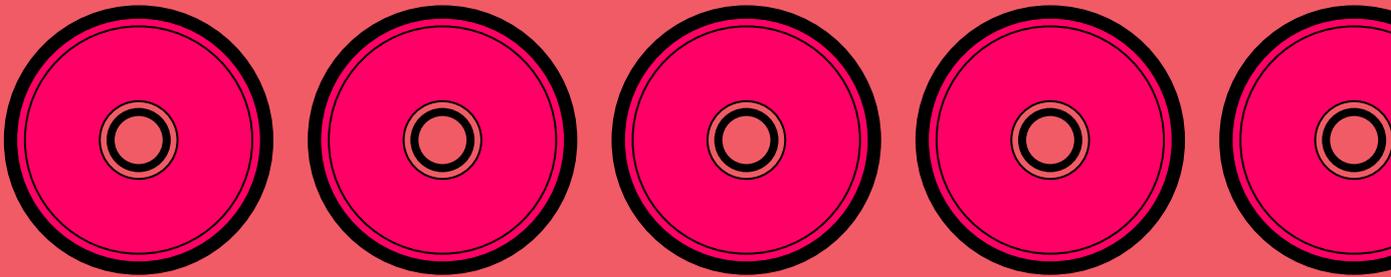
I figured I was better off with God than where I was at that moment. I broke down in desperation and re-dedicated my life to God. Things have not exactly been rosy since then. Nonetheless, regardless of the situation, I have never once doubted that God loves me and *deeply* cares about me. Even when He does not show me the full picture, I put my trust in Him for He has the full picture.



C.U

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sex and
addiction.





“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

1 Cor. 10:13(NIV)



““ Miss goody two shoes turned bad” was not what I ever imagined being part of my story.

I grew up in a morally upright, Christian home; I started speaking in tongues as a child.

In secondary school I was the one who judged the girls who did things with boys.

Here I was; only 3 months into my first year at university, doing all the things I judged those girls for. All it took was one dude saying all the right things and I was in his arms and bed.

I could not believe myself, felt so terrible and willed to stop; I would cry and stand in front of a mirror promising myself “no more” but was back at it shortly after.

At some point I stopped feeling bad; my conscience would nudge me still, but I ignored it.

Meanwhile, I kept saying my prayers, serving in Church, doing the things that I thought a Christian should do. This was the point that I realised the futility of religion; it creates an illusion that you and God are great, even when you're so far way.

Things went on this way until all of a sudden I started failing miserably in school work. I could not understand why because I never had to struggle with school. I began to pray fervently about this but there was no progress.

Then I remember being home for the holidays and my mum said 'I bind you to the will of God, that outside it you will not succeed'. I was not sure if this was a prayer or a curse but it got me thinking a lot.

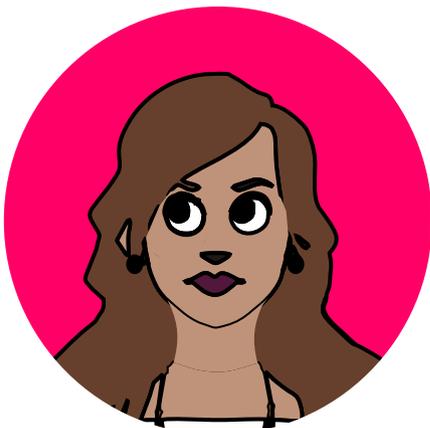
“...and I found a new strength to overcome lust.”

By the start of my third year, I knew that if I continued doing so poorly in school, I would have a lot of problems graduating. I got so frustrated and said the most profoundly honest prayer I ever said: "God help me, I do not want to be out of your will, but I cannot do it on my own, so help me"

I do not exaggerate when I say that from that day I turned a new leaf. I became more conscious of everything. I would hear God speak to me moments before temptation came, and I found a new strength to overcome lust.

4 years later and I have not as much as kissed a boy. I cannot say I did that on my own.

God taught me to surround myself with the type of friends who were not in the same sin I was trying to overcome. I learnt that God cares about every aspect of my life. I also learnt how to open up about everything to Him. He became my sexual counselor.



A.D

As I share this story, it has been over 100 days since I last masturbated. Actually, 108 days if I want to be exact.

