

Kathy Barnett | Carrie Daus

THE
WARRIOR'S
Bride



BIBLICAL STRATEGIES
TO HELP THE MILITARY SPOUSE THRIVE

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Bride

PRAISE FOR *THE WARRIOR'S BRIDE*

“*The Warrior’s Bride* is a MUST READ for every military wife! While Carrie and Kathy have not sugar-coated the many challenges of military life, they have generously shared the HOPE they have found and the “road map” for thriving! This book contains so many important lessons that could save your marriage or that of someone you know. Read it and pass it along!”

—Kathleen Dees, wife of
Major General (Army Retired) Robert F. Dees

“I love how every chapter feels like it relates to me and what I am going through in my life and walk with Christ. This book will touch and impact so many lives!”

—Heather Osgood, wife of an active duty soldier

“I found your life stories and growth in your understanding and commitment to God’s purpose in marriage to be inspiring and insightful! Your testimonies will encourage many military spouses!”

—Paula Van Antwerp, Army spouse for 39 years,
married to Lieutenant General (Retired) R.L. Van Antwerp

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Kathy Barnett | Carrie Daws



AMBASSADOR INTERNATIONAL
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA & BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

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The Warrior's Bride

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AMBASSADOR INTERNATIONAL

Emerald House

427 Wade Hampton Blvd.

Greenville, SC 29609, USA

www.ambassador-international.com

AMBASSADOR BOOKS

The Mount

2 Woodstock Link

Belfast, BT6 8DD, Northern Ireland, UK

www.ambassadormedia.co.uk

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This book is not ours to dedicate. All that is in these pages came from the Lord and goes back to Him for His glory and for Kingdom advancement.

I would like to give thanks, however, to the Lover of my Soul, and to the Warrior He gave me to share life with. I love them both immeasurably.

“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”

—Song of Songs 2:16

And to Carrie . . . words escape me for once!

Thank you sister.

-Kathy

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

Political correctness permeates many areas of our society. While we're certain that it helps soothe feathers that would otherwise be easily ruffled, to be honest with you, neither of us is particularly good at it. With God's help, we find moments of grace, mercy, and even tact, but rarely political correctness.

We are military wives, writing to military wives, simply because it's what we know and who we are. We've never served a day in uniform, never deployed outside the places our families need us to be, and never put our physical lives on the line for the benefit of others. Yet we do not fail to recognize that many women do serve their country proudly within the military. We honor all those within the ranks of the Department of Defense, regardless of gender.

In the pages that follow, you will read phrases like *military man* or pronouns designating the male species being the one in uniform. Please understand our hearts: we do not intend to negate or even diminish the burden placed on our military women and their civilian spouses. We recognize that about twenty percent of the United States Military is comprised of women, and many of those women are married with families.

Throughout this book you will read what we have learned, often the hard way. We encourage you to learn from us without having to travel the roads we traversed. And we ask for grace from those military women and their civilian husbands when we use the terms and pronouns that seem to convey that the military is only comprised of men. It is not a political statement, and we mean no disrespect.

We merely speak from our lives.

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MARRIED TO THE SUPERSUIT

FROM KATHY

(A scene from *The Incredibles*, a Disney Pixar movie released in 2004)

LUCIUS (FROZONE): Honey?

HONEY: What?

LUCIUS (FROZONE): Where's my supersuit?

HONEY: What?

LUCIUS (FROZONE): Where is my supersuit?

HONEY: I, uh . . . put it away.

LUCIUS (FROZONE): Where?

HONEY: Why do you need to know?

LUCIUS (FROZONE): I need it!

HONEY: Uh-uh! Don't you think about running off doing no derrin'-do! We've been planning this dinner for two months!

LUCIUS (FROZONE): The public is in danger!

HONEY: My evening's in danger!

LUCIUS (FROZONE): You tell me where my suit is, woman! We are talking about the greater good!

HONEY: *Greater good?* I am your wife! I'm the greatest good you are ever gonna get!

One of the greatest frustrations about being married to a military man is knowing that you cannot plan your own life. Your husband, and thus your marriage, is owned by the United States Government, and you are forced to accept the plans for the greater good over your own.

In the movie scene above, Lucius's wife is freshly reminded of this fact. It had been many years since Frozone's supersuit was put away, and I'm certain that part of Honey had relaxed into a false perception that the days of the supersuit were over. However, as Frozone later shows up in full regalia to save the world, we can only assume that his wife dealt with her feelings and pulled out the supersuit, allowing him the freedom to do his job to the best of his ability. I can so totally relate to her.

I can't count the number of plans that Hubby and I have had to scrap because an urgent call came down the Chain of Command for him to put on his supersuit and save the world from some imminent threat. Or at least go take a class to learn how to save the world from imminent threat. And sometimes I am less than graceful in my acceptance of the inevitable. But I still do it. I still dig out whatever he needs, sometimes grudgingly and other times squelching my thoughts in the breathless whirlwind of trying to get him out the door in whatever time the government has dictated.

I know now, after many years of being a military spouse, that I married a man who isn't *normal*. I've learned over the years that I didn't just marry him; I married his supersuit too. And because his supersuit is so much a part of who he is, I have to love it and all its baggage. That doesn't mean that I run around wearing red, white, and blue, singing the "Star Spangled Banner" twenty-four hours a day.

While I am very proud of my soldier, sometimes I get frustrated or angry. And sometimes I feel a lot of disappointment or despair. Sometimes I just want to go buy my own private island and set up my own tin-pot dictatorship that doesn't involve deployment or TDYs (temporary duty). But I think that even if we had our own country, Hubby would form an alliance with some other country that would require him to put on his supersuit and rush off to save the world. It's just who he is.

And me? I'm the greatest good he is ever going to get.

That simple ending to the movie scene above expresses my world on so many levels. Just as Honey ends up laying down her own feelings and plans, families of military men are asked to sacrifice much. We sacrifice having our husbands around for holidays and birthdays. We sacrifice their presence when we give birth to their children. We sacrifice them missing our babies taking their first steps, cutting their first teeth, and starring in the holiday show. Of course, they also tend to miss the other joys of life when their presence would be convenient, such as stomach flus, cars breaking down, and major house repairs.

As difficult as all those things are, sometimes it's our own hearts and minds that are the biggest battlefield. Like wondering if your husband still loves you when you have gone three weeks without a word from him, knowing your marriage was shaky before he left for this deployment to a war zone. Wondering if he found someone else to warm his bed on the other side of the planet. Wondering if he wants to come home to you at all. How do you fight for the man when you can't see him? When you can't control when you will see him? Or even, heaven forbid, if you will see him again. I hope you are not in this hard place, but I have been. It is so hard to see your man run off to sacrifice for this country when you aren't even sure he wants to sacrifice anything for you.

The truth is that the men we married are willing to lay down their lives for their country, and in so doing, for you, their wives. This is the epitome of Christlikeness. As the Bible says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). When your husband goes running off to follow orders, he is laying his life down for this country and all of the people God has bestowed upon it. Including you.

I know that it frequently doesn't feel that way. I often fight the feeling that the only thing he sacrifices *is* me. I often feel left out of the loop in his "HOO-AHH" world, and I resent the time he spends training and fighting for everyone else.

When I look at the lives of my civilian friends, I want to scream, because their marriages all seem so reliable, while I am forced to live in uncertainty and flexibility. To be able to pick up a cell phone and always have my husband answer is surreal to me. To have him home every night for dinner, spending time with me and our children, is like asking for the moon. I often fail to see value in the

supersuit.

But that does not mean the value isn't there. It does not mean you are forgotten. And it does not mean that life would be better without it. If you are ready to consider this, to lay down your feelings and let God work on you and your life with your supersuit spouse, I encourage you to begin praying now. Pray for your heart to be open to the Word and for your ears to hear the truth God has for you.

The burden God has given us in writing this book is to help you find hope and joy in your marriage. We promise that we don't have all the answers, but we have discovered secrets to finding joy in our trials. We have learned to not only love our own men, but to love the calling of those men. And we have learned to love our calling as military wives.

Join us as we share our journey.

IT STARTS WITH YOU

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

—2 Timothy 2:2 (the Apostle Paul to his student Timothy)

FROM CARRIE

Have you ever considered how much of your life is ruled by your own filters and perceptions? For example, if I told you I recently took a trip through Charleston, what comes to mind? Those who live in the northeast may think of West Virginia, while those in the south probably think of South Carolina. Perhaps someone in the Navy recalls the ship bearing the name USS Charleston. A quick search on the Internet revealed a town named Charleston in twenty-two different states, in addition to four other countries! The Charleston that came to your mind depends upon your background and experiences.

We can have similar problems within our marriages. Imagine your husband coming home to laundry all over the family room and asking, “What did you do all day?” You may assume he thinks you lazed about when you know you cared for three sick children, trying to do the laundry as quickly as they were dirtying it. Knowing he doesn’t usually find the house in such a state, the intent of your husband’s question may have been motivated out of love and concern. Acting on a false perception could leave you hurt and angry as you push away the help you desire.

Filters and perceptions color our world. If you believe the national media with their constant bombardment of bad news, how can you possibly hold on to hope that your marriage will last into old age? If you perceive that your husband is more committed to his job than to you, why should you lay your heart open before him? If you are constantly filtering negative emotions onto his every word, why should you trust that he loves you?

This is where we all need truth. We must find absolutes to hang onto so that no matter what we feel, think, or fear, we can continue to love and serve the very person with whom we long to grow old. In our many years of living as military wives, Kathy and I have survived everything life has thrown at us so far. But along the way, each of us anchored ourselves to the realization that Jesus is Truth and God provides Hope.

We aren’t going to argue the legitimacy of Christ or the reality of Him as the only path to salvation. We also will not debate the Bible’s validity. We are simply going to present it that way. If you are skeptical, many good books provide ample evidence for the historical reality of Jesus, the authenticity of His crucifixion, and the certainty of His resurrection. (see appendix)

Many Americans want to cling to God’s loving nature. Even those who never enter a church

building boldly proclaim that God is love. Exodus 34 says, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (verses 6–7). If the story ended there, we’d be good! Heaven’s just on the other side of death.

But one thing about this reasoning always bothered me. If God truly forgives that easily, if God is merely love, then what about the men who shamelessly torture and murder millions? Are they going to be in Heaven too? Is there no ultimate accountability for those who steal, kill and destroy on this earth? Fortunately, Exodus has more to say. Verse seven continues by saying, “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” Obviously, the picture of an all-loving God who lets everyone into Heaven is distorted.

Psalm 99:5 says, “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; He is holy.” The key that most people want to ignore is God’s holiness, and that His holy nature both deserves and requires perfection. The word holy means “to be set apart, separated from sin.” The book of Romans says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). If we have sinned, then God must separate His holy self from us. We cannot live with Him in heaven. Are we doomed?

Because love is such an integral part of God’s nature, He could not help but provide a way for us to reach Him. He sent Jesus. Jesus lived a sinless life and died an excruciating death on a Roman cross, accepting the penalty for our mistakes. While God offers this gift to everyone, He does not make anyone accept it. You see, if I propose to give you my truck, it is yours only if you obtain the title and keys. The gift is there, waiting for your response. I will not pressure you to take the vehicle any more than God will compel you to welcome Jesus’s sacrifice.

1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” When you ask for forgiveness, wanting nothing more than to be forgiven, Psalm 103 assures us that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (verse 12). God truly loves you that much. He wants to save you and give you knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). He longs to spend eternity with you.

You may be thinking, “I’m a Christian. I believe that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead 2,000 years ago. I heard it in mass or Sunday School or Vacation Bible School when I was a kid.”

You may believe in Jesus as Savior, but are you prepared to let Him be Lord of your life? Do you believe His Word is absolute truth? Could you learn to trust in that Word for freedom in your marriage instead of trusting in your own filters, perceptions, and feelings? Much of this book hinges on your response to Jesus and your answers to these questions.

Or you may be thinking, “I don’t want anything to do with a Heavenly Father. My experience with my dad wasn’t so great.” Although Kathy and I had good dads growing up, we know our experience isn’t as commonplace as we’d like it to be. And perhaps more than anyone else, you need to understand how your filters and perceptions are coloring your view of other people.

In our marriages, Kathy and I both faced times when we thought divorce was around the corner. We have feared for our husband’s safety and we’ve contemplated what he was doing on the other side of the world without us. Thoughts of infidelity invaded our minds, frustration with being a single parent has overwhelmed some of our days, and the stress of moving again has dominated sleepless nights. But God holds the answer and Jesus is the key. We take Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 2:2 seriously (written out for you at the top of this chapter), and in the pages ahead we will share more than just some funny stories, moments we failed miserably, and encouragement to stay the course. We

will entrust you with what we have learned, what Christ has taught us.

