

# The Goodness of YeHoVaH



Charienna Perdomo

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father,  
and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## First Encounters with a Sinful World

I was born in the Philippines (I'm Filipina). My parents said I was sick upon delivery and they weren't sure I would make it. Fortunately, by God's mercies, I survived. When I was around two years old my parents decided to move to the USA, but around that time, my dad's cousin, who was a missionary doctor in Liberia, Africa, called my parents and asked them if they would be interested in becoming missionaries too.

My parents went to college at Mountain View College (MVC) on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. During their era, mission work was emphasized greatly, so MVC had many students become missionaries to foreign lands. If you come across a boomer baby who is SDA, Filipino, and a missionary, most likely they would have graduated from MVC.

On a side note, when my dad was a young boy, he recalled that his father was asked to work in one of the church's institutions. My grandfather, however, turned it down. At that time he was wealthy, but shortly after, he lost his wealth through a series of misfortunes. After the losses, my dad said that my grandfather told him, "When God calls you to do something, you go and do it."

On the other hand, my mom said that she grew up hearing missionary stories, and from a young age of around six, she told everyone she was going to become a doctor. Everyone would just laugh at her, but she eventually grew up and did just that.

So with all that compounded, guess where they ended up? Africa. My parents have had many miracle stories in the mission field that I'll have to gather and write down one day, God willing... If I survive writing this out 😊. For now I'll try to zone in on just my story and how it relates to specific truths.

So, we ended up in Liberia, Africa. I was about two years old, my older brother around six, and my younger brother was not yet in existence. He eventually was born in Liberia. During our time there I was exposed to some things that a little girl should never be exposed to. I don't have much recollection of how I came to know these things, but I remember doing and knowing things that now as an adult I know I shouldn't have known.

Eventually war broke out in Liberia and we had to flee for just a few months to Ivory Coast, the neighboring country to the east. I remember my mom hurriedly packing and my dad laying on the bed. He asked me if I was leaving him (I think this was his way of indirectly expressing his sadness that this could be a final goodbye). Of course at that time I did not understand much, but I just remember that it was very sad. (A quick background on this – women and children were being given opportunity to leave the country, but there was not enough transportation space for the men to leave as well, hence my dad being left behind.) My next memory was of us leaving on a plane without my dad and my mom praying. My dad got out of that country by a miracle, but that's another story.

Not long after, I remember my mom crying after she received news that the pastor's son, who was sick and had to be left at the hospital, was shot to death in his hospital bed. It was engraved in my memory, because to this day I remember where I was and my surroundings. My father went back eventually, after things calmed down, to get some of our belongings left behind. Unfortunately, our house was completely looted, except for one of my dad's watches and a document my mom prayed would still be there. She told God she would continue to be a missionary if that document was still there, and it was. He also visited the hospital, which was right next to our house, and sadly the rebels had made the basement of the hospital a slaughterhouse. They would bring people down there and shoot them to death. One of them was a family he had done Bible studies with. Even to this day, when he tells the story, I can tell his gut is wrenched.

Here's a map for those who are visual. Most of the countries that I grew up in are in the West Coast area. Map reference: <https://bit.ly/3zL6cDM>



When we were in Ivory Coast, I was exposed to more things I shouldn't have been. I remember one night that I was crying in my sleep. My dad had to shake me awake. He asked what was wrong and I said nothing, but I knew that I was being deeply affected. I think I was around five at this point. My parents did not know of any of this until I told them many years later. It broke my parents' hearts, with my mom becoming angry at me that I didn't say anything before and my dad crying. For many years the trauma from what happened led me to internally blaming them – that I was only a little child, and they were supposed to watch over me. Granted, by God's grace I no longer hold these ill feelings towards them.

## Childhood Secrets

We eventually got relocated to Togo (maybe for a year) and then to Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone was the country where my parents worked for the longest amount of years. I think I was seven at this time. My parents worked in a remote village called Masanga, with the hospital being called Masanga Leprosy Hospital. Yes, there were many lepers and TB (tuberculosis) patients. We used to play with a boy who did not have his digits anymore due to leprosy (he was cured but lost his digits). I remember my mom would check us once in a while with a cotton ball pulled to a point, to see if we could feel anything. At one point she thought I had TB, so I remember getting a series of shots for that. We also would get malaria occasionally. The flu doesn't feel too bad compared to it. Yes, fond childhood memories!

In this place, I was once again exposed to things a child shouldn't be. There was a person close to our family who did things that weren't good. Since I was older, I have more memories of what happened and how I felt. I think this may have gone on for a year or two, but I'm not sure. I just remember it felt like a long time. I was always so stressed and lived in fear and shame. I remember I would always ask my mom if she was the doctor on-call for that day (as opposed to my dad, who worked every day). I knew if she wasn't, then I could relax and know nothing would happen that day, because mom would be present at home. However, this person was so addicted/broken that they would risk it sometimes, even with my parents at home. Despite all this, God was still merciful and spared me from it being worse.

I remember lying in bed one night after a hard day due to what "happened". I felt physically cold and like I wanted to cry. I eventually started to fall into a fitful sleep... and then I heard a voice call my name. It sounded so clear like glass and like a drop of water falling into water, rolled together. I remember turning toward the direction I heard the voice. I thought that I dreamt it. As I fell asleep again, I heard the voice once more. It was still clear and pure sounding. I looked around this time

thinking this was weird and that maybe one of my brothers had called me (we shared a room). But they were sound asleep. I remembered the story of Samuel, but I dozed off again. The third time was louder but still crystal clear. This time I decided to say something to the effect of “Here I am.” I can’t remember exactly, nor do I remember if I whispered it or said it in my head. I waited to hear more, but there was nothing more. I remember feeling special and understanding that this was something supernatural that happened. I was comforted because I felt that God was with me. I never forgot that experience and it helped to carry me through the difficult times of abuse.

I don’t mean to focus so much on this particular trauma, but I felt I needed to lay the groundwork as to why it was so hard for me to accept the message of the character of our non-violent God. Looking back now, I really believe this experience was one of several factors that formed a block against this message, and it took nine years from when I first heard the character of God message to break down this block.

Because of this trauma, I remember feeling angry at my older brother for failing to protect me. Then when I got into my older teens and college years, I remember that I always told myself, “Look out for number one (that is, look after myself), because no one else will.” I would vent to my roommate and close friend that the men in my life (father and brother) failed me. That I felt I could not trust them at all to protect me. And I didn’t. (I no longer feel this way toward them, and I have grown to understand that ultimately our help and refuge comes from our heavenly Father.)

That sentiment spilled over to men in general, in a double-edged way – not trusting them to protect me and not trusting them to respect me. I had no intention to date in college and “ran away” from guys that I thought were interested in me. I did, however, have my first boyfriend/girlfriend relationship in my senior year of high school, and though I was assured that he did love me, I struggled with feeling like a



“victim” at times. It made it a tough relationship for him, but he was patient. I believe God spoke to me through that relationship.