When I started this 100 day challenge, I was almost certain that I would NOT complete it. How was I going to go 100 days without an activity that was a daily habit? The common sense approach would be to wean myself off gradually, not cut it off cold turkey. So of course, I figured my flesh would eventually win. However, this did not deter me from trying. Honestly, I do not even know how I picked up the habit. I do know the famous Mills and Boons romance novels in secondary school helped my imagination though.

When I started university, I dropped the Mills and Boons books but not the habit. To be honest, masturbation did not even seem like a bad thing at the time. Although I never openly discussed my habit with anyone, I was in an environment that openly discussed and encouraged sex. I graduated from university and masturbating was just another activity in my daily life. If I struggled to sleep, I masturbated. If I was bored and alone, I masturbated. Over time, I came to identify these and more as triggers that I had to avoid when I started my 100 day challenge. Fast forward to 2016, six years after I had graduated, I was still struggling with the same habit. I was tired of it. I figured that if it had to be shrouded in secrecy, then it was not ok. Especially since, it always left me feeling guilty and condemned.

I could not understand how it could wield so much power over me. I could never say 'no' to it. I felt like a bystander watching myself give in every single time.

“I figured that if it had to be shrouded in secrecy, then it was not ok.”

Now, what I have come to learn is that every single struggle we face, God uses it to teach us certain lessons and also encourage or inspire others. Therefore, I learnt a few lessons.

I learnt that the devil wants to isolate us. I wish I had known, years ago, that instead of shrouding my masturbating habit in secrecy and giving it more power each day, I might have found a solution and quit sooner. When I finally opened up to a close friend, Segun, I felt lighter. All of a sudden, it was not just me that knew about it. Segun had counseled many people in the past, and he made me realise that this struggle was not unique to me. In fact, many people were dealing with it and just like me; they were looking for a way out. However, he also pointed out that many people, including him, had dealt with the habit in the past and quit it.

For the first time, I felt like there was a solution. The devil did not want me to know that and he would have continued to keep me ignorant of that fact if I had not sought help.

I also learnt that the devil loves condemnation. After my eye opening conversation with Segun, I made a decision to drop the habit. I wish I could say everything went uphill from there but I was able to hold off masturbating for almost four months! Looking back, that was a major feat. Still rather than commend myself I condemned myself. I did not think I deserved anything good God wanted to send my way because I had decided to return to a habit that I knew would displease Him. However, this verse reminded me that since I was already in Christ, there should be no room for condemnation in my life. Rom. 8:1 - *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them, which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

All the condemnation did was encourage me to continue sinning since I was not good enough anyway.

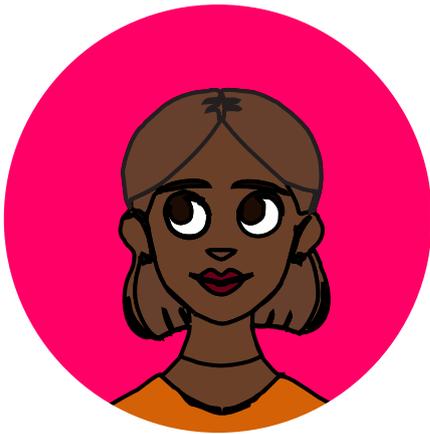
I then learnt never to justify a bad habit. Condemnation plays funny tricks with our minds. Since it looked like I was not going to stop masturbating after all, I asked God to accommodate my habit. I figured that since I did not have the willpower to stop, the least God could do was cut me some slack and accept me as I was. It was not sex, so I told myself it really could not be that bad after all. I did not think it was fair that God would create us as sexual beings but ask us to wait until marriage before having sex. Why could He not just activate a sex code for each person when they actually got married? Then one could truly live according to His laws.

I could not intentionally stop sinning because my flesh was too weak to say no. So what did I do? Honestly? Nothing. I actually just continued masturbating. Until my awesome daddy, a.k.a God, stepped in to help. I learnt that sometimes God will send someone to you when you are not willing to look for the help you need. Do not be ashamed to respond to the call. I had a meeting with Segun and he randomly asked how I was doing in that area. I was ashamed to admit that I was back at it as we had the initial conversation a year ago. However, I also realised that I could not lie to him.

Segun did not condemn me or even make me feel awkward about admitting my struggles. We spoke about it and then he put me up to this 100 day challenge. Here I was asking God to cut me some slack and Segun was asking me to do a 100 day fast off masturbation. I was like, 100 days? With no sexual pleasure? How was I going to do it? I mean the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak man!! (Matthew 26:41)

Then he gave me advice that stuck. He told me that at no point should I feel like I do not have the willpower to say no. Even when the desire is sooooo strong! God Himself told us that His grace is sufficient for us in our weakness. Like Joyce Meyer said, God shines through our imperfections.