FROM KATHY

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

—Genesis 2:18

Before reading further in this book, you must understand that there are principles attached to being a wife, a framework to how marriage is supposed to look. Most of us are just trying to survive, particularly since we may be living six months or more of every year away from the man we are supposed to be one with. If you don't understand how Christ wants your marriage to look, then you are going to be miserable trying to make it work outside the realm of how He is calling you to operate. It doesn't help if your husband doesn't love God. It can also cause you grief if you have some ideas of what the Word says, but you know your husband isn't following those guidelines for God's prescription for marriage. However, the circumstances surrounding your situation do not negate the principles for how you are supposed to live and operate within that marriage. Whether or not your husband is living in a godly manner does not determine if you get to choose to live as a godly wife.

Jesus lived a life of sacrifice. And then He died to show us life. We too are asked to sacrifice. Matthew 16:24–27 says,

Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done.

We are called to lay down our lives within our marriage as a sacrifice to God. To lay down our ideas, or perceptions, as Carrie said, of what we may think marriage is supposed to look like. Sacrifice usually involves pain and death.

I am certain some will not want to hear this. You are convinced that, due to your marital circumstances, your life is different. You may have already made presupposed judgments that I couldn't possibly relate to the trials you are facing. Perhaps your husband is anxious to deploy, or he doesn't appreciate the fact that you are working hard within the home. Maybe your husband thinks nothing of cussing or is into porn or has had an affair or two. Or three.

But the reality is that I've been there too. My marriage was once on the rocks. My husband was not walking with God when we got married. He had a foul mouth, refused to go to church, was into porn, and had been involved in extra-marital affairs. As a result of the pressure and trials, I lost complete control and ended up involved in an affair myself.

And I'm here to tell you that if you think your marriage is lost, it isn't. If you think God isn't bigger than your situation, you are wrong. Christ has hope for you and your husband. I submit that you must also have some hope or you wouldn't be reading this book. If you truly felt that all the problems were the fault of your husband, his career choice, or the Chain of Command, you wouldn't get a book to

help you be a better wife.

We will challenge you in this book that the biggest changes in your marriage will not take place within your husband. At least, not at first. The changes have to start in you, in the heart of the woman who loves the man who is often unlovable and who likely doesn't understand the amazing call God has on his life. That is why God gave him a helper. That is why God gave him you! You are important. You are valuable to this man. But you must understand your role and purpose according to God's Word, if you are to fulfill your role and find joy doing it.

If you read Genesis 2:15–25, take note that God made man and then gave him a job. In fact, He gave him the job before He gave him the woman. He had already created all the other living things, both male and female, and He knew the man would need a suitable helper. But God waited.

Imagine Adam looking around at the pairs of animals, only to realize that he was the only one of his kind. He was in the image of God and had fellowship with God, but I believe he came to see his own need for a companion. I believe God allowed him to desire for her in that short span of time he was without her. Adam sacrificed part of himself, perhaps unwillingly and unknowingly at first, so that she might be formed. God could have created her the same way He made Adam, but He chose to make her from the man. She was a part of him from the beginning. She knew from the moment she opened her eyes and took her first breath that she was called *from* the man and *to* the man for the purpose of blessing and helping him.

Do you see yourself called to the purpose of being united with your man, helping him to fulfill the purpose God gave him? This is how God designed marriage. Just as Christ came to lay down His life for you, you are to lay your life down for those who God brings into your world. And if you are married, after your relationship with Christ, you are first and foremost to lay your life down for that man.

Ouch! You may be thinking about how you feel you are always the one to lay down for him and he never lays down for you. But remember, you aren't working on changing him. You are allowing God to shine His light of truth on you. I know this is hard. It was hard for me at first. But God didn't call us to an easy life. He called us to be a living sacrifice for Him (Romans 12:1).

I can hear some of you crying out, wondering about your hopes and dreams. I hear you! I have dreams too. In fact, I was well on my way in a career that I loved when I began learning all of this. There were moments when I thought about walking out on my marriage to follow what I wanted for myself. I got tired of waiting for my husband to lead me and love me.

But please listen: if you want true freedom in your heart and in your marriage, then you must understand that Christ desires more for you and more for your husband than you can fathom. God's desire to bless you and see your marriage prosper will always far exceed your own.

How do you attain that blessing? How do you see the desires of your heart fulfilled? It is simple, really. You must obey the Lord. He has set Himself out to capture your heart and love you like no other. He wants to show you what true love is, so that you might better love the gift He has given you in your husband. In order for Him to do this, you must learn from Him how to love.

The greatest way our Jesus showed us that He loved us was to die for us. And now, He is asking you to die. He knows it is hard. He knows it is painful. He didn't want to do it anymore than you do, but He waits to show you. Jesus did what He did on the cross so that you might be able to walk into the abundant life He promised. Just as salvation is yours for the asking, so is the peace and joy that you are longing for—but it has to be achieved God's way.

The trials you face as a military wife are often unique, compared to what other marriages face. But in all of this, Christ knew you could carry your cross and walk in the way He prepared for you (Luke 14:25–27). God wants you to find freedom; He has a plan. He intimately knows the heart of the one in your life wearing the supersuit. He waits to tell you how to reach out and love that man. He knows how to usher that man into loving you as he was called to do.

But it will start with you. You must let go of worrying about how well your husband serves you, and focus on how well you serve him. This book will continually point you back to the cross and how to exchange your yoke for the one Christ has for you (Matthew 11:28–30). It will challenge you to die to yourself, your desires, your opinions, and your disappointments. But it will also encourage you to know that your heart is the most important thing Christ is after. He wants your heart so much that He died for it. He will ask you to receive His love, and then you can learn to give His love sacrificially to your man.

At some point, you fell in love with the man you married. At the moment you spoke your vows, you decided to lay your life down and embrace oneness with him. You chose to submit to his headship and the life God was calling him to live. In so doing, you sealed your own calling: you are his wife. You are to walk alongside him and whatever God calls him to do. If he is a warrior in the Armed Forces, then you are called to be a warrior bride. It is a hard calling. But it is a high calling.

The big question is: What will you do? Will you hold onto your dreams and plans, resentments and canceled dinners? Or can you get past your filters and perceptions, taking the chance that you might not be seeing things clearly? Will you consider that God might have something better in store for you?

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.

—Romans 12:2

FROM CARRIE

According to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, almost eighty percent of people in the United States in 2010 claimed to be Christian.¹ If that statistic surprises you, Barna Research helps shed light on it. Their 2003 survey probed the minds of those who said they accepted Jesus as Savior and believed they would go to Heaven when they died. Questions were asked to find out how many of this group of Americans held a biblical worldview interpreted as belief in the following:

1. Absolute moral truth exists and is defined by the Bible
2. The Bible is accurate
3. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life
4. God is the Creator of the universe and still rules today
5. Salvation is a free gift from God
6. Satan is real

Out of the 2,033 adults polled, only 9% held fast to the above concepts.²

In popular culture today, everything is said to be relative: people tend to see more ethical and moral grey areas than clearly defined black and white absolutes. The Christian who is determined to follow God should ask if this cultural thinking lines up with the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Either this is true or it isn't. The phrase “all Scripture” doesn't leave any wiggle room. If it's an exaggeration, then everything, including the resurrection and hope of Heaven, must also be called into question. But if the Bible is God's Word, if it is sound truth from the Architect of the universe to His people, then it should govern our entire life.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 states, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” Although most of us struggle to varying degrees with trusting God to direct our lives, I've learned that giving up control is not a negative. If God is responsible for leading me, then He is

responsible for all the details along the path. (Not that this knowledge makes following Him easier all the time.)

Mankind began exalting itself over God in the Garden of Eden. We pride ourselves in thinking that we are wise and powerful, acting as if we know more than the Creator. But we must be careful to follow His Word, else we will bring the negative promises of Scripture down on ourselves. As Isaiah warns, “The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled . . . Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem?” (Isaiah 2:17, 22).

Do you believe God knows everything? Do you trust that He wants only what is best for you? These are tough questions that I tend to wrestle with during those times when my life is interrupted with a problem. But all other issues aside, if God really knows everything and He wants only what is best for me, then why do I fight being obedient?

Moses often comes to mind when I think about this issue. In Exodus 3, Moses meets God in a burning bush. God gives him very simple instructions: go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Many are familiar with Moses’s 101 excuses as to why he was not the right man for the job (Exodus 3:12–4:17). He showed doubt in his importance, disbelief that anyone would believe him, and uncertainty in his abilities given his physical limitations. Yet God persisted and eventually Moses conceded. When Moses trusted and obeyed, God took care of the details.

So often I claim “Jesus is Lord” but then act like Moses, submitting rationalizations as to why God must be wrong. I’ve noticed that sometimes it doesn’t even matter what the size of the job is that God wants me to do. By nature, I am a quiet introvert who hates to talk on the phone. In my younger days, when God would ask me to stop working around the house long enough to call a friend, I would sit and argue with Him. I’d act as if God knew everything about the universe except the one fragment of information that prevented me from participating in His plan. If God would simply understand my natural limitations and insecurities, I thought, then He would agree with me that I was not the right person for the job.

Sometimes I think more like Jonah. God showed up in Jonah’s life, and, just as with Moses, He gave very simple instructions: go to Nineveh and preach (Jonah 1:1–2). After trying to run away and earning three days in the belly of a huge fish for his effort (verse 17), Jonah finally presents himself in Nineveh and delivers God’s message (Jonah 3:3–4). Then, instead of rejoicing at the repentance going on throughout town, Jonah is furious when God shows compassion (chapter 4).

Occasionally when God does not meet my expectations, I throw grand tantrums like Jonah. I act like God doesn’t always have my best interests in mind. Deep in my heart, I conclude that every once in awhile, God ignores me, forgets about me, or simply lets something slip by that ultimately causes me more harm than good. After all, how can God honestly tell me that it is in my best interests to unpack that house in a new town with a toddler and preschooler underfoot while my husband searches for bombs in a danger zone half a world away?

The truth is that God does know our strengths and weaknesses, and He still wants to use us. One of the things I love about the Bible is that it shows us real people, including their shortcomings, scruples, fears, and doubts. Abraham was a liar, but he had the faith that started a nation. Moses was a murderer, but he led the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Rahab was a prostitute, but she protected the Israelite spies. The list just continues throughout the Bible. God molded one unknown imperfect person after another and asked them to enlist into active Kingdom service. When they stepped up to do exactly what God asked of them, He intervened and provided miraculous stories that

we still read today.

For every name we recognize, I imagine a hundred more who never received a single verse. Noah's wife, unnamed in the Bible, stood faithfully by her man for years while he built a monstrous boat in the desert. Imagine the persecution she endured from the town busybodies! Many women remained at Jesus's side during his ministry years simply to provide for His needs, yet the Bible records few of their names. Just think about the sacrifice these women willingly endured, not just serving a group of men for months on end, but leaving their hometown, their family, perhaps everything they grew up knowing and loving. Sounds a lot like a military wife, doesn't it?

The point is not worldly recognition, but perfect obedience. Sometimes others will see what is asked of you and sometimes they will not. Often God's instructions will be inconvenient, require great discipline, or just seem goofy. But if we truly love God, then we must obey. John records Jesus as saying, "Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make Our home with them. Anyone who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent Me" (John 14:23–24).

Notice that Jesus puts no limitations or restrictions on His words. God doesn't provide us a free pass on any area of life. This isn't a Sunday-only verse that applies during church services and special fellowships. If we love God, we will obey His Word; and by obeying His Word, we show that we love God. If you want your life to accomplish extraordinary things and your marriage to fulfill all your girlish dreams, then you must allow Jesus to be both Savior and Lord.

FROM KATHY

Why do you call Me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say?

—*Luke 6:46*

The Greek word for "Lord" used in Luke 6 is *Kurios*. Its Hebrew counterpart, the word most frequently substituted for the holy title YHWH in the Old Testament, is *Adonai*, and was used by the Jews to describe the sovereign God of the universe who had the right to exercise authority over his creation. Both the New Testament word *Kurios* and the Old Testament term *Adonai* embrace the concepts of honor, power, and glory (Revelation 4:11) being intricately tied to the makeup of the Supreme Authority, who had not only the right, but the responsibility, of mastering His creation.

In our modern English, we have the unfortunate disadvantage of not seeing the differences in semantics through the translation of many words in Scripture. For example, sometimes what we see translated as *Lord* is the Greek word *Rhabboni* (from the Aramaic *Rabboni*), which is a title of honor, denoting a master or a teacher. While *Rhabboni* can be used to describe men, and it conveys ideas of competency, wisdom, and greatness, *Kurios* is used only for the supreme, self-sufficient God who possesses all authority and to whom ultimately every knee will bow in submission (Philippians 2:9–11).