I remember one night lying in bed and suddenly it hit me – how loving, patient, and gentle my boyfriend was to me, even though I pushed him away and was so emotionally complicated. Yet he loved me. The realization hit me like a brick, and I started to bawl. And I knew then and there that it was the Father speaking to me in His still small voice in the quiet of that night. He was showing His love to me through this young gentleman, though he was not perfect, beginning the healing of the wounds inflicted early on in my childhood. I had forgotten a lot of those tender memories, until this moment, when I’m having to relive it and it brings tears to my eyes.

We eventually graduated from high school and went off to different colleges. Doing a long-distance relationship was just too tough, and with my level of insecurity and how young we were, I ended up breaking it off my freshman year. I was so heartbroken that I had no interest in being in another relationship for a long while and just poured myself into my schoolwork. This is where the performance mentality really kicked in. It didn’t take much, considering I am of Asian background, where education is highly prized, compounded by the fact that my mom is a doctor and father an accountant. I felt I was expected to do well, even though it was not verbally said. My older brother dropped out of college and so I felt more pressure to succeed. Though a college dropout, he has been successful in climbing the ladder in the correctional facility of his city, and now is captain. I believe his choice of career also stemmed from his trauma in childhood.

## Growing Wings of Wood, Hay, and Stubble

So, I took the route of majoring in pre-medicine to follow in my mother's footsteps. Deep down I believe I did all this to find value for myself. I was heartbroken to no longer be in a relationship with the young man who was so kind to me, which is ironic since I was the one who ended the relationship, and so I just became a school "workaholic". Interestingly enough, I did not end up in medical school, despite all the hard work I did. I ended up turning down an interview with Loma Linda University. How I came to this decision was peculiar even to me.

One day, I went to attend a tutoring session as I normally did right before a physics exam. Surprisingly, I was the only one there. I got to talking to the tutor and the story came up of how his mother and father met in medical school. However, his mother never worked as a doctor, because they decided that she would stay home and raise the children.

After hearing his story, I told myself that if I met someone before I had to decide to enter medical school, I would not proceed, because I knew I would want to raise my children and not be occupied with a career. If you've been following what was said in the previous paragraphs, you can deduce what happened. Looking back now, I believe it was no coincidence that I was alone in that tutoring hall in order for the tutor to share that story with me, in order for me to make a critical decision that would propel my life in a direction opposite of what I had planned, one that eventually led me to learning more of His truths. And no, it wasn't the tutor who I married! More later on that...

Growing up I always longed for a more intimate and safe relationship with my parents, but I think a lot of that stemmed from the abuse during childhood, as mentioned earlier. I carried so many things internally but felt I could not reveal it to my parents. Many nights I would walk to my parents' bedroom and want to climb into their bed, but I could not, so I would just lay on the floor and weep. I also felt very unloved and emotionally neglected by them. I remember they would be in my

brothers' room and I would hear laughter, but I was alone in my room. I just would cry in silence. I know that my parents love me now, but these exaggerated feelings were probably conceived due to my age and the trauma I had.

Looking back, I was a traumatized, insecure, repressed, and emotionally isolated child. I remember feeling a lot of times that I wish I had never been born. As I grew older, I knew I didn't have a choice but to live, so I became numb to my feelings. Discovering that I could push myself and succeed in college and make grades that ranked me with the cream of the crop, despite how challenging I felt the class was, was enlivening. It was as if I found hidden value, a new purpose and drive, but at the same time it was making me more prideful. I remember getting a test back from my organic chemistry professor, and he mentioned that it was a hard test and I got the highest score.

That was it, I felt like I had reached "it", whatever "it" was. My determined studying on Saturday nights while my friends went out to have a good time was paying off! This drove deeper the lie that I, *I myself*, could breathe life into my desires and dreams. I could be like God and create for myself whatever I wanted or longed for. I felt like there was nothing that could stop me if I set my mind to it. My ex-boyfriend had said something to me shortly before we parted ways, and that was, "You can do anything you set your mind to." I never forgot that and started to believe this lie to be true as it manifested itself through my own efforts, or so I thought. Looking back now, with the knowledge of the beauty and pricelessness of God's kingdom and understanding more of the principles upon which it is built, all I see was that I wasted many hours of my life in college, making for myself a god of wood, hay, and stubble, to be burned up in that great and terrible day. Working faithfully to do well in school is not bad, but my motives were totally twisted and self-centered.

I was also growing to be more aware of the power of womanhood. Praise God though that I was such a workaholic in school that this did not

become a more complex problem to fall into. The problem only lay in my growing pride. I also did well in the sports I participated in, though I was not involved in a lot. Though these two things added to my vanity, academics was my main focus and god, and so I poured most of my strength and time into studying. In a way, this was good, almost like an accommodation God allowed by helping me get good grades (though it wasn't the best thing for my pride), in order to spare me from worse things I could have gotten into, like bad relationships or more wasteful interests/hobbies (my friends were into swing dancing and wanted me to join them). Because of how dejected I felt growing up, all this fueled even more the vain value I created for myself. With all this I came to unconsciously put others down in my mind to feel better about myself.

It took me years and many mistakes to realize this flawed mindset and learning the truth of the Father and Son, especially in light of His true character and feelings towards us, for me to even see myself more clearly and identify these faults in myself. When I saw more of His love and tenderness towards us, and the value that He speaks into us because of His great love and not for anything we've accomplished, how I viewed and treated others naturally shifted to be more tender, compassionate, and long-suffering. It is so true that by beholding we become changed and that we become like the god we serve. Looking back now, I pity the young lady I was, so vain and conceited when really there was only emptiness and a scramble to find and make my own value.

Somewhere down the road, around my junior year of college, there was a young theology major who was interested in me, but I had no interest in him. However, he was persistent and had a calm nature. I would accompany him to his speaking engagements and would hang out when he would call. I never had a friend who was so passionate about God and the Bible, and this intrigued me. Through him I was introduced to the Spirit of Prophecy and reforms taught by the pioneers.

As I mentioned earlier, he was persistent in pursuing a relationship with me, but at the same time he was very gentle about it. He just seemed to enjoy having me around and did not pressure me into being in a more serious relationship with him, even though he knew I was not interested in more than a friendship. However, he grew on me after a while.

My friends had always teased me that I would marry a theology major. And I thought, well maybe they are right. Because he knew I wasn't interested in more than a friendship, he did ask me to think and pray about being in a more committed relationship with him. One day I decided to tell him that I was ready to go steady with him. I'll never forget what happened. We were sitting in his car and I said something to the effect of being ready to move forward in the relationship. After a moment of silence, the next word from his mouth was, "No." I thought he was pulling my leg! So I laughed and proceeded to ask what he meant.

He said he had been praying about us and that he had set a time limit to get a decision back from me and it had ended the week before. My heart dropped. He continued to call me as before and we would hang out as usual, but it got harder and harder. I finally had to say that I couldn't continue to be friends because it was painful. He went on to become an SDA pastor.

Apparently, God had other plans. Though the relationship did not go anywhere beyond friendship, it definitely left a deep impression and was a catalyst to me pursuing my faith for the first time as a young person. I took my relationship with God more seriously and threw out things in my life that I was convicted were not pleasing to Him, like certain music, clothing, and food.