Therefore, now that I have done 100 days, I have asked God for the grace to continue. I still think about masturbating sometimes but these thoughts are fewer and farther apart.



EJ

I was born and raised in an Orthodox Christian background. I was taught about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible.

I skipped a year in primary school and started secondary school at 9 when most of my classmates were at least 11. As a result of this, I was more mature than my peers as most of my friends were older than I was; a phenomenon that continues till today. This meant I was introduced to some good habits and some bad ones unfortunately.

When I was 11, my friend and I walked from school to his house every day and we would have lessons and do homework there until my mum came to take me home. One of those days, I went looking for my friend and found him in a room trying to quickly hide something. I cajoled him until he showed me what it was; a porn magazine with naked images of women. I found it very intriguing and that marked the start of my battle with pornography. From that point, all I could think of was how to get magazines and smuggle them home.

As I grew up, pornography became more accessible to me. At first, I did not think it was a problem because I was only looking at it; I was not hurting myself or anybody. Until I began to dwell on it and skip classes, even when I went, I could not concentrate. I stopped reading and my grades began to slip. I went from being a great student to just being a good one. Although, I still had fairly good grades and managed to get some prizes on graduation day, I was not happy with myself. When I saw my secondary school results, I knew something had to be done so I burnt all my CDs and magazines and went off to university.

I stayed strong through my first semester in University, and finished with a great result. Unfortunately, I was trying to do it on my own and I backslid in

“...even though there are other struggles, I now know I do not have to do it alone.”

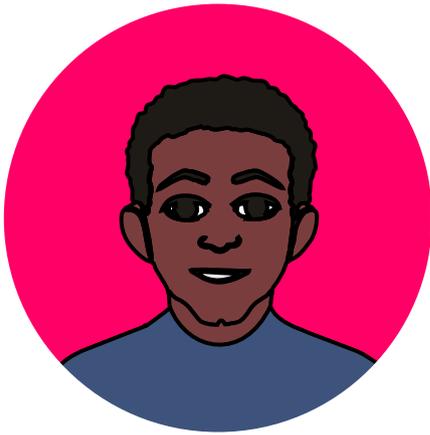
my second semester so my grades dropped again. It was a cycle for the next few years. I would be good for a while then I would falter. Anytime I faltered, I felt I did not deserve to be in God's presence so I would stay away from Church. Then my Church family would get worried and come looking for me so I would go back to Church. This cycle continued. But my Church fellowship got disbanded and nobody came looking for me because they assumed I was ok. But I was not. I was hurt. I did not care about Church or God. I felt God had abandoned me to the struggle so I stopped trying to fight it. My grades actually got better somehow and I graduated with a good result.

Then I went to England for my Masters. When I arrived, my mother made sure I joined a Church. This happened to be the best thing that ever happened to me. Service was fun and interactive, unlike the Churches I went to in my youth where service was in some language I did not understand and was pretty boring. But this Church was different. There was praise and worship like I never experienced before. So I went back the following Sunday and the Sunday after that. Eventually, I joined the Technical team and from there, the Men's fellowship. There, I met an older colleague who I am proud to call a friend now, who shared the story of his battle with pornography. It felt like he was talking to me and I knew I had to meet him. I spoke to him and though it took a while, I eventually opened up to him. He became my friend, brother and accountability partner. He would always encourage me and pray for me. It's been 2 years since I gave up the habit.

I rededicated my life to Christ on October 18, 2014 at the Festival of Light in London and even though there are other struggles, I now know I do not have to do it alone and that Jesus has won all my battles for me. A favourite bible passages which also helped me was Romans 8 v 1 - 2, v5 (MSG)

“With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death

their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.”



PS

Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring. My father is an Anglican Church priest so I went to church literally every day of the week. Growing up in such an environment made me aware that God existed.

My mother led me to Christ after she caught me stealing. She told me I was a covenant child and I had been dedicated to serve God. That was the first time I gave my life to Christ amongst many other times.

When I got into secondary school, I started to struggle with my identity. I knew I could be a social person but I just could not engage people. I had a serious fear of rejection. I was scared that people would not like who I was or be able to relate with me because I was too stubborn or too loud.