Most of us don't understand this concept of lordship, yet it would have been familiar to those Jesus was addressing. The Jewish people were indoctrinated with the concept of Yahweh being the only God to worship and follow. The word *Lord* as a title of honor would have never been confused with the word used for *Jehovah*, the eternal, self-existing God they had followed out of Egyptian slavery to the Promised Land.

It was from this Lord God that they eagerly awaited the promised Messiah. They understood, as Carrie said, that there was no wiggle room in serving more than the one true God. They were reminded again and again throughout their law to serve only the Lord (see Deuteronomy chapters 6–7, 10–11, and 13), and their experiences had proven the veracity of His promises. When they obeyed, blessings followed. When they didn't, they slipped into their own sin-filled destruction. The Jews had no doubt what their jealous Creator thought of sharing His glory with another.

Because they took God's laws so seriously, the concept of Lordship pervaded every area of their lives. Being a Jew wasn't just a religion. It defined who they were culturally, racially, spiritually, and relationally. Lordship flowed out of their submission to and trust of God, and was evident within marriages, families, and friendships. It permeated their history and culminated in Christ's declaration that the most important commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Matthew 22:36–40, Luke 10:25–28).

God seeks to show Himself in all our relationships. Parents, siblings, mentors, disciples, and friends all portray examples of God's love for us and remind us of our roles with our Creator. But ultimately, over time, those relationships all change. As the years pass, we displace obedience to our parents with honor for them. We will change from stewarded caretakers of our children to becoming wise counselors for them, even perhaps eventually becoming dependent upon their care for us.

But marriage most clearly depicts the beauty of the positional authority that God wants with us. Just as Paul outlines in Ephesians 5:21–33, where he compares marriage to how Christ and the church are to operate, the biblical model of marriage reflects the gentleness and kindness of one who rules and leads as well as the trust and submission of one who serves and follows. While the husband is called to lay his life down for his wife and to deal gently with her, the wife is called to submit to her husband, trusting and respecting him, following him as her leader throughout their life together. And it is here that we need to spend some time, discovering more clearly our role as wives.

The Apostle Peter uses the example of Sarah and Abraham, the great Patriarch of the Jewish nation. Peter says,

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord.

—1 Peter 3:3–6

I don't know about you, but I really have a hard time with those verses. Given our modern American culture, I have struggled to understand it on many levels. In modern-day America, women's liberation and personal rights are magnified as the essential key to our personal happiness and success. We are encouraged to pursue anything that will bring us pleasure. Along with trying to satisfy the desires of our flesh, we also are expected to maintain a level of appearance that the world will deem attractive. I have a difficult time not letting the world's standards determine my beauty, but added to that I now have the supreme challenge of trying to have a gentle and quiet spirit. Trust me—I am the furthest thing from gentle or quiet.

With my overwhelming personality, I often think of myself as a bull in a china shop. While I can be the life of the party, I can also easily take over all the festivities, not allowing anyone else to participate in the conversation. Additionally, I'm hard-headed, strong-willed, and very independent. These are not the traits of the ideal biblical wife. Imagine my husband's struggle to lead me—and my strife in being led! But this does not negate what God is trying to convey to me through Peter.

Although our culture interchanges *Lord* and *God* quite readily, Sarah would never have equated Abraham with God. She would have understood the positional authority her husband held as head of the house and master over her life. By acquiescing to Abraham, she followed the role God laid out for her, therefore ultimately submitting to Jehovah Himself. And she did this even when Abraham had less than stellar ideas.

The Bible tells us that Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God and was willing to sacrifice his son. (Genesis 15:1–6, Genesis 22:1–18, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:20–24) He not only knew who the one true God was, he was intimately involved with Him. In person-to-person conversations with the Lord, Abraham spoke of his own limitations. He knew God was his shield who fulfilled promises he couldn't begin to comprehend (Genesis 15).

If Abraham knew his own shortcomings, surely Sarah did too. Yet, she didn't focus on what Abraham couldn't, wouldn't, or didn't do. She focused on what she was supposed to do. Her culture and training induced her to serve her husband without questioning his worthiness of being served. In other words, just because he had weaknesses and may not have always led her perfectly, she knew her role as a wife was to trust him, serve him, and follow him unconditionally.

FROM CARRIE

Perhaps to Americans, one of the more familiar examples of *lordship* is medieval England. After William the Conqueror won control of the country, he had to figure out a way to govern it, particularly since he wasn't popular with the citizens. His solution, feudalism, was to divide the land and give each section to one of his most loyal men. These were the dukes, earls, and barons (a.k.a. the “peers”) who most supported him on the battlefield.

The land was still too big for the peers to control, so they divided up their lands into smaller tracts, awarding each section to their most loyal men, the Norman knights. The knights then became overlords of whatever populace lived in the area. The knights were not gods by any means, but they assumed the role of lord over the people.

The commoners, those at the bottom of this tiered system, could do only what they were told, and to disobey an overlord's command meant punishment. A major problem with feudalism became apparent during the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. Although the populace had many stressors at the time, including an outbreak of the plague and high taxes, one of the key dilemmas was this: the people didn't trust their leadership. Commoners called the men in charge “Lord”, but it was only grudgingly; they didn't mean it in their hearts.

Now let's look back at Sarah. By calling Abraham, “Lord,” she verbally acknowledged Abraham's authority over her. But what about her heart? Was it more than just a title she used to identify him? Let's look at her life:

In Genesis 12:10–20, Abraham deceives Pharaoh into thinking that he and Sarah are nothing more than siblings. In my mind, it makes it worse that this is not some last-ditch effort to save their lives. This is the plan going into Egypt before they encounter the first Egyptian! Scripture indicates that no

only did Sarah comply with Abraham's request, but she did so without saying anything to anyone who would have told Pharaoh that Abraham wasn't telling the whole story.

In Genesis 18:6, Abraham gave Sarah instructions to drop everything she was doing and make bread for surprise visitors. The remaining verses do not tell us what she said or thought, but they give the indication that she did so and wasn't overly bothered by it.

Remember Abraham's dumb move in Genesis 12? Yep, he does it again. In Genesis 20, Abraham deceives the King of Gerar into thinking that he and Sarah are nothing more than siblings. Again, we're not told Sarah's thoughts, but Scripture indicates that Sarah complied without saying anything to the king.

FROM KATHY

The proof that Sarah's devotion to Abraham was deeply imbedded in her character is evidenced by these actions. The proof in our marriages of a surrendered heart must first begin in the evidence of our lives being given over to Christ. Everyone needs Christ as Savior. But few want a Lord over their lives. Fewer still will want to call themselves slaves to a master. But this is exactly the attitude of Sarah to Abraham. It was also the attitude of the early church to Christ. 1 Corinthians 7:22–23 says "For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings."

According to Jesus, once He is Savior, He must become Lord. Matthew 10:39 states, "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for My sake will find it." The act of submitting your life to Christ is one in which you choose to lay down your life, your choices, and your sinful desires in exchange for following Christ as your master. Sometimes this is easier than others; sometimes it's a knockdown, dragout fight. But the reward, Jesus tells us in John 10:10, is abundant life! We must remember that we are submitting to the Creator of the universe, Who intimately knows us and jealously loves us.

Our lives and our marriages will never be what we long for, if we don't surrender them to the God who knows best what He designed them to be. He longs to be Lord of our life, and He won't share this role with anyone or anything else in your life. Learning to walk in obedience before God, as Christ exemplified through His complete surrender to the will of the Father, is the only true way to find the abundant life promised to us. It is the beginning steps to finding fulfillment in who you are and how you are supposed to function in all areas of your life, especially in your marriage.

So the question you must answer is this: Who really has control of your life: you or your Lord?

¹ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," A Project of the Pew Research Center, December 19, 2011, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

² Barna Group, "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," December 1, 2003, accessed May 6, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/131-a-biblical-worldview-has-a-radical-effect-on-a-persons-life>.

KATHY'S STORY

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

—Revelation 12:10–11

The power of our testimony. It is more than we know. In the life that your God calls you to walk is the very power He has given you to overcome the enemy. To overcome the darkness. To overcome the pain. To overcome the loneliness. To shut down the lies that you have already walked through and past into the beautiful light of truth when you embraced the blood of the Lamb.

When I read those verses from Revelation 12, it gives me a whole new perspective on why my life has looked like it has. When Jesus walked out His life, and gave His life, He paved a way for me to be covered from all unrighteousness and to embrace life abundant, which I could never know apart from Him. His blood covers all the sin, pain, and loneliness and allows me to look up from my filth and despair through the blood and see, not with empty promises of rose-colored glasses, but with eyes of truth that suddenly grasp reality unlike I ever perceived. The mess isn't ugly, but beautiful, like when you first catch sight of a newborn babe just from the womb. Covered in blood and mess, but screaming with life and energy and the hope of a future unknown, all before him. This is the blood of the Lamb. Truth. Life. This is our hope.

So I will share my testimony with you. I want to show you how this sweet Jesus covered me with His precious blood, demonstrating to me how to lay down my own life following His example, and where He has met me and how it had the most profound effects on not only me, but also on my marriage. His Word has been the unchangeable compass that has forever directed my path, even when I was unaware of it, and it protected me even in the haziest, darkest places of my walk. My prayer for you is that you find a new longing to press into the perfection of His Word and find His plans for you there. And that you will learn to embrace your own precious testimony as you see it through the eyes of Christ.

I come from a relatively small family, having only one younger brother. But both my parents came from large families, and family was very important in my life growing up. When I was born, I had eleven living grandparents and great-grandparents. I didn't lose the final one until I was thirty-nine years old, and several of them affected my life even into my adulthood. Not many people can testify to that many loving grandparents for so much of their lives. I have dozens of aunts, uncles, and cousins who have been vastly important to me in various seasons of my life, and I am so blessed to have them

all.

My mother was saved while raising my brother and me, but my father was not. My father is saved now, and for that I am eternally grateful. But he did not come to Christ until after I had my third child; when I was a child, he was not a godly man. A good man, who loved my mother, brother, and me, but not a godly man. All I knew at that time was that my daddy and mommy loved each other and loved me. And I am still very grateful that they showed me this powerful truth. My mom always made sure we were in church with friends and family, even if, due to her full-time job as a nurse, she couldn't be there. I'm grateful for her persistence to make sure we were given that foundation. But in an unequal marriage, there were many gray areas in biblical truth presented with two very different belief systems.

My family instilled in me basic manners from a very early age. I learned to respect adults and their authority in all areas of my life. A token biblical model of morals was handed to me from all sides of my family, even the unsaved ones. Most of them had exposure to biblical truth even if they didn't embrace it, and they knew enough to know how to at least look the part of a good moral citizen, even though they weren't actually Christian. My family stressed the outward appearance of actions rather than the motive. This helped instruct me in my path of outward obedience without inward heart change.

I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was nine years old and followed through with water baptism at that time. I sincerely loved Jesus and wanted to be a good girl. I remember realizing then, for the first time, that my dad wasn't saved. I remember grieving for him, and wrestling with the fact he wouldn't go to church with us. I have journal entries from this time of my life, praying that my dad would get saved so he wouldn't go to hell. I began, for the first time, to notice differences in the belief systems of my parents.

Even in my Baptist church, a worldly faith walk was often acceptable. Now that certainly wasn't preached, but it was obviously emulated by the people whose lives I watched. For example, I was told we should always put God first and that the Bible was truth, but then I saw them clearly putting other things—such as jobs, relationships, and possessions—ahead of Christ, and very few read their Bibles or embraced the Word as absolute truth in their lives.

I recall reading my Bible before bed one night when I was twelve. I stumbled onto the passages in 1 Corinthians 12–14 that discuss the many gifts of the Spirit. I got so excited that I ran to my mom to show her. I knew when I read those chapters that I wanted to have all those gifts, which is just what Paul had said . . . to desire the greater gifts. I wanted to move in prophesy and healing. I wanted to lead, and have faith, and speak in tongues. When you are twelve, that all sounds so cool! That still sounds cool at forty-two!

But when I approached my mother excitedly, she was dumbfounded and didn't know what to say to me. She had never considered those gifts for our lives. I don't know if she believed that we, as good Baptists, could even have those gifts. She saw them there plainly in the Word and so wanted to tell me it was truth, but she didn't know how to justify telling me that, since these gifts clearly were not a part of our life of worship and doctrine. She told me she honestly didn't know what to say. She encouraged me to talk to my pastor to gain insight. So I did.