In hindsight, my relationship with my dear theology major friend paved the way to another more serious relationship which eventually led me to the deeper, richer truths I now hold dear. It's so awesome to look back in life and see how God led. I'm so grateful to my friend for the impression

he made on me. I hope and pray that one day he too will discover the truths I have come to love so much. I am reminded of this quote:

“God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.” - Desire of Ages p. 224.5

## The Blood Diamond Brutality

Let me rewind back to Sierra Leone. I had mentioned that my parents had worked there the longest – so much happened there. We were there from around 1991 to 1997. The nation seemed like it was constantly in a state of government/civil instability. The rebel leader, Charles Taylor, who started the war that we fled from in Liberia, was funding the rebel activity in Liberia’s neighboring country of Sierra Leone. This war was apparently notorious enough that a movie called “Blood Diamond” was made based on it. According to Wikipedia it started in 1991 and ended in 2002 (11 years) and left over 50,000 dead.

Reference: <https://bit.ly/3E0poA2>

So through the years, there were times when things would get tense, cool off, then get tense again and so on. I remember one night, I think I was seven or eight, my mom told us to sleep with our jeans and socks on, and shoes next to our bed, in case we would have to run into the forest just behind our house. I don’t think I slept much; it was a tense, long, and fitful night.

Maybe a couple of years later, rebel activity started to ramp up in the surrounding villages. There were ambushes on villagers and on the roads. The rebels were very ruthless and brutal. They would cut off limbs, rape, and make boys into “boy soldiers” by forcing them to shoot their parents. They would slice open pregnant women and cut off the babies’ heads and have the boys play soccer with it. We had a hospital worker who decided to have her baby early just in case “anything” happened. People lived in constant fear and ordered their lives according to it, and so did we.

There was a village where the women were trying to protest against the rebel activity, so the rebels ambushed it and padlocked the women’s mouths shut. There were many atrocities, these are just the ones I heard about at that time as a child. I only praise the Father I was spared from ever seeing violence. But I would question: Why were they not spared too? It feels so unfair.

One time the hospital’s truck was caught up in an ambush. One of the nurses was killed in the gunfire and his cousin was captured. Later on, my parents helped him through school by giving him a job at our house, so I got to hear of his experience. Another house helper we had, a local village man, was captured when they attacked his village. He only escaped by hiding in the bloody bodies on the ground, pretending to be a corpse himself, when the rebels attacked another village sometime later. We had childhood friends whose parents were killed in front of them and then taken captive. The girls were forced to be “wives”: having children as soon as their bodies were capable, not by choice.

I remember hearing that one of my childhood friends was somehow freed from this type of captivity, and I was to meet her. She was so frail and skinny, but clean and in a nice dress. She was so quiet and didn’t have much to say, and I didn’t know what to say to her either. There was just an unspoken silence where I hoped she understood that I

acknowledged, but could never fathom the heartache, pain, fear, and darkness she had gone through.

I remember being in school with my brother and a couple other missionary kids, and we would hear bombs going off in the distance. Supposedly they were RPG missiles being launched. Every time one would go off, we would just look somberly at each other. No one said anything. We lived in fear and uncertainty.

As the rebel activity intensified, the hospital director, who was an American, decided that it was time for all of us missionaries to consider leaving Masanga. We all gathered at his house and the adults discussed things while we children played. I remember that even as we played, we knew and felt the gravity of the situation. It's one of those times where you constantly feel sick inside while you try to function normally.

After the adults discussed, they called us children and asked us what we thought. I don't remember much detail, except that we agreed with the adults that we should try to leave. I remember them discussing in what order we should have the caravan and what we should do if we get ambushed (make sure to duck, etc.). There was also a lot of prayer for protection and God's timing. I can never forget that night and thinking how surreal everything was. Like it was a bad dream that we were not waking up from.

At the appointed date, we headed out, the cars in the order as discussed. Sometime during our trip, as we were going up a slight hill, a few cars zoomed the opposite way. I remember thinking that was odd. Then a white Nissan Land Rover passed us, and a white man was waving to us to go back. I tried to see his face but couldn't. We turned around and asked people at the checkpoints we met if they had seen a white man in a white Nissan. Everyone said no. But there was only one road and one way to go, how could no one have seen him? Could this have been an angel? When we arrived back at the hospital compound, everyone was



happy to see us because they had heard that an ambush took place and were so concerned we may have been caught in it.

We planned another date for our caravan to leave and finally made it out safely to the capital city of Freetown. Thank God! The second time around, I remember that us kids were spread out into different cars. Now I'm thinking the adults planned it that way so potentially more could escape if there was an ambush – basically the concept of not having all your eggs in one basket. It's sad, but they did what they had to do to ensure some would survive.

Since things were unstable in the more remote village area, my parents ended up working in Freetown. I remember my mom saying she had a lot of war victims as patients. One day she had a bunch of people with their limbs cut off by the rebels show up all at once due to an attack. As time went by things started to escalate more even in the capital city.

## Looking Down the Barrel of Death

Gunshots being fired at night was not unusual. As a matter of fact, it was common to find shells and bullets around our house. Then in May 1997 the bottom fell out: a coup d'état was set into swing. I had just turned 12. My older brother was graduating from the 8th grade and my mom was scheduled to fly to Kenya for his graduation. She was supposed to leave on a Sunday, but for some reason she had to leave a few days earlier on a Friday. Looking back now, that is odd because flights are usually rescheduled to be later and not earlier. I truly believe God allowed that to happen to spare my mom from what we encountered in the next few days.

That Sunday morning, my dad was supposed to go for an organized run to raise money for a certain neighborhood cause. Fortunately, the shooting started before he left for the run. I remember waking up that Sunday, the day my mom was originally supposed to fly out, to gunshots. My eyes flew open and I had to think for a minute. I thought to myself that hearing gunshots was common, however, it was usually in the evening and not during broad daylight in the morning. The shots were a little more frequent than what I was used to, and there were also RPGs going off. I also heard a woman wailing... So I knew something was off.

I remembered my dad was supposed to go for his event and was concerned that I and my younger brother, who was only about eight at that time, would be alone at home. I eventually heard him talking on the walkie talkie to another missionary family. I was so relieved he was still home. The missionary families had walkie talkies that they used to communicate with one another; these were the times before cell phones. They were discussing what was going on. I remember he was outside, and I walked out to see him. It was such a lovely Sunday morning and I thought, *could something so bad be happening and yet the day looks so beautiful?* I felt deceived with a tinge of doom mixed in.

My dad eventually explained to us that a coup was happening. He then gathered us into the living room; we had worship I think and prayed. Through that ordeal I remember my dad always praying that no matter what happened that we would have peace of mind. He also told us that if we heard the gate rattle, we were to run to the back of the house, jump over a cement block fence, and go into a crawl space of the neighbor's house.

After that he tried to normalize the day by making breakfast for us. I remember eating but feeling so empty and sick inside. My dad fell asleep on the living room couch (not sure how he could sleep through all this!) while my brother and I played in the living room. Then we heard the gate rattle. We had a thick iron chain and padlock with which we locked the gate with and that was what we heard rattling.