This struggle continued in the University and affected my academics. I was struggling with school and this was not because I did not read. By the end of my second year, I was on a 2.85 GPA. I was not born again – I did not have a love relationship with God but I knew that God could do things for me. I knew that if I served Him, He would do things for me. So, I started to do things a certain way. I would go to class, study my books, pray and fast. My results got a lot better and I went from being a third class student to being a second class upper student. Notwithstanding how I had seen God help me in University, my story went south as soon as I left for NYSC (National Youth Service Corps). In the NYSC camp, I spent most of my time at mammy market. Before

“For 3 years, I was an active smoker. My grinder was my best friend apparently because I did not go anywhere without it.”

NYSC, I had probably drunk just maybe about five millimeters of alcohol. However, during NYSC I made up for all those years. That year, I was also introduced to weed by my flat mates. It was a house birthday party and there was loads of weed. I decided to try it just once but that was the first of many. For 3 years, I was an active smoker. My grinder was my best friend apparently because I did not go anywhere without it. It was always in my car or my bag, there was always a blunt somewhere.

All through this, I had a serious vacuum in my life.

I tried to quit smoking weed just before I went to the UK for my Masters so God could help me with getting a Visa. However, just 2 months after I got there, I met some other guy that introduced me to the UK weed. So I started smoking again.

I was in the choir in the church in UK because my parents had gone ahead of me to make sure I had a church family waiting for me. I was already registered to the choir before I even got to the UK.

Life became very confusing for me. I would go to church for choir practice on Saturday, leave church 8:00 pm, go home; get changed, go partying and come back maybe 5:00am in the morning. Catch a nap and be in church by 9:00am to minister in church till 1:00pm.

That was my life all through my stay in the UK.

Somehow, amazingly, through all of these, God stayed faithful. My academics went on smoothly. Considering my lifestyle, many people expected me to be on a third class or not even pass. I graduated with a merit.

Still I knew there was a vacuum in my life. I was looking for something but I did not know what it was.

When I came back to Nigeria, again I gave my life to Christ and said, "God I repent of all my sins, please just give me a job."

I got my dream job within a year. God gave it to me in a way that I could not imagine.

At the time, my parents pastored in a church in Lagos so I was active in

the church as youth leader. I went out against my parents' will most of the time.

Then my parents were transferred out of Lagos and I felt a covering was removed from over me. I started to struggle with a lot of things. I could not invite my friends to where I was living. At some point I started living out of my car.

I had just lost over a million naira to a bad investment. I was really in a bad place. I'd go to work, come back and light a blunt and smoke. I'll call someone and ask "where can we go tonight?"

I went out Monday to Friday as against going to church Monday to Friday. And I would go to work the next day. It was a reckless life. I was all over the place.

Until a particular day, which is the day I can significantly say that God knocked on my door – it was some time in about September. God laid Psalm 51:11 in my heart – "Cast me not away from your presence oh Lord. Take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me, the joy of Your salvation and renew the right Spirit within me."

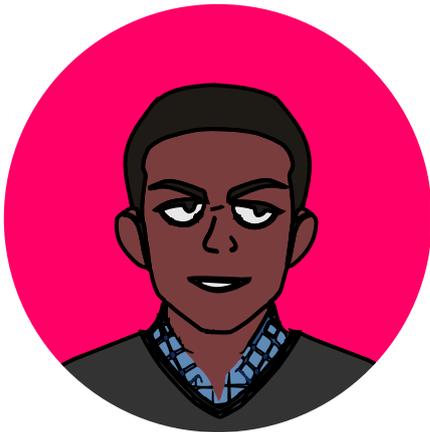
I was very high when I sang that song. I was so scared; I asked "what do you mean by 'cast me not away...' am I about to be rejected like Saul was." I went into my room, locked my door and I began to pray. I called my mum and I told her to pray for me and my brothers so she does not know she was actually praying for me. I knew my mum would immediately go into her prayer room, write it down, put it up on her wall, and start praying.

This testimony is not my testimony. It is my mum's testimony.