He told me God could choose to give those gifts, since after all He is God, but He simply didn't choose to do that anymore. It was something He did for a season in the early church to help them during their trials and to take the gospel forth.

My question was immediately, “But what about our trials, and aren’t we supposed to still take the gospel forth?” I also questioned him about the fact that the New Testament was written for the church after Christ’s resurrection, and weren’t we still, in the present day, under the same title of *the church* until Christ’s return, meaning that all the Scriptures were applicable to us?

He was rather dumbfounded with me as well. He proceeded to fumble about and tell me I was too young to grasp the full theological relevance of things, and began using large words (which I’m sure he learned in seminary) that shut me right up. He made me feel quite silly for questioning the Word as I did. He commended me for reading my Bible, but said I really shouldn’t hope for those things as he really didn’t think God would choose to operate that way today.

I didn’t know it then, but the Holy Spirit was guiding all of that. God placed in me a great desire to read His Word, and to not just read it, but to study it. But I can also see that the enemy placed some serious webs of deception in my thinking. What I took from this experience was that God’s Word was not true all the time. It was true only when it was relevant to a particular time period or season. It didn’t necessarily apply to my life today.

So, I began to pick and choose from the Scripture what I would apply to my life. For example, I didn’t mind the Scriptures about not making an idol. I wasn’t about to go craft a golden calf, but surely my overt fascination with my clothing and appearance wasn’t idolatry, was it? After all, this was the twentieth century, and no one back in New Testament times had to face the peer pressure and choices I had to face in middle school . . . right?

This shocking incident made me feel quite stupid for questioning someone with greater authority than me about the Word. Up to that point I had always believed, without question, my parents and authorities. My parents had never made me feel silly for asking questions. In fact, just the opposite. But now I began to question whether I could trust the authority figures in my life—or my own heart.

I spent the next several years wrestling within myself about what was right and true. I wanted to believe my parents, pastors, and teachers, but because I often got mixed messages from them, I also began to wonder whom I was supposed to believe. I often caved in my personal conviction because I was ashamed or afraid. But there were times when my pride rose up and I got angry, because I wanted to follow my heart and I either didn’t think others cared or understood. I was a mixture of obedience and rebellion, all in one.

I still read my Bible, but I also often decided to skip the parts that would have illuminated the truth during this season. The result was that through the next few years I walked with one foot in the world and one in the Word. James 4:4–10 and 2 Timothy 4:3–4 talks about this kind of person. My friendship with the world would cause me to be double-minded and my desire to satisfy what my itching ears wanted to hear would keep me far from the truth, long into adulthood.

Through my teen years, I was an oxymoron of tendencies. I was a leader in my church youth group, but I didn’t mind going to parties where drinking and smoking were commonplace among my friends. I actively read my Bible, but also regularly watched MTV and R-rated movies. I was an “A” student and well liked by most adults because I was responsible and well mannered. But in many ways, I had begun functioning in a way that I knew would please them and would ultimately gain me some acceptance or benefit. I behaved in peer groups similarly. By most of the world’s standards, I simply skirted the boundaries of wild living. Thankfully, alcohol and drugs were never real temptations to me. Quite possibly because I had seen the effects of alcoholism on some of my extended family, and because it was out of my reach financially.

I met my husband, Sam, during driver's education class. He told me on our first date that he planned to join the military. He was sixteen years old, and he had a plan. My sixteenth birthday was the next day, and I had a plan for my life as well, which did not include being with someone going into the military. The thought had never occurred to me, so it wasn't in my plan. I teased him a little about having "a girl in every port," and he said he wasn't like that, that he wanted a wife and family to come home to after deployments. I was somewhat impressed that he was already contemplating his wife, because most boys I had met were only interested in the moment. Sam was the first guy I had met who was looking for not only marriage, but a family as well. Those things were in my plan, so I decided to go out with him again.

We went out several times over the next few months, and by that following summer we were inseparable. During my junior year—Sam's senior year—of high school we missed no less than 40 days of school: we skipped them just so we could spend the days together. Miraculously, we both still managed to pass our classes and avoid being caught, until the final nine weeks of school. My mother was the one to realize the truth when she went to the high school one day to question them about why her straight-A, honor-roll daughter hadn't been inducted into the National Honor Society. She had the eye opening experience of learning that I wasn't as honorable as I had led her to believe.

So my parents tried to rein me in. I finished the school year without another absence, and they began to take a more vested interest in how and where I spent my time, but I staunchly refused to bend on my relationship with Sam. My mother especially tried to make me end the relationship, but by this time, Sam and I knew we were going to marry. I began to be openly defiant to my parents, and refused to end the relationship.

At this point, my dad was unsaved, so my parents were still unequally yoked in their marriage. My dad, although disappointed with my deceit, wasn't as against us being together as my mom was, so I became a very good manipulator and would speak to whichever parent I thought would give me the answer I wanted to hear in any given situation. This caused more stress in my home than I can begin to tell you. Stress between myself and my parents, but also, I think, stress in my parent's marriage. I can see now how God used the stress they were going through to stretch them both into new levels of dying to self. My mother learned much about dying to self in her faith walk during those years. My father just had his heart broken and got angry, until eventually he came to see that he needed a Savior to heal his heart. So in all of this season of my walk, although I am not thankful for the ugliness of it, I can clearly see the beauty Christ brought forth from it in my parents. For Sam and me, the beauty was to come, but it would take more mess and more time before we would bend to that dying to self and resurrection power.

Sam graduated school and left for Ft. Benning, Georgia. I went with his mother to see him in the fall when he graduated from basic training, and he gave me my engagement ring. He was able to come home for Christmas after getting his jump wings, and then promptly left for Germany for two years.

My parents were not in support of my engagement. They wanted me to finish college and have a career before finding my husband and settling down to start a family. Education meant a great deal to them both. They were the first ones in each of their families to graduate from high school and go on to get college degrees. They pushed to instill in me, at least at that time, that education was the one factor that would set you apart from everyone else, and it meant security and success for your life. I remember when I came home with the engagement ring, my dad said to me that he didn't mind if I married Sam. He just stressed it was critical that I got my education so, if the marriage failed, I would

be able to take care of myself.

I know now they were so concerned because many of my parents' siblings walked through serious marital issues and divorce. My grandparents all stayed married, and I thank God that legacy passed to my parents, but, sadly, for so many others in our life, marriage was transient, not permanent. My parents feared I would not be able to provide for myself and any future children if I didn't have a degree and a career firmly established. Education and a career were to become pillars in my life: pillars on which I would base much of my worth and value.

Don't misunderstand me. I see education as a God-given blessing, and it should be embraced for what it is meant to be. And certainly, I would never see a career as sinful for anyone. But I made both of these things an unhealthy measure of my worth. Because I was successful academically and had a promising future ahead of me, I held a great deal of pride in those areas, as well as a false notion that a career would solidify my success in life. God would later show me just how different His perspective was about my value and from where I was to draw my worth.

I did go to college while Sam was in Germany, but when he returned for three weeks' leave after being gone almost a year, we eloped. We didn't tell anyone. He wanted to tell the world and take me back to Germany, but disappointing everyone by not finishing school was not something I was willing to do. I believed the lie that school was my measure of personal success, so to let that go was to become a failure. My pride was too great for that. I didn't want to lose Sam, my family, or my own personal success. I wanted to have it all: The American Dream. It was easy for me to cover up the truth at this point, though, since I had been practicing telling lies for years. I convinced Sam to keep the news quiet, and he left to go back to Germany alone while I went to school. (And worked three jobs to pay our phone bill!)

I justified my deceit by convincing myself that I was doing everyone a big favor. After all, I wasn't hurting anyone, was I? After all the pain I'd caused my parents through the lies in high school, I reasoned that they would be better off not knowing. And Sam would be a better man if he had a better woman, which I would be once I got a degree and could earn a good living to help support us. So I fell again into deceit.

I even tried to convince myself that getting married was just a legality to justify what we had already consummated. I wanted it to be legal, because in my heart I knew that being with Sam physically while not married was a sin, and I was eaten up with guilt. So I reasoned within myself that if we just got married, then this heavy weight of sin would lift, and I would be free. But I just exchanged one sin for another. My insecurities and pride all mingled with the many decisions that followed, and soon I was swallowed up with the tangled webs of deception I found myself weaving constantly with my family and friends.

While I was busy with work and school, I also spent time reading my Bible. I had an idea in my head of what I wanted my marriage and life to look like. I wanted a man who loved me more than anything else. I wanted a couple of children. I wanted a successful career. I wanted a great relationship with my extended family. I wanted to raise my kids in church as I had been raised. But unlike with my parents, I wanted my husband to be in church, too. I desired to have God in my marriage. I had felt His tug on my heart for years, and had heard the whispers of the Lord in my mind. After almost a year of being married and having seen Sam only once when I flew to Germany for a week's visit, I remember one day driving to work and praying to God to bless my marriage. I clearly heard the Lord say, "I am Truth. Only that which is founded in truth can I build upon."

My heart sank. I knew we were lying to everyone. Now I knew I couldn't live with that lie anymore. Sam was due back from Germany in a few short months. He had come to the States, passed the Special Forces selection process, and was due to begin the SF (Special Forces) qualification course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, upon his PCS (Permanent Change of Station) from Germany. I would be leaving my parent's home to join him as soon as he returned, and they didn't even know we were married. I had to tell them the truth. This was the most difficult thing I had ever done.

When I told my parents, they were emotionally crushed and angry. As was my brother. Then I had to go and confront my grandparents. Amazingly, although everyone else in my world was furious with me, my grandparents all handled it extremely well. I remember my granddad just hugged me and told me he loved me. My other grandpa and grandma each wrapped their arms around me and began praying for me, my young husband, and our life together. My grandma even smiled through tears and said, "I always did think he was a nice boy. You'll get along just fine, sweetie. He'll be a good man. Just remember to keep loving Jesus."

What love. What forgiveness. What hope and peace that was given to me by those who had lived enough to know life is hard, but tomorrow is a new day full of mercy. They had all made similar mistakes in their own lives. They had created their own messes and made their own mistakes, but they knew life would still go on. They knew God was bigger than this present dark situation I found myself in. And they loved me. It would take time for my parents to forgive me, but God used even this as a time for revealing truth in their lives. I praise our Lord that He wastes nothing in our lives. Especially our mistakes.

Sam came home, and I was eager to begin a new life based on truth with him. I was experiencing a new rush of hope in the Lord and it strengthened me for the things ahead. I had already gone to North Carolina by myself and arranged an apartment and the utilities. Having never even done my own grocery shopping or laundry, now I had left home to join with a man I hadn't spent time with in more than two years. I would need all the guidance and protection God could give me.

Two weeks into our new life together, we found out I was pregnant. We were using birth control when this happened, so it was definitely a surprise. I was terrified. I barely knew the man I was living with, and now we were going to have to get used to the idea of being parents and sharing our life with someone else!

Sam, remarkably, wasn't nearly as scared about us having a baby, which would prove to be true throughout our lives. It seemed with each new child God always rattled my trust, but Sam embraced the idea of being a father. That amazed me, because Sam never had a father in his life, only his mom, who raised six children alone. Sam was the youngest of his family.

Sam had not grown closer to the Lord during our time apart. As a child, Sam had been invited to church by an older gentleman. The old fella would regularly pick up Sam and one of his sisters to take them to church. Sam found a love in that church that he didn't have in his home. His mother ended up joining them in church after some time, and when Sam was nine years old, he received salvation and was baptized in a river, along with his mother and sister, one cold, spring, Sunday morning in West Virginia. For a few short years, before junior high, he attempted to press into the Lord and grow in faith. But, even with the professed faith from his mother, she continued to live a rough lifestyle and several of her life choices ended up causing her and her children to struggle. Sam had very little accountability in his life from about the age of thirteen.

During his time in Germany, he had a roommate who was a professed Satan worshipper. With no

understanding of how the spirit realm operates, Sam was being affected greatly by the influence of darkness that was so near his life. Like the slow creeping of fire across a piece of paper, the enemy began to burn into Sam's thoughts and choices, destroying the good that the Lord had for him. Through the music he listened to, the people he chose to engage with, and even the clothes he wore, a darkness was evident in Sam by the time he returned to the U.S. Where prior to high school graduation he had never cursed, his speech now would have made a sailor blush.

I wanted to find a good Baptist church to attend when we reunited, but Sam wouldn't even discuss it. I eventually guilted him into attending with me on a couple of different Sundays through the course of our first year, but I was easily persuaded into skipping church and spending our Sundays together, as it was our only day to see each other. Sam was busy with his training and school, and I was enrolled in school full-time, plus working at a local restaurant nearly full-time. And so again, I knew I was hearing the Lord's voice, but I chose to disobey by continuing to place Sam as an idol ahead of my God.