I said, "Pa they are here!" and immediately my brother and I took off to the back of the house. My dad helped us over the fence and we crawled into the crawl space. Our dog followed us until the fence and he just kept on barking. We prayed he would stop and I think he did. I don't know how long we were under there, but as we lay on the cold ground I remember hearing shots being fired here and there, RPGs going off once in a while, and a woman or two wailing. There wasn't a whole lot of commotion, but it definitely was not normal. My younger brother was whimpering. Fast forward to the present, both my brothers have a handful of guns. I think this stemmed from past trauma which caused them to feel like they have to protect themselves and those they love. I understand them because I have felt, and sometimes still feel, the need to have a gun as well.

My dad talked us into going back to the house. Apparently the rebels were able to break into the gate because the motorbike was gone, but the house was not broken into. Some time passed and then again there was commotion outside. Unfortunately, my dad did not think of the gate being wide open now, with no way to warn us if the rebels approached again. All we heard were loud angry voices. My brother and I wanted to

run to the back of the house again, but my dad stopped us because it was too late. The rebels would see us exiting the house. So he led us to the garage. He told us to wait there and pray while he went to talk to the rebels. I remember seeing some sunlight stream into the garage and thinking that this might be my last day on this earth and I thought of my mother.

I did not have much time to dwell on my thoughts, maybe it was just a few seconds. My mind was quickly forced back to the present. I waited to hear my dad's voice. (As I write and relive this I do feel a bit weak and uncomfortable.) It felt like forever, then I heard the voices get louder and angrier and I knew my dad had approached them. Loud talking went on for a few seconds, then a shot went off. Immediately the thought entered my head that they shot my dad. I waited to hear of any wailing or moaning, because I knew that if my dad was actually shot he would make some sounds out of pain. But it was silent. Then I thought that maybe he was dead. But just as quickly another thought pushed it out and I felt assured that he was ok. I believe this was the Father reassuring me, and that it was one of the answers to my dad's prayer for peace of mind. Considering how bad things were, my brother and I were calm. I remember my brother saying they shot our dad, but I assured him that our dad was ok. Granted, all this happened in a matter of seconds. I finally heard my dad talking again in a normal voice. My dad proceeded to plead that they not shoot the dog (my dog was barking furiously) because he had kids in the house. They proceeded to demand we children come out to them.

Just to fill the readers in, what happened was that they shot at my dad's foot, but he kept an eye on the trigger and pulled his foot away beforehand. To this day I wonder why they didn't try again, but I am very thankful that they didn't!

Proceeding with the story... My dad called out to us, "Children come out!" In between he would plead that they not shoot, that we were only kids. This house was unique in that it had a long hallway with all the

rooms coming off it. At the end of the hallway was the garage and at the other end was the living room. I remember having my arm over my brother who was younger and more traumatized than I was. I remember walking down that hallway and seeing the sunlight streaming through the doors into the hallway. It was the longest walk ever. It felt like a corridor of death. I thought, "I could be shot at as soon as I get to the end of the hallway."

We eventually made it to the end, which was the living room. As soon as we came into the rebels' view, they shouted, "Hands up!" My brother and I just stared at them in shock. They once again yelled their order and this time our hands flew up in the air. The two rebels who yelled the orders were carrying AK-47s pointed at us. At that moment I wondered if they were going to shoot right after we put our hands up. By the grace of God they did not. I do remember their eyes were bloodshot and they acted erratic. There was another rebel who stood closer to my brother and I. He was calm and his eyes were clear. He told the two other rebels to put their guns down and told us not to worry, that they weren't going to hurt us.

They then proceeded to take our belongings, which were already packed in boxes since we were about to leave the country permanently before the war broke out. We eventually made it safely out of the country after a few days. The U.S. government got involved and sent troops to assure their citizens made it out. We were not U.S. citizens at that time, but thankfully we were helped out as well via a helicopter. We later had all our stuff taken just like what happened in Liberia. My parents have so many stories... and many miracles too.

You would think that my parents would quit the mission field after this experience, but they went on to do missionary work in Ghana, Cameroon, Botswana, Kenya, and Tanzania. They finally retired from the African mission field in 2014, after serving for about 25 years.

Needless to say, these experiences left me with mild PTSD that manifested itself in slight anxiety when I hear unexpected loud blasts (e.g. gunshots, fireworks, etc.) and when I see military vehicles/planes. I also got violent dreams, though I noticed that they decreased significantly after I became mainly vegan in diet. Could be a coincidence, could be not. I just know that in the past when I ate meat after being on a vegan diet for a while, I would have a violent dream that very night. This has happened on the few occasions I ate meat in the first few years of my diet transition.

Continuing in this short rabbit trail... Not too long ago, I ordered a veggie burger, but when I tasted it I wondered if it was real meat because it did not taste or look as I remembered the veggie burger to be. I brushed it off and told myself they would not give me a wrong order. (Like that never happens!) I was in a busy rush and didn't give it any thought afterwards. Well, that night I had a violent dream after not having one in such a long time, maybe years. As soon as I woke up, I realized that most likely that burger was real meat. I share this to show that I don't think the link between what I ate and my bad dreams is solely psychological, since I thought I was eating a veggie burger. Also, I hope this information would be of help to anyone reading this who may be plagued with violent/bad dreams.

## Catalysts to Christian Faith

Back to my story with a quick recap... I grew up in Africa from toddler age to about 14. My parents left the mission field and moved to the USA for 4 years. After that, they got called back to the African mission field, this time to Botswana. I had 1 more year of high school left and so I went back with them and attended Maxwell Adventist Academy in Kenya for my senior year. I graduated and went to Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, USA, while my parents continued their missionary work in Africa for many more years. After 4 years of university I graduated, went into the work field with my degree, and at the same time I was working to get into medical school as I had planned.

While I was in the process of studying and taking the MCAT (required tests to get into medical school), I would also play volleyball every weekend. Some girl friends and I would play with a mixed church group of all ages. We would play from about 10 in the morning until 6 in the evening without stopping, rotating teams of course. It was a lot of fun!

There was an older friend there that I would talk religion with occasionally. One day as we were playing in the sand pit, we were having a religious conversation as we tried to play volleyball. I asked a question and he pointed to a new face in the volleyball group and said, "You should talk to that guy there."

"That guy there" happened to play next to me in a later game that day. He smiled without saying anything and I smiled back. But I thought he was weird! I didn't talk to him that day and didn't see him again until several months later when he showed up at another volleyball game. This time we both happened to be sitting out waiting for our next game. The first thing he asked me was, "Do you know Jesus is coming soon?" Since I had become more serious in my Christian walk (as I had described earlier), he piqued my interest. We talked for a little while, but I had to leave early for my scheduled weekend at work.

Later that evening, my roommate gave me a DVD and said that Edwin Perdomo, the guy from volleyball, wanted me to give this to you. Of course, she gave it to me with a sly smile and wiggled her eyebrows! The DVD had his email address on it. I sent a short email just to tell him thank you and... didn't hear back from him.