God began to work in me. I attended Church then but I would sit in the back and I'd say, "I cannot join the choir because people will recognize me as the boy dancing on tables in Lagos clubs"

Sometime in March, while I still used to smoke and drink. God led me to a scripture in Jeremiah – it was a scripture about rejection where God had rejected Israel because of their whoredom. The scripture

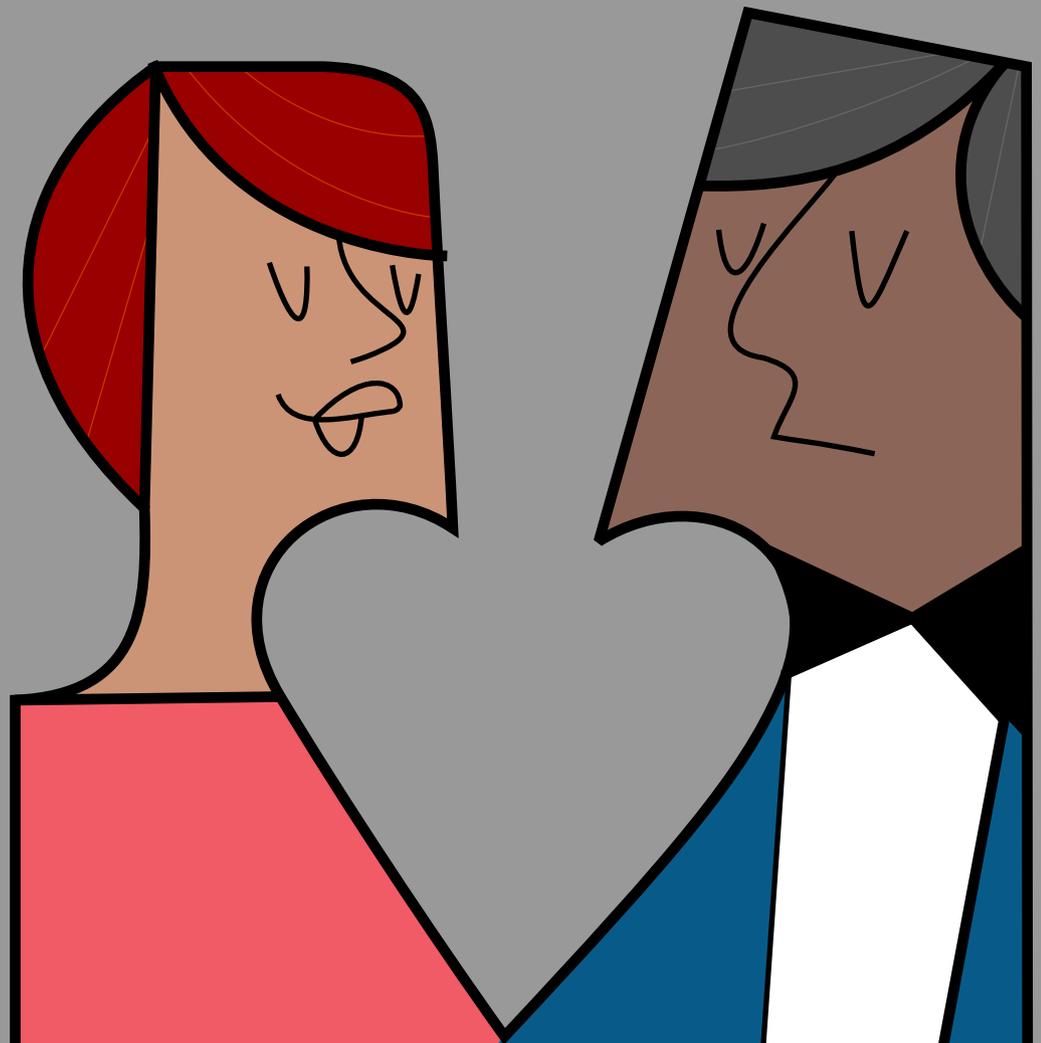
described my life in 2016. God then ministered to me to take off my clothes and lie flat on the floor. I started to pray for mercy. God then led me to another scripture where He said He has forgiven Israel. Then I got up and went to my fridge, and emptied it of all the alcohol; I took out all the paraphernalia (lighters, weed) and threw everything away. When I previously tried to quit by myself, I struggled with the hunger for the partying, weed and alcohol but since that day, it was a total healing.



K.B

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how to
experience
God.



Perhaps you have read a few of these stories and crave your own God experience. Or maybe you have been looking for God before now. We would like to show you how to find Him: He is just a prayer away:

To meet Jesus, all you need to do is to speak to Him from your heart, in your own words telling him how you feel. Vent if you like. Tell him what your questions and frustrations are. Tell him you want to try Him. In whatever state you are, surrender to Him. Ask him to help you and make you over.