I was still up to my old tricks of justifying my sin. I told myself I needed to foster a good marriage by following my husband's lead. We needed to get to know each other all over again, I thought, and quickly, before our son arrived in nine months! Choosing time with Sam seemed like the right course of action if we were to build a strong relationship.

During those months, I was still praying, but I slowly gave up reading my Bible. So, I had little input into my life that resounded with truth. I was struggling to feel loved by Sam. He told me he loved me, and he was affectionate, but when you are trying to fill the God-sized hole in your heart with someone or something other than God, you will always be left feeling hollow. So there was emptiness in the love I felt from Sam, because I was unknowingly expecting Sam to fill the place that was meant for only God.

We experienced other issues as well. Sam struggled with an addiction to pornography that he was able to keep hidden from me, but somewhere in my heart I knew it was there. I confronted him, and we fought several times, but he always denied everything and said I was just insecure and it was my problem, not his. I suspected he was having an affair, but I acknowledged to him that I was growing increasingly more suspicious of everything in our life. I always ended up begging him to forgive me at the end of our fights, because I was mistrusting him even though he had given me no reason to not trust him.

Another problem we had was that I had no idea of the long-term effects that premarital sex would have on a marriage, and on a woman, in particular. We will elaborate on this later in the book, but what I didn't know was that deep in the heart of every woman is a hard-wiring by God with a need to be covered and protected. When a woman is not cherished and valued through purity, and when she doesn't hold that sacred virginity until her marriage bed, she will always wonder if she is valuable enough for the man to want to stick around. After all, she will think: if she was cheaply gained, how valuable could she be?

So, I had self-esteem issues and insecurities permeating throughout my thoughts and emotions.

Plus, I was still walking with idolatry and lingering deception in my life. I was terrified to let Sam see who I wanted to be. I wanted to go to church. I wanted to follow God, but I was so afraid of losing Sam that I began to do as I thought he wanted. I was back to my old tricks of putting out there what I thought others wanted to see in me because I was too afraid to be who I knew I was called to be.

I was also disappointed with how little time we had to be together. I was becoming increasingly aware of the frustrations of being an Army wife. Sam would have to report at a certain time of day, and, since we had only one car, I would have to drive him there. That meant me waking up and heading to base sometimes as early as 4:30 a.m. That was hard, but not nearly as hard as being told to pick him up at 5:00 p.m.—only to arrive and wait until 8:30 p.m. because someone lost something that day in training and no one was allowed to go home until the item was recovered. Even if they knew who had lost it. So I was missing classes, arriving late to work, and losing sleep all because of the Army rigamarole. I could not understand the foolishness of so many people who were supposed to be leaders. Clearly, they had no idea how to run things efficiently!

And so many weeks were still spent apart. The military lifestyle was not conducive to us making plans of any sort. We would plan a weekend trip to head home to see family or to go to the beach, only to be told at the last minute that he couldn't go because he was now on alert and had to stay in town, or he had to go to the field. I was not pleased with any of this. I knew it wasn't Sam's fault, but I still got angry, and as he was the only person standing in front of me, he usually caught the full brunt of my frustration and anger. I tried not to make him feel worse, but occasionally, he actually seemed excited about the trips and training, and then I would get furious with him. How dare he choose to enjoy work over time with me? I began to wonder if he even loved me as much as I loved him. I was quite selfish in this manner, and adjusting to the military lifestyle was not easy to do with so many insecurities and selfish tendencies in my life. Add pregnancy hormones into the mix, and I was a mess.

We were slowly spiraling down together in our personal and collective sins. But in all our failings, good was happening also. I was doing well in school. Sam was too. We were sharing our first pregnancy, and we both grew increasingly excited to see our first child. We really did love each other. Despite all our sins, we were trying to give of our best to one another. The foolishness of youth often affected our decisions, but we were trying to love even in our selfishness. Sam and I were trying in our own strength to offer each other our best. And for a short while, it seemed like it might be enough.

We had our first baby, Jedidiah Gunner (we call him Gunner), but Sam nearly missed the birth. He got home while I was in labor, and only five days later he left for six weeks. He got home and finished up with graduation, got his green beret, and began language school. He was assigned French. That meant we were going to be stationed with 3rd Group, keeping us at Ft. Bragg once he got to his unit. I kept working, taking houses to clean so I could take our son with me in a pack-n-play, and I continued to work on my degree. We were incredibly busy in our own separate goals, along with raising a baby and living on a very meager income. Money was tight, sleep was scarce, and our relationship was in a constant roller coaster of ups and downs. Our son was probably the best thing we shared at that time.

When Gunner was sixteen months old, we bought our first home, in a small town called Parkton. We moved away from Fayetteville and many of the unhealthy relationships we had developed there. Our first week in our new home, Sam actually suggested that we try going to the Baptist church in town. I felt like we were being given a new start.

When we began going to church, I rejoiced. As our son had gotten older, I knew I was supposed to have him in church. I often thought of how my mom had made sure to get my brother and me to church when we were children. But I was such a coward. I wouldn't leave Sam's side in order to do what

was best for our son—what I knew God was calling me to do.

I think with the purchase of the house, Sam also wanted to start fresh on our marriage and life together. He began to look forward to attending church. We made some friends there and joined the couples' Sunday school class, where we met about half a dozen other young couples all our age and in similar life circumstances. Sam and I both were opening up to Christ in a way we never had before.

We decided to try to get pregnant with a second baby. We both agreed we wanted at least one more child, and we didn't want them more than three years apart. We tried for nine months to conceive, with no success. This was surprising to us both, considering we had gotten pregnant with our son while using birth control.

Despite our inability to have a baby, we were much happier in our marriage than we had ever been. We had a beautiful healthy son. I was almost done with school—so a promising career with better income was ahead of us. And we placed God back into our life on Sundays. I was more fulfilled than I had been in years.

My relationship with my parents and family was also nearly restored, due to the birth of our son. My parents were proving to be doting grandparents, and my mother was finally able to stop nagging me about why I wasn't going to church. Also, I stopped being so distrustful of Sam. I still had nagging doubts about him, and us, but he was putting much more effort into loving me.

Yes, life was aligning perfectly in my best plan. I began to live with a confidence I hadn't experienced since high school. I found success in all I set my hands to. Relationships were smooth, and life was good.

I honestly thought that where we were was as good as it could get. My limited brain couldn't conceive of more than we had. We were completely unaware that powerful storms were about to hit us.

I am so very glad that God didn't give me only what I asked for. It says in Romans chapter 2 that God's kindness leads us to repentance. It says later in the same chapter that God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ. What that meant in our life was that God loved us too much to let us sit in the mess we had made and pretend it wasn't there. He didn't want my husband's secret sins to have any hold on his heart. He loved Sam too much for him to have anything less than true freedom. God loved me too much to let me find my worth in my husband's approval of me or my success at school and work. I could never earn my blessing from the Lord by keeping up appearances. My life finally looked good to anyone looking through our window; the outside of our cup was clean. But what about the inside? I was so conditioned to a depraved way of thinking and moving in my life, that truth was something I could catch only glimpses of, and usually in others, not in myself.

The young pastor who began to mentor Sam in that small Baptist church was a shining example of real love. He held the Word of God as his absolute authority on life. I loved what he would say when he would open up the Scriptures. A hunger that had long lain, sleeping and starved, in the recesses of my mind began to awaken within me—I wanted more truth. As I began to tentatively step out and ask God for more of Himself in my life, I had no idea the power and love I was about to lose in my world. For those who seek Him will find Him. And make no mistake, He is seeking us. He had never once, in all those years, let go of me. He had never once forgotten that He had placed in me a hunger for truth in His Word and that He had giftings lined up for me from before the foundation of the earth.

Quite frankly, if at that very moment God had opened a crack into the door of heaven and given me

a glimpse of what lay ahead of me, I believe I may have run screaming for the hills. I don't know that I would have eagerly raised my hand as Isaiah did and said, "Here am I. Pick me!" (Isaiah 6:8). But in my ignorance of faith, I tentatively placed my big toe out of my comfort zone and whispered to God that I thought maybe there was more to life, and I would like to see if that was true. God answered my prayer.

I got pregnant. Two days later I found pornography in our home. Sam was with me when I stumbled upon it. It was as much a shock to him as to me because he thought he had finally gotten rid of all the evidence. I felt like someone had punched me in the gut. I didn't even know how to react. I got up, left the room . . . and vomited. Sam didn't even try to follow me. The shame at having been caught was more than he could bear. He had tried to hide his addiction and put it behind him.

I was exposed to pornography at a very young age in different situations. In many ways, the safety of growing up in a small town and being near all our family lured my parents into a false sense of safety for us. Or maybe neither of them were in a place to know that Satan was really out to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), but either way, I was exposed to far more as a child than I should have been. I didn't just see magazines. Hard-core porn videos had crossed my path on more than one occasion before the age of ten. I never discussed this with my parents, because dark things have a natural bent to stay in darkness. The enemy likes it that way: keep things hidden.

In many ways, this exposure to sex as being something dirty and something that needed to stay a secret in dark places helped to pave the path for Sam's and my future sins together. But I had always hated porn. I felt dirty enough in my own heart without bringing smut into our life. Sam had never even suggested we have porn in our life together. He, too, knew it's dark hold, and he had lived alone in that secret place of bondage a very long time.

When I saw the evidence of what I had suspected for three years, I was angry. I felt betrayed on so many levels. What else could he have done to deceive me? Were there other women? My mind whirled with the gravity of it all. There I was, pregnant, and suddenly having to question everything I had placed my faith in. My self-esteem went through the floor. After all, if he needed to look at pornography, I reasoned, I must not have been enough to satisfy him. And then I remembered all the times he had told me I was crazy and insecure and the one with the problem. I wanted to hate him. He had purposefully made me feel like a jerk, and I had begged *him* to forgive *me* for doubting his faithfulness.

My house of cards was crashing hard and fast. We barely spoke for two days, and I cringed when he got near me. He tried to give me space, and he ended up begging me to forgive him, as he was reduced to tears for the first time in our five-year relationship. I was so broken and hurt. I wanted to believe him, but I was so wounded and raw. I told him I would try to forgive him and we would try to move forward.

The very next day he was told he was being emergency-deployed to Haiti for an invasion. It was September 1994, and Jimmy Carter was sent as an ambassador to run interference in the escalating situation, but thousands of troops were sent with a 48-hour notice to invade. Sam was to go with his team in Third Group and would be one of the first to go in on choppers for a ground assault.

I was terrified. For the first time in our marriage, I was suddenly faced with the possibility that Sam might die. He had never been sent to Iraq during Desert Storm in 1990–1991; he had simply been on alert status. But now he was actually going to go fight. I was overwhelmed with the thought of losing Sam. I was pregnant. I had a two-year-old son. My heart was still raw from the fresh betrayal.

and yet it still belonged to this man. In fact, more of it belonged to him than my jealous God wanted to allow. For this reason, I believe God allowed my whole world to topple. He allowed me to lose my grip on all I had held onto for so many years. He wanted to show me a better way. Himself.

God wanted me to hold onto and trust in Him. To allow *Him* to minister to my broken heart, not Sam. He wanted me to know my worth. He wanted Sam to know freedom. He wanted both of us to see ourselves as He saw us. To see ourselves beyond our messed up thinking and beyond where we were right at that moment, but what we *could* be if we would surrender ourselves to Him. But we had to let go of ourselves and each other in order to do that. God helped us, by causing us to face the very real possibility of living life without each other.

Sam left. Two weeks later I had a miscarriage. I plummeted even further into a dark abyss of pain and fear. One of my two reasons for holding onto the marriage was now gone. I wasn't sure I had the strength within me to go forward. I wanted so much more out of life for Gunner. I had always sworn to myself that I wouldn't divorce, as I had seen the pain and suffering divorce had caused to so many in my family. I wanted more. I had believed for more. But I was out of resources; I was out of strength.

All my pillars of emotional support were gone. I didn't have Sam. I didn't believe in myself. I had just lost a child. And I began to believe the whispers of the enemy that God had taken that baby because I was an awful mother, and it was better for that baby to not grow up through a divorce because that was where I was headed. I was utterly alone. I couldn't even share the loss of our child with Sam. I wasn't sure I would ever share anything with Sam again. I was sinking so quickly into darkness.

Sam was able to call me for a few seconds from Cuba about 10 days following the miscarriage. The conversation went as follows:

“Hey Kath, I love you. How are you feeling? Do you have morning sickness?”