A few weeks later, I happened to be on Yahoo Messenger the same time as Edwin and he sent me a message to say hello! Later, I found out why he never emailed me back. He thought I only wanted to say thank you for the DVD since that's all I said and my message was short.

It didn't take long for us to be talking for hours. He worked a few hours away so our conversations were mainly on the phone. He explained that he was trying to move into the country. He lived in Orlando, Florida and had learned of country living. He had no friends or family here but followed his convictions. That was my first introduction to country living. Shortly after, maybe within a few days, he shared with me something that rocked my world forever.

He told me that the Trinity doctrine could not be found in the Bible... He showed me John 14 and how it alluded to who the Comforter really was. He also showed verses in other sections. This one I saw right away though.

John 14:16-18 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: **but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.**

**I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.**

He pointed out that the verse says, "...but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you..." Who did they (the disciples) know because He was dwelling with them? It was He Himself: Jesus, the Son of God. Edwin then pointed out that the part right after says, "...and shall be in you." What tense is



this? Future. So Jesus was saying that the person they knew, who dwelt with them, will IN THE FUTURE be in them. Here was the nail in the coffin for me: “I will not leave you comfortless: I WILL COME TO YOU.” Here Jesus is, in a little bit of a cryptic way, clueing them into who the Spirit of truth is. The Spirit of truth who is called the Comforter in verse 16, “...another Comforter... Even the Spirit of truth...” It really isn’t that cryptic though; a child can see and understand this. It just takes believing that the words are true.

I saw what he was saying immediately and knew right away that we had a problem. After that day I could not unsee it. But... I kept my eyes shut as much as I could. He gave me a booklet that sat on my shelf for almost a year. I kept on telling myself that he believes in a Spirit and so do I, and that’s all that matters. And how could the whole world be wrong? Before then I never questioned that there was another belief aside from the Trinity.

Many months later, Edwin started to put together a study on John 14. When I would visit him after work, he would share how his study was going. He was excited because he was learning so much by putting the study together. Everything he said was making a lot of sense, so I decided to read the pamphlet he gave me that was sitting on my shelf.

The pamphlet is called “The Living Voice of the Lord’s Witnesses”. It is basically a compilation of several Adventist pioneers’ stances on the Trinity. What they said made a whole lot of sense too, as it seemed to blend right in with what I was hearing from the Bible. One day I asked Edwin if he read the pamphlet. He sheepishly said that even though he gave it to me he hadn’t read it. I said, “Really?! Are you sure you didn’t?” He said, “Yes. Why?” I told him that what he was telling me from his study of John 14 as it relates to the Trinity, or rather the non-existence of it, is what I am reading these pioneers say as well! To me that made me realize that when people sincerely study the same source, they will arrive at the same conclusion or close to it. Here were two groups of

unrelated people (Edwin vs. Pioneers) saying the same thing based on their study of the Bible!

Though I could see the problem right away, it took me a year to fully embrace it. I had many concerns – What would my family think? My friends? How would I fit in church settings? I knew that my acceptance of this obscure belief could change things, and that’s exactly what happened when I finally did accept it. Everything spiraled downward. Though I haven’t been disfellowshipped yet, Edwin had been disfellowshipped from his church in Florida for believing what we called the “anti-trinitarian” message at that time. We now lovingly call it the Father and Son message. For more on it please see: ([https://maranathamedia.com/book\\_theme/view/divine-pattern](https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/divine-pattern))

My family and friends quickly put Edwin at arm’s length and thought he was influencing me in a controlling way like they thought my theology friend did. Though I had been introduced to conservative reforms by my theology friend, I fought him on some of it. My friends were concerned about the change that was going on in me. Since I was not fully grounded in what I was learning, and to keep hanging on to my identity as not to be controlled (as my friends said I was), I would argue with my theology friend about some of the reforms. In the end I rejected some and wasn’t firm on others that I liked. My friends still had a strong influence on me. They were and still are well meaning, and I don’t fault them for speaking out in their efforts to protect me.

When Edwin came into my life, all those things I had learned in the past resurfaced. When that happened, I laughed to myself. I knew God was bringing me back over the same ground. This time, since I was in the work force, in a committed relationship with Edwin, and not in school – I was more independent of my friends. Also, the way Edwin presented the reforms was more relaxed and I didn’t feel much pressure to do them, from a legalistic standpoint. He explained them from a practical point of view. He gave me a book called “Creeping Compromise” by Joe Crews and that sealed the deal for me. After that I can say that the reforms

became my personal convictions. I was later blessed to have two women enter my life who taught me the finer details of what I had learned.

I say all that to say... Once again, my family and friends saw a quick and drastic change in me. Within a year of meeting Edwin, it probably seemed to them that I was now in a different religion/belief system. I dressed different, ate different, lived different, no longer spent time playing volleyball, got derailed from medical school, even believed in a different God! Once again there was someone in my life “controlling” and “brainwashing” me. Needless to say, they didn’t like Edwin very much.

All that led to our relationship being and feeling very isolated. Many big problems came with this. I was still caught up between my friends/family/former life and Edwin/new belief system. Some very hurtful things were said to me by close family members which led me into a spiral of depression that went deeper as the years went by. I knew these truths were life, and I clung to the one who gave them to me – Edwin. In this cold, lonely world, as two broken people with baggage from our pasts, we hung to each other, it seemed we were all we had. As for me I didn’t know where to go, I found comfort in Edwin, the one who had shared precious new light to me, though our relationship was rocky even from the beginning. I could understand the following verses very well, for Edwin was the one who had the words of eternal life. It took a few years to transition that dependence I had on Edwin to the Father Himself.

John 6:68, 69 Then Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

I will always be grateful to Edwin for allowing our heavenly Father to use him as a channel of blessing to give me these wonderful truths. Understanding the blessings that came with feast-keeping was the next thing I learned. That was easy to see. After I saw the Father and Son truth, seeing the blessings of the biblical feasts was easy. Also, I knew

the apostles kept them after the cross and there are verses to show that they were not done away. If the apostles observed the feasts, then good enough for me!

I never saw the feasts as a requirement to eternal life. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing! I cannot even say that about the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath. But most of us have the mentality that if we are to be saved, we **MUST** keep the Sabbath. God our loving heavenly father does not give us these laws to prove our salvation. He gives them to us to pour blessings and life on us, to draw our minds to Him who is the life-giver. If we observed the feasts and Sabbath (which is a feast according to Leviticus 23), we would constantly be reminded to have a godly spirit, not malice and wickedness. Any sincere, honest Christian would know that they would be hypocritical to keep the feasts and yet hang on to a wrong spirit. Instead, God wants us during feast times to confront our sinful self. That is just one blessing... there are many. I encourage you to taste and see for yourself, that the Father indeed is good. See here for feast and covenant materials:

[https://maranathamedia.com/book\\_theme/view/sabbath-fountain](https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/sabbath-fountain))

[https://maranathamedia.com/book\\_theme/view/everlasting-covenant-statutes-and-judgments](https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/everlasting-covenant-statutes-and-judgments))

1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore **let us keep the feast**, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Psalms 34:8 **O taste and see that the LORD is good**: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

I also found Hebrews 8 on the covenants extremely helpful in destroying the legalistic mentality I had towards keeping the law. It clearly showed that the laws were given to bless us, that we ourselves cannot live them out in and of ourselves, but that it is the Father who will cause us to walk in His laws of blessings and life. Many people see the law as a drudgery, but I think King David understood the real purpose of the law and that is

why he could say what he did in Psalm 119. These concepts were made clear to me in the article called *Gospel in Galatians* by E.J. Waggoner. After I read it, I understood more clearly the purpose of the law and realized they were not a thing to prove our own salvation or attain righteousness or eternal life by our own works, but that the Father gave them to us as a hedge of protection, a channel of blessing, and to give us life more abundantly:

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have **life**, and that they might have it **more abundantly**.