OR you can simply say these words:

“Jesus, I have tried everything and every way I know and nothing is working. I have done things I'm ashamed of and regret. My heart is heavy but you say you love me unconditionally and so I come to you. Please come into my life and give me peace. Set me free and make me whole. Living water, let me drink of you so that I will never thirst again. I surrender my life to you. Please make me over into something beautiful and pleasing to you. Amen.”

If you said this prayer, please send us a mail now (hello@lifepointeng.org) and we'd be glad to answer your questions and celebrate with you. You may also send a Whatsapp message to +2348091000078

Quit trying to straighten out your life yourself before you give it to Jesus. Give Him your crooked self now and let Him figure out what do with it. Jesus built movements on lepers, prostitutes and tax collectors. He can work with what you've got. Glen Fitzjerrell

index.



Dealing with Abuse:

God's will is that we are not treated unjustly and He does not take oppression lightly (The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed-Psalm 103:6(NIV)). If you have been abused in the past, and need healing, please say this prayer:

Dear God, I come to you bruised as I am and I pray that you heal my wounds and restore me to full health. I know that you are able to make me whole again. May your perfect love drive out every fear and anxiety. I declare that I recover self-respect, joy and peace in Jesus name. Amen!

If you are currently in an abusive situation, kindly send us an email and we will be glad to help.

Dealing with Rejection:

God desires to heal people that are hurt through rejection, it is His will to never leave or forsake us -

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.-Psalms 27:10.

God sets the lonely in families -Psalm 68:6a

If you have felt rejected or feel lost and rejected and need healing, please say this prayer:

'Father, It hurts to not be accepted but I thank you for your promise that you will never forsake or leave me alone. I thank you for always accepting me. I pray that you'll give me the grace to find my self-worth in you and not in men. I also believe that you will lead me to those who will accept me and love me. Thank you for always loving me and being here. In Jesus name. Amen!

Dealing with Career changes:

God is interested and very particular about every detail in our lives, including the career decisions we make –

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” Prov. 3:5-6

“The Lord himself will lead you and be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you, so do not lose courage or be afraid.” Deuteronomy 31:8

If you are looking for directions or wisdom concerning your career, please say this prayer:

'Dear God, thank you for your word. Thank you because I can always look to you for direction. I need your help to make this decision concerning my career. I trust you will lead me in the right direction. Thank you Father because you know all things and will lead me to making the best decision in Jesus name. Amen.'

Dealing with unforgiveness:

It is in God's plan and will that forgiveness should be our lifestyle to live whole lives as Christians; and also if we want our sins to be forgiven. We can also lean on Him for strength when we can't seem to forgive by ourselves— Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 .

Are you holding on to a wrong done you and you need grace to forgive? Say this prayer of forgiveness:

Dear Lord, thank you for your word today. I am still hurting and I need your grace to forgive this wrong that has been done to me. I let go of it and repent of every plan to avenge myself. I trust that You will take care of me. I forgive this person of the wrong they have done to me and I hold nothing against them in the name of Jesus. Thank you for your grace in Jesus' Name. Amen!

Dealing with mental and physical sickness:

It is God's Will that we are in good and perfect health. —

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” 3 John 1:2 (NIV)

If your health is failing either mentally or physically and you need to get healed, please say this prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for your word concerning me that you intend that I live healthy in every way. I ask that your healing power works in me and makes me whole; strengthening me mentally, physically and in every other way. I receive and thank You for this healing in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Dealing with Loss/grief:

God comes to us when we are in our lowest state. He comforts us when we suffer loss or grief. —

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

If you have suffered loss or grief and you want healing and comfort for the pain, please say this prayer:

Dear God, I am in so much pain from this loss and need your help to be strong. Help me not to grieve like those who have not known your mercy and kindness—who have no hope. I pray that you will wrap me in Your loving arms and comfort me, that you will take this pain away and give me strength to face each day in the name of Jesus, Amen!

Dealing with Addictions:

God frowns at everything that separates us from His will. He desires that we are free from every form of addiction and He understands our struggle. —

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” -Hebrews 4:15 (MSG).

If you are struggling with an addiction or trying to break free, please say this prayer:

Dear God, I thank you for your word that you understand my struggles with this addiction. I ask for your grace to break free from it so that I am only under the influence of Your Spirit and not this sin. Thank you for this breakthrough in Jesus

name, Amen.

If you said one or more of these prayers, but still need to talk to someone or have someone pray with you, please send us an email at Hello@lifepointeng.org.

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