“There is no baby. I lost it. There probably isn't even a marriage at this point. I don't know what to say to you.”

Silence.

“I'm sorry. I don't know what to say either. I love you.”

“I love you too. I'm not sure that will be enough anymore.”

He proceeded to tell me they were leaving Cuba and heading into Haiti within the next couple of days. The evening news had just indicated that Carter had managed to negotiate some sort of treaty and so we would be occupying Haiti instead of invading. Everyone expected there to be some insurgents, though, so we would have to gain control of the rebellion upon our initial entry. Sam was still going in first.

I was scared. And for the first time in our life together, Sam could not pull me out of the despair I was sinking into. No promise he could say was going to help me. No hope for a future together was going to mend the brokenness of my shattered heart. And Sam knew it too. So for the first time in Sam's life, he faced the realization that he might be losing me. He too was lost and broken. All that we had built our hope on and gained our strength from was now collapsed and broken.

Sam and I had very little contact over the next several months. Sam's team went into Haiti fully armed. Thankfully, there were no major threats to their arrival. But there were also no phones where he stayed in Haiti after occupation, so over the next five months I got only about five radio/phone calls. He was able to send me a few letters, through people heading back to the States with the supply

planes. I tried to write to him and send him packages sporadically with the resupply planes when we were allowed.

For you younger folks reading this, you probably don't remember a world without Internet and cell phones. But this was before any of those glorious modern conveniences. We had to rely on letters and radio communications. Since I was not a ham operator, we were dependent on those who were. Sam would radio out of Haiti and find someone in the U.S. listening on the same frequency as him. When he found someone willing to make a call for him, they would call me on the telephone and hook their radio up to it so I could communicate through this mediator. I had to use the same words the radio operators used, so they would know when to hand the call over to Sam on his end, for him to speak. I had to start everything I said with *Roger that* and end everything I said with *Over*, knowing that a stranger was listening to every word we shared.

When your marriage is in such a desperate place as ours was and there is so very much that needs to be said, this is not the most helpful means of communication. The calls were usually very brief, with little information exchanged, and even less emotion and affection due to the impersonal disjointedness of the whole thing. It made our lives seem more separate and lonely than ever.

I was still going to school full time, when I bothered to go to classes. Gunner was two-years old and deserved so much better than I gave him at that time. I trained the child to work the VCR and get his own pop-tarts to eat so I could sleep half the day on the couch. I would go days without showering and rarely ate. I honestly contemplated suicide for a brief time, but because I couldn't imagine how that would affect my son's future, I refused to linger there in my thoughts. As selfish as I was, I praise God He still showed His love for me, His child, by reminding me of my love for my own child. And so I pressed on in darkness.

I didn't want anyone to know what I was going through. Keeping up appearances was *still* hanging in my twisted thoughts. I know my parents were worried because I had just suffered a miscarriage and my husband was away, but they had no idea the state of my marriage, and I wasn't about to let them see what a lousy mother I was turning out to be. I had a new acquaintance in my life at the time whose husband was in Haiti with Sam, and her friendship would prove to be one of the greatest gifts God has ever brought me. But she too was kept at arms length from my heart struggles.

I would occasionally drag myself to school, because it was one of the last fragile pillars I had built my hopes and worth on that had yet to topple. I unknowingly allowed myself to walk right into the hands of the enemy of my soul, who was so eager to devour me completely in my now weakened mental, emotional, and spiritual state. Two things helped me stumble into the pit I was to fall into next.

The first was that Sam had taken very little interest in my education up to this point. He valued it very little, and even suggested that I might not be able to complete my degree due to our financial stresses. He wanted me to quit school and go to work more to alleviate the immediate financial pressures we were under. But I had convinced him that if I stayed in school I had a plan to make much more money with my career and it would be worth it in the end. He agreed, but other than the financial gain it would ultimately bring us, he had no real interest in the things I was learning.

I think he was just too busy with his career. But Sam's lack of interest in my goals left me feeling as if he didn't care about me. Remember, so much of my worth was falsely tied to my educational success. I felt that me being the one left to pay the bills, clean the house, raise our child, and face the stresses of our home—all alone—were all that Sam was entitled to as my show of support for his

career. By comparison, he offered me little to no support with my goals. In my young, foolish mind, I felt like I was being short-changed by him. My own apparent lack of interest and support of his job at this point didn't affect my thinking or cause me to realize my own selfishness.

The second thing that helped me open the door to the enemy of my life in a profound way was that I had an immense amount of pride and arrogance; this was about to usher in a great fall. I reasoned in my foolish heart that Sam couldn't truly love me, since he had fallen into sin with pornography and deception. I was convinced at this point that Sam had been involved in at least one affair, even though he denied it; I didn't trust him at all. I had placed Sam on such a pedestal of idolatry in my heart until then, that I believed I could never cheat on him and betray him as he had done to me. I even told him this: I would never tell someone I loved them and then treat them that way. He didn't love me as much as I loved him, I said. I reasoned that I was a better person than he was. In my foolish arrogance, I was about to learn a very valuable lesson. Never say never.

During a Shakespeare class one day (I bothered to show up, in sweat pants and with unwashed hair in a ponytail), I answered some questions brought up in class discussion. When class was over, I was approached by a guy whom I shared several classes with. He too was an English Literature major. He was very kind to me and said that he always enjoyed my comments. He thought my insights were engaging, and said he always looked forward to the stimulating discussion I brought to the class.

The door was opened. My rock-bottom self-esteem had its first encouragement in months; someone was finding worth in the only thing of value I felt I had left in my life. This man's compliments began to stroke my ego and make me hungry for more of the same to satisfy my starved, lonely heart. He saw me as smart. He liked what I had to say. He was *listening* to what I had to say. Nothing is more attractive to someone who feels worthless than a person who tells them they have worth. Even if they are lying. And I was so good at believing the lies of the enemy, I thought the only thing of value I had left was my success in academics. It was easy to believe and embrace that this person saw my value in that as well.

My already dark journey was now on a slippery slope. The more I shared with this man, the more I rationalized that he was good for me. I felt like he was bringing me out of my emotional pit. He was encouraging me to move forward in my school and career. He told me what a great mom I was to be caring alone for my son. He was always complimenting my abilities to handle everything so well. The enemy was using every word he spoke to continue to stroke my fragile ego.

I was torn in my spirit unlike any other time in my life. My best description of myself during this brief season is that I was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Falling into this relationship the enemy had laid out to ensnare me, sinking quickly into a dark ocean of sin, I was also walking in a new friendship with the military wife whom God had laid out for me as a lifeline.

This new friend was a Christian. She began joining me in our small church, and she forced accountability in my life, by persuading me to continue to attend church, when on my own I would have fallen away. She also held the unique position of having her husband posted with Sam. This forced me to keep up appearances with her so my marriage would not seem to be in shambles, and to hide the fact that I was becoming an adulterous wife. I genuinely liked this woman, and it caused me great grief to, once again, be continually lying to someone I cared about. It seemed I was born to lie to everyone in my world. I was soon to discover that I had become so adept at the skill that the one I had lied to the most was me.

My new Christian friend and I had gotten in the habit of hanging out every Saturday night. The

holidays were approaching and we were getting Christmas packages ready for our husbands. In front of her, I was playing the role of being such a good wife. I managed to get my house picked up on her visits and had my son bathed and cared for those days, too. I was quite convincing due to my years of practice. But the thing I never expected was her genuine faith.

I had never met anyone like this woman. She was honest in her true love for Jesus. She didn't just want to talk about Him on Sunday. She wanted to talk about Him all the time. She started bringing her Bible to my house on Saturday evenings, and we began to look to the Word to study the different things we would talk about. The hunger I had always had regarding God's Word was aroused, and I found myself reading my Bible between our visits so I would be able to discuss with her more readily, and because I had a newfound yearning for truth.

The more I read my Bible, the more I longed for the promises within it. I knew I was a mess. I knew I was wrong. I knew He was the answer. I knew He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and I wanted to follow. But I had no idea how to do that. I only knew going to church. I only knew trying to be good and look good. And I had proven, most soundly, that I couldn't do either.

One night, after realizing the treachery of my own heart, I was holding empty hands to heaven, crying out in total desperation for Jesus to show up and fix me. Not just fix the situation I was in, but fix *me*. I had fallen into the same condemning sin as my husband, and I felt powerless to affect any change in my world. For the first time in my life, I was finally broken enough to see that in His great mercy, my God was the only one who could lead me. I begged Him to show Himself to me.

The next day, my girlfriend and I attended a Christmas church program. After the program, I drove her home, and we sat talking in her driveway for a few minutes. I dropped my guard for the first time ever with her and admitted to struggling with my own faith and belief that God was the only Way, Truth, and Life, because I had so little proof in my life. She immediately said that she had been waiting for me to admit that. She pulled out a list of Scriptures from her Bible that she had written down weeks before and had been carrying around, waiting for God's timing to give to me. She then proceeded to tell me I needed the power of God's hand in my life and I needed to be baptized in the Spirit.

I didn't know what she was talking about, and said immediately that I had been baptized at the age of nine. She said that wasn't the same thing. My heart started pounding and I whispered, "Are you talking about getting gifts, like speaking in tongues?"

This was almost sacrilege, after having been raised a good Baptist. But deep in my heart, I felt she was speaking a truth to me which had been buried under a lifetime of lies, and I yearned to believe her and grab hold of what she was saying. I had just challenged God the night before to show up, and now I felt lightheaded, as if I might pass out. The power of the Holy Spirit was filling me and the car and God was leading me, like never before, into truth. He was taking me back to the very root of the lies that had sidetracked me so many years before regarding His Word.

I took those Scriptures and read them. And I believed them. In fact, I believed the Bible was true from Genesis to Revelation. My friend came the next evening and asked me if I was ready to surrender everything to God and make him Lord of my life. Was I ready to receive all He had planned and the many gifts He had for me?

Shaking and terrified, but with an anticipation for a new life unlike anything I had ever experienced, I let her pray over me, and I was overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit. I was truly "slain." After she left, I stayed up most of the night devouring the Scriptures; I felt as if God Himself

was speaking them to me. There was no picking and choosing. I knew it was truth. And I knew it was the only way I could ever walk if I wanted life. And I wanted life. Jesus met me there, and I understood for the first time that the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). And in Him was life, and that life was the light of men (John 1:4).

I went to my final exams the following Monday and immediately broke off the relationship with the other man. In fact, I went so far as to tell him that he needed Jesus, and he needed to go straight home and work on his marriage. Then I turned and left.

My heart was free and full. My life was beautiful. My God had picked me up in my bloody mess and loved me right there.

I prayed for Sam. I prayed for my marriage. But I wasn't worried about either. I was so filled with new faith and hope in Christ that I knew God would find a way to fix it—anyway, I had no idea how to do it! Recognizing my own inability to control my life became my liberty. I truly turned into an overnight Jesus freak.

Two weeks later, I took Gunner and we went to West Virginia to spend Christmas with our family, since Sam was still deployed. Sam and I had not had any contact during this time. While I was in West Virginia, someone broke into our home in North Carolina and robbed us of many of our things, but also did a lot of damage to our house. I contacted Red Cross just to get a message to Sam about what had happened. I had no other way to notify him.

Although I was nervous about the break-in, I was still on a honeymoon high with the Lord and was confident, even in this new mess in our life, that God would work it out for our good. And He did. Within a week of hearing about the break-in, Sam was allowed to come home. This was more than a month ahead of his team, and they didn't ask him to rejoin them there. So when he got back, he had nearly a month to just be at home with Gunner and me.

Want to hear the most amazing part? While I was being slain in the Spirit in December, Sam was on a mountain in Haiti crying out to God too! He was sure that he had lost me and Gunner, and he was crying out to God in desperation, just like I was. And our great, merciful, and mighty God met Sam on that mountain. He too was slain in the Spirit. We have never been able to confirm it was the exact same night, but God was definitely breaking down the walls of deception in both of our hearts so He could become Lord in both of our lives at the same time. Sam feared our marriage was over, but he knew God could fix it, because he knew he couldn't. Sam and I both were freshly committed to our marriage and each other, without either of us knowing *anything* about what had happened to the other.

When Sam came home, there was a lot of confession which had to take place on both our parts. Besides the pornography, he had been in two adulterous relationships. But I had to confess my own sin to him in this area as well. This was fairly easily confessed in the beginning, but the next couple of years would prove to be difficult for us both, but especially me, in overcoming trust issues between us.

God was good during all this time, but it was only after a couple of years of ups and downs, and some relapses in our old patterns of sin, that we finally agreed to get some counseling; through this we made significant headway in our healing. Lies we have believed for a long time can be easily fitted back into our pattern of worldly thinking, but, as followers of Jesus, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). The more Sam and I pressed into the Word, the more the lies we had believed in our lives were replaced by truth.