Matthew 5:17 **Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.**

We also see that the foundation AND fruit of the law is LOVE.

Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for **he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.**

Matthew 22:36-40 Master, which is the **great commandment** in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt **love the Lord thy God** with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt **love thy neighbour** as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.**

We see in the last three texts that we are to fulfill the law as Jesus, our example, did. But not in the old, legalistic covenant mindset, but in the new!

Then came calculus... I have a friend who said that understanding the Father & Son message and the Feasts is like learning Algebra. And then

learning the non-violent Character of God is like learning Calculus. It may not be that way for all folks, but it certainly was for me.

Once again, I was introduced to the loving character of our Father by Edwin. During this time, we had an elderly man living with us. He may have been responsible for introducing the message to Edwin since he believed in it for many years. Edwin eventually came across Pastor Adrian Eben's ministry, Maranatha Media, around 2012 or 2013. He loved it because he said he always thought that the mainstream understanding that God eventually metes out His judgement and burns everyone with hellfire just didn't seem to make sense and wasn't consistent with the fact that God is Love.

When he first shared with me, I was opposed to it. I felt a bit of aggression, which grew a little more through the years. I didn't have this emotion with the other things I learned, except maybe with the reforms, but only because my friends were saying I was being controlled.

I couldn't seem to handle the thought that God wouldn't directly strike out at unrepentant sinners. I thought this made Him a wimpy, irresponsible God, like a parent who lets their children rule over them, instead of ruling over the children.

We would have discussions at home, and they would share with me and I would, in a little bit of an aggressive way, defend my view of God's character. I remember praying that God would show me the truth. A lot of times when God wants to get my attention, He will show me things in pairs within a short amount of time of each other (a duplicate).

This elderly man had mentioned to me how Sister White had rebuked a brother and told him that he was "walking in the sparks of the fire of your own kindling." On my way to work shortly after, I was listening to an audio and I happened to hear the same phrase! I sat stunned. So, I thought that maybe this was true. I share the passage below.

When Eld. Olsen's voice should have been heard in remonstrance and rebuke, that voice was not heard. He did not have faith in God to lay his hand firmly upon that which, under the control of the Spirit of God, he knew to be wrong; and **without hindrance you have pursued your own course, venturing to do things in your own spirit, walking in the fire of the sparks of your own kindling.** You have done many acts of injustice by your voice, and with your pen subscribed for many things which you will not care to meet in the judgment. 1888 1295.2

Well, that lasted for a few months and then I decided that I was deceived, and that the duplicate witness was the working of the devil to trick me or just a coincidence.

A few years went by, fast forward to around 2016... Edwin and I attended some meetings held at Talking Rock Sabbath Chapel, where Pastor Ebens was preaching a series called 'Pentagon of Lies'. In the series he talks about different doctrines that practically blind us to His loving character through subtly working in our subconscious. It is an excellent series in breaking down these blinders. I highly recommend it to anyone willing to learn.

I thought I caught a glimpse of the message once again, but shortly after I lost it. Because I was stuck between two minds – one mind crying out for this truth of a loving God and an opposing mind still wanting a god of force – it made me feel unwilling/unable to reconcile contradictions, which led to me feeling uncertain of how I read scripture. At the same time there were major rifts going on in the movement among the brethren. This situation coupled with a difficult marriage left me demoralized. The church situation caused me to feel like a child caught between its parents divorcing and at the same time my marriage was on the rocks. All these things ended in me neglecting to study my Bible for over a year.

## The Fork in the Road

There were other things too, looking back, that I think made me very opposed to this message. Several years before I had been badly betrayed. Because of that, this text was dear to my soul. I truly felt like I understood it, minus having the spirit of Christ in me.

Zechariah 13:6 And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, **Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.**

Through the years my relationship was very difficult. I'm not casting blame on any one person, for all had a part, though some might disagree. Because I had learned so much from Edwin, when things got tough, I was so tempted to throw it all away. This was a huge temptation; I cannot emphasize it enough. It was thrown before me often, and in the earlier years of my marriage, I would outrightly rebel.

One night as I was driving and battling inside, I saw a fork of a road presented before me in my mind. I could see clearly that the wrong decision would cause me in time to end up very far from the right path. I knew I didn't want that. I wanted the right way. That gave me some peace and I resolved through the power of God to walk down the right path regardless of the struggles. The temptation still presented itself a few times after that and one night it finally dawned on me that the evil that others do should not cause me to throw away God's love for me.

How could I reject God because of the evil someone else was doing? Or the evil I was doing for that matter? It doesn't matter who. God is not the one doing the evil thing to cause me to have hate. It's like someone hating and rejecting friend A for something friend B did. Just doesn't make sense. After I realized this fact, this temptation quickly died. I thanked God for His love for me and for not allowing the action of others to make my love grow cold.



However... there was one thing that I hadn't let go completely of. And so I go back to the incident surrounding the verse in Zechariah 13:6. This was a beast. It took me two years to get over it for the most part, but looking back now there was always a residue. During that time, when I would think of this hurt, I would literally, and I mean literally, see fire in my mind. I would see fire everywhere and I would feel it not just in my heart but in the very depths of my soul. I knew deep down that if I did not let this go, it would burn me up. *I knew without a shadow of a doubt that it would cost me my salvation if I did not give it up.* When I would think of it, it was literally like a fire that would creep in. It was the strangest thing I had ever experienced. I don't know how else to describe it.

The emotions were so intense and foreign. When it was fresh, I would wake up in the morning and I would wonder how I was even alive and breathing. I would wish that I would die and wonder why I hadn't already. I thought that this much sadness and brokenness should have killed me already. And I wished it would. But... I had to keep on living. I had never drunk alcohol seriously before and never desired it, but for the first time in my life I wished for a bottle to drink it all away. Thank God I never pursued it, but I often thought how I could obtain alcohol without being seen. It is a strange thing to desire something one has never really had before.

A few days before the incident, I was crying in the parking lot at my job. There was a thought I had, but it wasn't from me. It said, "You will go through the fire, but you will not be burned." It came out of nowhere so clearly that I stopped crying and looked around, as if I would find who suggested it.

Isaiah 43:2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: **when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.**

As I write this, I am in tears. That thought carried me through so much, and I clung to it. This was a very difficult and broken time for me. As I would battle with that fire raging inside, I would pray and tell God that He promised I would not get burned. I prayed He would help me forgive. And for the most part He did.