We got pregnant with our daughter, Hannah Grace, within two months of Sam's return from Haiti.

After Hannah was born, God showed me two things to comfort my heart about the miscarriage of the earlier baby. First, that if we had carried that child, we wouldn't have Hannah, as I would have only been about seven months pregnant with the other child when I conceived our precious Hannah. And we can't imagine our lives without her.

But second, and even more profound, the Lord impressed upon me that of all my children, the lost child was the only one who had already completely fulfilled their purpose before the Lord and had heard, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" This is all that I could ultimately pray for all of my children. So I am doubly blessed by the grace of God in this knowledge. That precious little one did much to help bring his mama to the great mercy of a mighty God. I thank God for the truth that He does "work all things together for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

About two months into my pregnancy with Hannah, I completed my student teaching and earned my degree. I graduated with honors and was eager to begin my career, which I unknowingly still hung a lot of my value on. It would take God asking me two years later to give that up, for me to realize the lie and replace it with the truth that I am valuable simply because God says I am.

My mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer when Hannah was born. So I moved back to West Virginia with Gunner, then age three, and Hannah, two weeks, and began a nine-month stretch of living between my parents' and my sister-in-law's homes, helping to care for Sam's mom. She passed into heaven after losing the battle to that wretched disease. And as hard as it was, I wouldn't trade a moment of that season. I watched her strengthen in her faith, as did I, while her body weakened. She passed from this life with a peace and a surrender that was sweet to behold after many years of seeing her fight her Lord. It was a privilege to witness that blessing.

On many levels, Sam's family grew closer and stronger during this time as well, where before, all of his siblings had been very disconnected. It was another blessing from our Lord in our time of sorrow. The unity and fellowship with his siblings has continued as an ongoing blessing for the past eighteen years.

The very week I returned to North Carolina, I began my first teaching job. Gunner started preschool at the Christian school where I taught junior high English, and Hannah went to a sitter daily. She was an awesome babysitter and actually became a dear lifelong friend. She was one of the first shining examples in whom I saw the joy of being a stay-at-home mom and wife, and this would help me later.

I am very grateful for that year, on many levels. God taught me much about grace and mercy in teaching. But the personal gain I received from teaching was not worth the loss I felt that my childer suffered. When I finished the school year, I was unexpectedly pregnant with another baby. That was not our timing, or at least not my timing. But God still had things He wanted to teach me about trust.

While pregnant with our third child, Sam deployed for several months. One of the routine maternity tests, the AFP (Alpha-fetoprotein), came back positive for Down's Syndrome. I was quite startled upon hearing the news, but I pressed into Jesus immediately. I didn't want to pray for the child *not* to have Down's, because if that was what God willed for us then I wanted to embrace that call and that child. But no parent *wants* to have their children struggle with health or mental issues of any sort, so obviously I was conflicted with this knowledge.

My dear friend who had helped lead me into truth earlier was still my greatest confidant, after my husband, and she stood by my side again while I faced this great trial. She went with me to the doctor

for additional tests to confirm or deny the validity of the first test results.

To my shock and horror, a doctor at the military hospital counseled me, prior to receiving any further testing, that it was to my advantage to terminate this pregnancy. I was appalled. I knew, no matter what, that this baby was sent by God and we would embrace whoever she was! I insisted they run the tests, but also affirmed that no matter the results, we would not entertain such an idea. The test results came back perfectly normal and our healthy baby girl, McKayla Faith, was born five months later. The enemy would not have our child or my trust!

During that same pregnancy and deployment, both Gunner and Hannah contracted chicken pox. I had to miss weeks of work in order to care for them, and I still ended up working some days when they were not feeling well. It was an incredibly hard deployment, with me both working full time and pregnant, the stress involved with the health of the unborn baby, caring for our two little ones (four years and eighteen months), and trying to run our home with Sam gone.

By the school year's end, Hannah, then nineteen months, was a disciplinary handful because of her lack of consistent training by me. Between the time in West Virginia and then my commitment to a full-time job, she had fallen lower on my priority list than I should have allowed.

Don't misunderstand: I loved her very much. But I knew in my heart she deserved more of me. God wanted me to be unselfish and put my kids before myself. He had a totally different plan than I had for me, and I had a hard time stepping into it. I had to wrestle through many of my worldly precepts: that my worth was caught up in my career success, or that by offering more financially to my family I was offering them the better part of me.

I needed more transformation with the renewing of my mind. I knew motherhood was valuable, and I knew my kids were valuable, but being a stay-at-home mom seemed like such a waste of my education, on many levels. And the financial hardships we would willingly put ourselves into by me coming home would prove extremely difficult. We had quickly adjusted to our new level of income and had foolishly incurred debt beyond our means with the anticipation of years of money to come. Oh, how God would change my perspective!

First of all, we did struggle for nearly two years due to our foolish financial decisions during the one year I taught. But God, in His mercy, always managed to give us what we needed. Not always what we wanted, but every *need* was met during that humbling time. We learned to trust God with the whole tithe and God blessed us in ways that were astounding to Sam and me. God showed me a level of creativity I didn't know possible in the area of grocery shopping and budgeting. He began to speak directly to me about being frugal in ways I had never considered. The challenges of making ends meet was a monthly issue, and one in which God stretched both my faith and my respect for myself (in my newly discovered talent for being a successful mother and homemaker).

It was also during this time that God spoke to me about homeschooling and began whispering to Sam and me both about trusting Him with the size of our family. Sam had no trouble with this. I, on the other hand, was quite nervous about surrendering control of my womb and the number of children we might birth into God's hands. That might sound silly to some of you, but you must remember, we already had three children, and I came from a family of only two children. We were already a big family in my book. But, at Sam's insistence, we opted to not use birth control after I weaned McKayla around her first birthday. Within a month we were pregnant with baby number four.

When Cora Abigail was born, Gunner had just turned seven, Hannah was three, and McKayla was almost two years old. I began homeschooling for my second year, and Sam was gone roughly six

months that year.

Our marriage was now much better, but I was finding myself becoming more and more discontent on many levels. Part of it was the process God had me in during that time with finding my worth in being at home. That was a huge process for me, and it took me several years to fully take hold of the weight of what God was blessing me with by bringing me home to work. Also, surrendering the size of our family was throwing me for some nasty curves at times, too. Having four small children and being asked to step into homeschooling was a lot, since—between constant pregnancies and nursing—I had been running on very little sleep for about three and a half years straight.

I had a hard time finding joy in being weary and alone so much. I loved my babies and I loved Sam, but I didn't love me or my life a whole lot. I was walking in obedience to what I heard the Lord telling me, but I was not very cheerful. I struggled in that spot for several years. I began blaming Sam and his Christian walk, or lapses in his walk, for my struggles. I also blamed him for my discontent because he was never home to help me. Even when he wasn't deployed, the military life of an SF unit meant that he was never home frequently or consistently.

Sam had shifted from Third Group into another Special Operations group during my pregnancy with Hannah a couple of years prior. And although he had gone to that unit as a support guy, he was transitioning and getting ready to go to their selection so he could serve on a team. He had been exceptionally busy, traveling on several shorter deployments (two month stretches at a time) and with a lot of training both in and out of the States.

I had grown increasingly more agitated with Sam about his career. He was quite successful in his career and so was traveling all the time. He often worked with women, and that caused me no end of frustration and fear, as I would often slip into my old insecurities. It worried me more with each new pregnancy and the way my body was changing shape constantly. I am one of the only people I know who has spent her entire adult life adding fifty pounds one year, only to work like a fiend to lose that same fifty pounds all over again the next year. The cycle has been perpetual for me for nearly twenty years, through nine children!

With the pregnancy of our fifth baby in 2001, I continued wrestling with the Lord about our family size. By the pregnancy's end, though, I had finally totally surrendered that fight to God. I would love to tell you that I graciously surrendered, but I am so stubborn that God had to wrestle with me for nearly three years, almost like He had to wrestle with Jacob (see Genesis 32:22–32). I felt like Jacob, fighting and demanding a blessing all at once. God was trying to bless me all along, but because it didn't look like I wanted it to look, I refused to accept it.

When I was holding our precious son, Josiah Gabriel, I couldn't remember why I had tried to tell God I didn't want this. If God would entrust us to raise one of his precious children, who was I to turn away that amazing blessing?

Also during 2001, my fight with God and Sam about his career reached a climactic point and in many ways God had to wrestle me again into surrender mode. When Tuesday, September 11, 2001, happened, my world, along with every other military wife's world, was forever changed.

I had given Sam an ultimatum just two days before. He would either choose me and his children, or he would choose his job in the military. I was convinced that my unhappiness stemmed from his lack of leading me and the children. I was certain that God had not intended for us to have all these kids only for them to be raised by only one parent. That could not be God's best plan for a family, I was certain. Sam was simply not listening to God like I was. He needed to make a drastic change in

order to support us and love us as a godly man should.

One of the things I remember laying down in my ultimatum was that Sam could request a transfer from his unit and probably get anything he requested, due to his good status and reputation there. I suggested he get a job pushing a pencil at the Pentagon until his enlistment was up. Two days later the Pentagon blew up . . . along with all of my arguments.

Within a few weeks of the attacks, Sam was with the very first troops to go in for a ground and air attack in Afghanistan. I was once again terrified. I was pregnant with our fifth child. I was back to where my heart was in Haiti. God had a new level of idolatry to show me in my life. Only this time it wasn't Sam. It was me. It was me wanting control of my life. I was so afraid I would lose Sam that I remember crying out and asking God, "What will I *do* if You take him from me?"

God's response was simple, "What *will* you do if I take him from you?"

No! No! No! That was not the response I wanted! I wanted God to whisper to me that He loved me beyond measure, and that He had a great plan, and that I would not be alone to raise my children. I wanted to be in control of my life. I wanted to be in control of my husband's life. I wanted my husband with me, and I wasn't going to be satisfied until I had him my way.

That was the truth God showed me: I did not trust my God. I loved God. I was obedient to God. But I didn't trust Him. I was forever trying to tell God what my life should look like, rather than ask Him what my life should look like and embracing the peace that comes in that place of surrender.

By proxy, my poor Sam had a wife who was forever telling him what his life should look like, instead of having a wife who would ask her headship what she could do to serve him and help him in his life's work and calling. My call was to be Sam's helpmeet. But that meant surrendering my life to a man who was rarely there and who might not even notice or appreciate what I was offering to sacrifice!

But my God noticed and appreciated it. And once I began to be willing to die to my own fear, my selfish expectations, and my agendas, God amazed me by having my husband be more attentive, more appreciative, and more tender than ever before. But first I had to die to *me*. I had to die to my own dreams and allow God to give me *His* dreams. He would give me the desires of my heart . . . after I allowed Him to take my selfishness and lack of trust—in exchange for the desires He would bestow upon me in His infinite wisdom for my life (see Psalm 37:4).

So in the end, I did receive all the things I wanted. God did whisper to me that He loved me beyond measure. He did have a great plan. He would never leave me alone to raise my children, for He would always be there, whether Sam was or not. Mercifully, it has meant sharing life with my precious man. But it has had to be God's plan. I must trust Him regardless of what it looks like. Trust has been the best plan for me, for Sam, and for our kids.

In the twelve years since that time, we have had four more amazing children and survived more than a dozen deployments, adding up to Sam being absent for at least six of those twelve years. And I, my children, and my marriage are more beautiful for it. God has done more through the amazing giftings in my husband and through his career than I could ever know, this side of heaven.

The prince of darkness has been overthrown on the physical as well as the spiritual battlefield, because Sam was willing to fight the fight few others would go to war for. Many of our children have become and are becoming amazing adults who reflect their trust for God in their lives, despite the circumstances they are in. They value family and each moment God blesses us with as a true gift to be celebrated. They understand much of this due to only having shared precious, often limited, seasons

with their dad. And although there is so much more I could share with you about my life, family, church, and ministries, it is enough to say that I am a blessed woman who has more joy than I can contain. My God is great. His strength is great.

We are standing now on the threshold of retirement. Our oldest two children are in college and our youngest is potty training. I am currently teaching six different grade levels in our homeschool. Sam and I help lead a vital military ministry at our church, and we both stand in awe of how beautiful our life is. Neither of us is exactly sure what God holds for us in our future, but we are “confident in this, that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

This is where we begin anew and, like a newborn baby, become completely dependent on the God who holds us in His hands. We surrender because we can't do anything for ourselves or fix our messy lives any more than the newborn babe can clean itself at birth. And as you allow your God to bathe you, dress you in righteousness, and place a crown of beauty upon your precious brow, please know, dear sister, that your life and your testimony will become the very thing which will draw others into this God of life and love. He means for you to not only draw others with your life, but for you to draw strength through that testimony every time you share it.