But I still clung to a sense of justice. Surely God calls me to forgive, but He said vengeance is His and He will repay. So I clung to this God, who will eventually pay back sinners for all their cruel deeds. I loved Jude.

Jude 6,7,15 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire... To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

And of course, we become like the God we perceive...

There was another incident that happened that hammered another nail into this would be coffin but thank God He is in the business of raising the dead! I had a humongous family issue which got drawn out for a few years, and because at this point in life I was pretty estranged from family and friends due to the path I had chosen, I sought help from my church family. Long story short, they were unable to help me. Some friends asked me why I hadn't asked my church family and I said I did, but they said they couldn't help me. Their response: If what you call your church is unable to help you at the time you most need them, that is not a true church.

I told them I felt the same way. What my friends said left a deep impression and I distinctly remember wondering if I should associate with the church ever again or just leave them in the past. The church's decision also caused me to doubt even more one of the doctrines (Character of God) they claimed to believe, since the action I saw was not consistent with the message, according to my opinion at that time. Looking back now, though it was hard to take emotionally, I can see it was the right decision made looking through the eyes of wisdom.

The journey I took after that was lonely and hard. I was in essence going through life by myself. I was in a position where I was accountable to no one and I realize now how risky that was. This may not have been God's ideal route for me, but He used it to reveal my heart – my condemning, sinful, and hypocritical nature. I was plagued with temptation left and right it seemed, in my mind. At some point I questioned – What is going on? It was like I was living in a game and trying to avoid obstacles all the time. And it was a game I seemed to love but wanted to hate. So much conflicted emotions that it seemed ridiculous even to me. I constantly had to pray and keep my thoughts in check. It was like being intoxicated. This went on for maybe three years.

I didn't have to wait the full three years to realize that the sins I was condemning so harshly, I was guilty of myself. Though outwardly I was spotless in human standards, inside I was like a whitewashed sepulcher, full of death and sin. The only difference between those I condemned and me is that one took the opportunity, and I just came a hair shy of it.

You should have suitable control over your thoughts. To obtain this will not be for you an easy task. You cannot accomplish it without close and even severe effort. Yet God requires this of you. It is a duty resting upon every accountable being; and you are responsible to God for your thoughts. If you indulge in vain imaginations, **permitting your mind to dwell upon impure subjects, you are in a degree as guilty before God as if your thoughts were carried into action. All that has prevented the**

**action has been the lack of opportunity.** Day and night dreaming, and castle-building, are bad habits, and exceedingly dangerous. When once established, it is next to impossible to break it up, and change the order of the thoughts, and have them directed upon pure, holy, elevated themes. You will have to become a faithful sentinel over your eyes, ears, and all your senses, if you would control your mind, and prevent vain and corrupt thoughts from staining your soul. **The power of grace alone** can accomplish this most desirable work. You are weak in this direction. T19 78.2

I'll say again that I believe the church made the right decision in God's wisdom, because it took me down a path that opened my eyes to my true self – causing me to no longer condemn my brethren for their weaknesses. I realized that no one is exempt from this or any shortcoming. It only takes the right mixture of life events to weaken a person into whatever sin the devil is looking to trap them into. I finally understood personally how my brethren stumbled, and for the first time I had mercy, true forgiveness, and even pity toward those I was so harsh with. Father forgive me, for I am no better. Not until God allowed me to be laid low in my pride, could I more fully appreciate His forgiveness for me and others.

I have a good friend, who after being wrongfully treated by their church, decided to go back and attend. They said they felt that doing this was a healthy way to help them forgive and heal from what they had gone through. I did not feel as wronged or hurt, because I accepted, to a great extent, the church's decision, by giving them the benefit of the doubt. However, my emotions still slightly clamored for supremacy. So I decided that I too should maybe visit my church again. I wanted to make sure I held not the slightest grudge and that visiting would help me face anything else in my heart. It wasn't until a few years later, when someone did the courtesy of explaining to me the state of the church's management at that time, that I realized they really could not help me even if some of them wanted to.

Also... I “had rested” this controversy over God’s true character... Or so I thought, until my daughter started to ask me really difficult questions. Like, if God made people and He loved them, why would He tell others to kill them? Etc. Also I had met someone who wanted to teach their six year old son that essentially it is good to check evil with violence and wanted to present them with a children’s book that taught this lesson in a violent way. I thought they were joking but they were serious! I presented them with the booklet *Reaching Samson*, which reveals the deep seated psychological scars and ramifications caused by inflicting violence on others even if it is for a “good cause”. I realized that even though I did not fully agree with the non-violent character of God, my view and what I thought were answers did not fully rest the issue either. So, I thought I better revisit this study again, and decided that maybe attending the 2022 Spring Feast would give me some kind of clue and at the same time it would give me the opportunity to face any residual ill feelings I may have toward my church.

Before my visit, I had been praying for over a year that if the non-violent character of God was the truth that God would help me see it (though I was more convinced I had the right answer already). But if it was false that my friends would see the falsehood and forsake it. I thought if this is false there is no way I could be convinced now because I had already heard plenty of sermons on the topic over the years. Yet it was strange, though I could sit and listen to a sermon with Edwin, I could not read a study or pamphlet on the subject. I would feel repulsed by it and think, this is heresy!

During the meetings, it was like a veil was lifted! I realized that my deep psychological scars blinded me to see God in a certain way – the way that I desired. I also realized that I was so hung up on the black and white words of Scripture. I had approached it as almost a law book, which it is, but the law without the spirit of the law. See, the scripture is like a living being. For it to come alive it must have the words and the spirit, just as a person needs the body and breath to be a living soul. If

we separate the two, words and spirit or body and breath, then we have death. If we focus on just the letters, we tend to a spirit of legalism; if we focus on just the spirit we tend to liberalism. These are two extremes away from the truth, which is in the middle, a living combination of the two.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father **in spirit and in truth**: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must **worship him in spirit and in truth**.

John 4:23-24

I was so focused on the words, the law. I did not allow the Spirit of God to bring life to them because I was already set on my preconceived notions that were firmly anchored by my life experiences. Once I saw the block, I was more willing to learn and be humble and read with fresh lenses.

Doing a deeper study on what His wrath actually is and what His judgements are set a strong foundation for me to build upon. Also always keeping in mind Jesus's words: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

Isaiah 54:8 **In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment**; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith **the LORD thy Redeemer**.

Isaiah 30:18 And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be **gracious** unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have **mercy** upon you: for **the LORD is a God of judgment**: blessed are all they that wait for him.

Ezekiel 45:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: **remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice**, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD.

Proverbs 8:20 I lead in the way of **righteousness**, in the midst of the paths of **judgment**:

God is our Redeemer, not destroyer. He tells us He changes not. His judgement is gracious, merciful, non-violent, righteous, etc.

Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, **I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**

We can know God the Father by looking at the Son.

John 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? **He that hath seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

Isaiah 53:9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; **because he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

When we reject the Life Giver, Redeemer, and Defender (God our Father), He has no choice but to turn away in His wrath. We are then left to the judgements of the evil one and the consequences of our own choices. Satan's judgement is to accuse us of all we are guilty of, and he is right, we are guilty! And he says every sin we have committed is punishable by death.

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the **accuser** of our brethren is

cast down, **which accused them before our God day and night.**

**Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan;** and if God should **remit** the punishment of sin, *He would not be a God of truth and justice.* Desire of Ages 761.4

But where sin abounds, grace abounds more. Praise God the Father from whom all blessings flow!

Romans 5:19-21 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: **That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Whose judgement will we choose? Which god will we choose to serve and love? Will it be the God of Mercy or the "god of mercy"?

Proverbs 12:10 **A righteous man regardeth the life** of his beast: but **the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, **that thou mayest live and multiply:** and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it...

For a deeper study on God's loving character see [Plain Statements](https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/character-of-god), etc. ([https://maranathamedia.com/book\\_theme/view/character-of-god](https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/character-of-god))



## Lessons Learned

In conclusion... After all the trauma I had gone through as a child and the difficulties in relationships in my early adult life, I had a really hard time accepting our Father's loving, gentle nature. Subconsciously I could not accept a God like this. A God who was "meek and lowly in heart". A God who does not use force, but turns the other cheek. A God who is so patient and wise beyond human understanding to wait for the fruit of our own choices to fall upon our own heads, for that is the only way we can see our true selves and see that all we reap is what we, only we, have sowed. A God who will plainly and quietly show us, when we are finally willing to see, the difference between what we make for ourselves, which is wood, hay, and stubble, and what He wants to give us – peace and stability forever.

No, I wanted a God who sacrifices. A God who would bring justice with force. A God who would strike those who wronged me and all those who have done wickedly to the innocent. A God who would protect me where the men in my life had failed. That was the God I held on to because of the trauma I had in the past. Granted, all this was happening in the subconscious. It wasn't until I came face to face with the truth of His character that the struggle began. And it lasted nine years.

He had to speak to me in His still small voice, coaxing me to trust in His wisdom, in His ways. Telling me that it is ok to put down the sword. That He still has everything in control even if it's not in the way I think. And so when I would get close to opening my heart to this message I would feel like I would want to weep and I did not know why. And I could not do it. And so I pushed it away.

When He revealed to me the deep wounds as to why I couldn't accept it, I found that I could trust Him. After years of struggling with this message and praying that if it is truth that He would help me see it, the pieces finally came together during a gathering in 2022. Interestingly enough I did not really feel like going to this gathering, but looking back

now, I know our Father impressed me to go. He even allowed me to get laid off from my job at that time so I could attend the whole thing! (My boss wasn't going to give me certain days off, so I would have only attended a few days). And then He gave me an even better job after that!

When I finally understood the importance of understanding God's character, it's like the veil was lifted. When I decided to trust Him to show me another picture of Himself, I saw a picture that would cause me to appreciate His true nature more, because now I really believe that He does love me and that there's not a flip side to His personality. There's nothing holding me back to opening my heart fully to Him because there is only safety in His arms. It's very reassuring to know that He never changes and is always the same, and that His love is always there for me even if I choose to cease to exist.

I finally understand and accept that it is ok to suffer because His Son suffered, knowing He sees it all and bears record and suffers alongside us. At the same time, He is working behind the scenes to bring justice but mixed with mercy, because of the great love He has for the sinner. I finally understand that He asks me to bear injustice for this moment in life on this earth, which is like a breath, in order to give more time to the sinner to accept Him. Can I love the sinner too? Like the Father and His Son Jesus did when sinners abused them? And They continue to love as They are abused to this day, waiting for us to realize and repent.

Romans 5:7-8 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But **God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

This is the perfection our Father is calling us to. To give us this mind, His mind. To be willing to lay down our life for the sinner so we can give them a chance to live. That maybe by the death blow we *allow* them to give us, they will see their true state. This is why Jesus said...

John 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but *I lay it down of myself*.  
I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.  
This commandment have I received of my Father.

This is our sacrifice. There is no way sin can enter again through the soul who has adopted this mind. This is how the Father defeats death and sin: a total crucifixion of self through His Son, propelled by agape love to all men, especially sinners. This is the true cross. There is only one death to die that really counts and that is the death of the cross, the second death. To be honest, it has hit me at this very moment that we all will die the second death, represented by baptism by water immersion. The only difference is that those who die in Christ will rise to eternal life in Christ, because He has defeated death! While those who have not Christ will die eternally.

1 Peter 2:21-24 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, **that ye should follow his steps**: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, **that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness**: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Hallelujah to the truths that set us free! And how beautiful are the feet that bear good tidings of great joy!

Glory be to God the Father and His only begotten Son.

## Psalm 103 and the Good Shepherd Excerpt

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always chide: neither will He keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, His days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so He flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul.

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"It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.

"As the shepherd goes before his sheep, himself first encountering the perils of the way, so does Jesus with His people. 'When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.' The way to heaven is consecrated by the Saviour's footprints. The path may be steep and rugged, but Jesus has traveled that way; His feet have pressed down the cruel thorns, to make the pathway easier for us. Every burden that we are called to bear He Himself has borne.

"Though now He has ascended to the presence of God, and shares the throne of the universe, Jesus has lost none of His compassionate nature. Today the same tender, sympathizing heart is open to all the woes of humanity. Today the hand that was pierced is reached forth to bless more abundantly His people that are in the world. "And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom. He will never abandon one for whom

He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast.

“Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore." Revelation 1:18. I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Isaiah 54:10.

“However much a shepherd may love his sheep, he loves his sons and daughters more. Jesus is not only our shepherd; He is our "everlasting Father." And He says, "I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father." John 10:14, 15, R. V. What a statement is this!—the only-begotten Son, He who is in the bosom of the Father, He whom God has declared to be "the Man that is My fellow" (Zechariah 13:7),—the communion between Him and the eternal God is taken to represent the communion between Christ and His children on the earth!

“Because we are the gift of His Father, and the reward of His work, Jesus loves us. He loves us as His children. Reader, He loves you. Heaven itself can bestow nothing greater, nothing better. Therefore trust.”

-The Desire of Ages, except from chapter 52

John 8:32

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 17:3

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

This is the truth that we need to enter into life eternal. And when we ask as Moses did, we can be assured that we shall see Him as He is. That is a promise.

Exodus 33:18-19

And he [Moses] said, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

And he [God] said, "I will make **all my goodness** pass before thee, and **I will proclaim the name [character] of YHWH before thee...**"

What does a childhood in a war-torn country do to how we perceive God and how we perceive life? This is the question that this testimony aims to answer.

We know that the Bible says that we have enmity with God, and the more sin and suffering we see and experience, the more enmity we potentially could have. We were not designed to see killing and bloodshed – what happens when it surrounds us?

Why did God allow these things? Can He protect me?

This testimony is the experience of one lady who, through years of learning to trust Jesus, allowed our great physician to finally point us to the truth of our Father's character in order to give her peace. May this booklet help others in their own life reflection and be a guide to how love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Where there is suffering, there is the cross. "In all their affliction, He is afflicted." Yet the Father endures with His Son, patiently waiting on humanity. Will we walk with Him?