You will overcome through the work of your Jesus, but make no mistake: the verse also says there is power in your testimony. Every time you share what Jesus has done for you, you overcome the accuser who would continue to whisper that you aren't clean or worthy. He is a liar.

You are clean. Jesus's blood is more than adequate, and Satan knows it. He is already defeated. He is already hurled down. Down to where? To our doorstep. We must learn to recognize his lies and learn to overcome them by remembering who Jesus is and what He accomplished. Then look at what Jesus did in you and what you have accomplished through Him!

And if you are still in unbearable pain and don't feel like you have accomplished much, dear sister, hold onto truth. Hold onto His Word. You are born again. You are a precious fresh creature who was worthy of our Lord paying the ultimate price. You are so valuable. Your life is one that God wants to use. He wants to make you an overcomer.

Are you willing to believe that Jesus is enough? Are you willing to share with the world that you believe it? Are you willing to surrender whatever He is asking of you today? In your heart, in your marriage, in your children? Then you are an overcomer!

And if you are frightened, then be encouraged that if God can take the mess of my life, and the mess of Carrie's life, and use us for Kingdom work, then sweet sister, He can use you. Your testimony is powerful. And the messier it is, the more glory it will bring God! Don't fear the mess. Embrace the blood! And overcome.

*Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, and to take him at his word;
Just to rest upon His promise, and to know, “Thus saith the Lord.”
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!*

—written by Louisa M.R. Stead in 1882

CARRIE'S STORY

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

—Ephesians 3:20–21

Ordinary. If I had to pick one word that summarized myself, that would be it. I've always thought of myself as average. I'm not athletic, graceful, or coordinated. I'm always confident that someone in the room is better at what I'm doing, and my deficiencies are at the forefront of my thoughts, even in skills in which I've proven myself very capable. Deep down, I just believe that I am nothing special.

My first breaths came on a military base in Virginia. And although Dad retired from active duty when I was five, you wouldn't know it looking at my long list of previous addresses. My first move came when I was about three years old, then another about two years later, and the third three years after that. I've lived in eight states, four of those twice, and more houses than I care to remember.

I surprised the family. The previous child was twelve when I was born, so while I have a brother and a sister, both had moved out of the house before I turned six. I remember almost nothing of my sister living at home, even less of my brother, and they both moved to other states when they moved out, so I was rarely around them. I grew up more like an only child than the baby of the family.

The first event to have a major impact on my life happened just weeks before Dad retired from the US Air Force. Mom had undergone routine surgery, and when she went back for her follow-up appointment, the doctor had bad news. Cancer. With a capital C. A rare, aggressive form, with a 100% mortality rate.

At the time, we lived on Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska. Mom was medically evacuated by airplane to Wilford Hall, still the USAF's premier medical education and research hospital, located on Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. While she began treatments Dad finished his out processing and the necessary preparations before TMO (Travel Management Office) came to pack us out and send our household goods to Kentucky.

I cannot imagine the great stress my father was under during those weeks. In addition to Mom's illness, a cross-country move, and a change in careers, his dad lay dying in West Virginia. However my father dealt with all these issues, I don't remember it affecting me. Perhaps it was because I'd already experienced the loss of one family member when my brother left for college. Perhaps my five-year-old brain simply didn't comprehend the seriousness of what was happening around me. Perhaps it just all blended in with the turmoil of another move.

All I really remember from those days are family stories, knowledge of the prayers of friends and family as Mom underwent radical therapies, and pictures of the aunt and uncle who flew up to Alaska

to see us and used our truck camper to drive my sister and me back to their house in Ohio.

I can imagine my mom's fears of the future: not seeing what her husband would become now that the Department of Defense had released its hold on him, not watching any of her babies get married, and not meeting (at least in this world) any of her grandchildren. With her family foremost on her mind, she told me that she prayed for a very practical thing: that God would grant her the time to raise me.

At different points in history, the Israelites built markers to remind them from where they had come, through what they had lived, and from what God had saved them (e.g., Genesis 28:110–22, Exodus 17:14–16, Joshua 3:14–4:9). That simple desire uttered by my mom through countless prayers is a spiritual marker to me, a reminder of how much she loved us, how much she loved God, and how much God loved us—for He gave her the desire of her heart. Not only did my mom survive, but she saw all of her children marry and met all seven of her grandchildren. She is now watching her grandchildren marry and is meeting her great-grandchildren.

As Mom recovered from chemotherapy and radiation treatments, life went on. The next several years were fairly quiet. Immediately following her release from the hospital, Mom and I lived with relatives for a short time before joining my dad and sister in Kentucky, where Dad was attending the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was here that I remember my first best friend. She was a little younger than me, but we shared many interests and spent a lot of time together.

Dad graduated from seminary and we moved to Ohio. For the first time in my life, we were living near family. This felt odd, but I enjoyed it for the most part, despite the fact that none of them had any children my age. A couple of moves later we ended up back in Ohio and again close to family. Within a few years, I would meet the boy who would become my husband.

I don't want you to think, because I'm not giving you a lot of details, that my life growing up was easy. On the other hand, I'm certainly not telling you that my childhood was rough. My parents stayed together through the different challenges that life brought them. I grew up mostly in hand-me-downs and thrift-store finds, sometimes out of necessity and sometimes out of choice. My brother and sister kept in contact with us, and I have good memories of visits over the years. I know that many children would love to have the option of growing up in such an environment. I was very blessed and I know it.

But tragedy wasn't unfamiliar. Among other things, I don't remember my paternal grandparents at all. Dad's mom died long before I was born, and his father died when I was five. My mother's mom died shortly after my mom was born, so the only woman I knew as Grandma was my mom's stepmother. Mom's dad died just before my twelfth birthday, and although we lived near him at the time, we hadn't done so for much of my life, so my list of memories of him is short.

I didn't realize how much I missed the influence of older generations in my life until my early 30s. The lack of close, extended family in my youth, my natural proclivity toward being an introvert, and the constant moving drove me into myself. I became very contemplative, and learned to love books more than people. At every place we lived I always made a friend or two, but I preferred the ease of being alone over the work involved in forming and maintaining relationships. This tendency would play a major role in a crisis later in my life.

My husband, Brian, and I had known each other for several years through our church youth group before we got married. We dated for a little over two years, and, just ten months after our wedding, our daughter came along. Brian worked at an entry-level position with an up-and-coming company,

while I worked part-time in the office of a small construction company that allowed me to bring our baby with me. We thought life was good, and we dared to dream into the future.

Then a series of calamities hit. Brian lost his job: largely due, I felt, to a personality conflict between him and his direct boss. It took several weeks before he found another position—and it paid less and had far fewer benefits. The weeks without his income had hurt; the lower pay and lack of medical benefits for well-baby checkups left us sinking into debt. And I was pregnant with our second child.

One day we left our daughter with Brian's mother and went for a motorcycle ride. As we reached a red light, he half-turned back to me and asked, "What do you think about me joining the Air Force?" The light turned green, and he took off down the road.

This statement was a lot to process, coming from the man who in high school had run from military recruiters. I had only recently adjusted my thinking to the idea of living in the same town with family for all of our lives, so this was a huge curve ball. As we talked, he revealed that he thought God was directing him to join the Air Force, not that he was excited about it. But it would provide the medical benefits and regular paycheck we desperately needed.

As I listened to him, an excitement built within me. I hadn't realized how much I wanted to explore the world, one duty station at a time. I knew military life would be an adjustment, but I looked forward to it. Major obstacles, such as selling our home, were downgraded in my mind to inconveniences. Moving was familiar, even comfortable. His family, however, had limited experience with the military life and I feared they would take it hard, his mom in particular.

But as we talked with a recruiter and began the paperwork, it became clearer to us that this was the path God wanted for us. A signing bonus in his career field of choice relieved some of the pressure from the debt, and financial paperwork that normally would have caused a red flag processed through the channels without a hitch. In October 1998, Brian left for Basic Training in San Antonio, Texas.

His first phone call came one week later. It was wonderful to hear his voice, but I could tell he was fighting emotions. I was caught off guard when he said he could tell me only that he was fine and give me his address. The TI (Training Instructor) standing nearby would end the call if we tried to say more. As I frantically wrote the precious postal address down, I fought back tears so I could say something he would remember, something to help him during those long days of training.

I anxiously flew down for graduation while my parents took care of our daughter and pets. The weekend was wonderful, but bittersweet. Leaving Brian at the dorms on his final night of liberty was tough. I felt like I was leaving half of myself behind. When I returned to the hotel room, I found an urgent message from my Mom. I immediately called home, fearing something had happened to our daughter. My parents let me know that my precious dog had died. The one that helped me corral our toddler. The support beam that helped me heave my pregnant belly out of our waterbed each morning. My constant companion while Brian was away.

I sat in a hotel room in a strange city, unable to reach out to the one person I wanted. Feelings of sadness for the pet I loved mixed with intense feelings of loneliness and abandonment. The man who was supposed to be my support was locked behind doors I could not open. I wondered how many times I would have to face such crises alone.

On the plane ride back home, I began preparing myself for Thanksgiving. Until my aunt and uncle had retired, Thanksgiving was always a huge holiday at their house that I looked forward to, complete

with family and friends, too much food, and special desserts. With my husband stuck 1,300 miles away, our daughter too young to care about traditions, and no one planning to host a big meal, the holiday looked bleak.

And then, on the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving, came a great surprise: Brian called. He had just been informed that the previous 400-mile limit on travel for the holiday weekend had been lifted. He could come home for Thanksgiving! We had no money for a last-minute plane ticket, but I did have an airline ticket to visit him in January when he graduated from Technical School (Tech School). He wondered what I thought about switching the ticket to him, then driving down with my parents, who spent the winter each year in southern Texas. Our daughter and I could live with my parents during the week, and drive up each weekend to see him at school.

First, I had to clear this plan with my parents. Under normal circumstances, I knew they wouldn't mind us moving in with them for the ten remaining weeks of training, but during their winters in Texas they lived in a fifth-wheel trailer. An additional adult plus a toddler would be a significant adjustment for all of us.

When they agreed to the plan, I frantically called the airlines and asked about switching the ticket to Brian and somehow delivering it to him in San Antonio. I was told that the only way to possibly do this was to ask a ticket agent at the airport. The offices were closed for the night, but they would open at 6:00 a.m.

I was up and moving early Thanksgiving morning, full of hope that the airlines would somehow make the day bright. Brian had caught a ride to the airport near him the night before, sleeping there in the hopes that I would be able to switch the ticket.

The airport was largely deserted, with one lone gentleman at the counter. He listened patiently as I explained the situation, adding that my husband had been gone with the military for two months. But he had a problem. Because the ticket was purchased with frequent flyer miles, I had to call the airline directly and have the miles added back into our account, so they could then be removed again for the new flight plan.

I dutifully went to the nearest phones and called the airline, explaining everything to the person who answered the phone. She kindly explained that we could certainly exchange the ticket, but she had a problem. Everyone who worked with the mileage program was off for the holiday, and no one would be there until the next day. I'm certain she heard the disappointment in my voice because she added, "If anyone can help you, it's the ticket agent at the counter."

I quietly hung up. Struggling to hold back tears, I made my way back to the gentleman at the ticket counter. He looked at me and asked what I was told. As calmly as I could with eyes full of questioning hope, I simply told him, "She said that if anyone could help us, you could." He looked at me for just the briefest moment, then asked to see my ticket. After a few keystrokes, he handed the ticket back to me and told me that my husband should be able to pick up his ticket at the counter in San Antonio at any time. It was the first time in my life I'd ever wanted to hug a stranger!

During the Thanksgiving holiday, we talked with my parents and finalized our plans for the next few weeks. Our house was going up for sale and most of our belongings were packed and placed in storage. Brian spent as much time with his family as he could before we left for the long drive back to Texas. I then dropped him off at school in San Antonio before meeting my parents further south.

Each Friday, our daughter and I faithfully drove four hours north to pick Brian up at the dorms, and each Sunday I would drop him back off and head south again. After graduation, with orders in hand,

we drove to Ohio to watch movers crate our belongings. We then said goodbye to the family there, drove west to St. Louis, Missouri, to drop the car off for shipping, and boarded a plane to our first duty station: Elmendorf AFB in Anchorage, Alaska. I was 38-weeks pregnant.

That was the most uncomfortable plane ride I've ever endured, but thankfully none of the stewardesses questioned me on the pregnancy. Our vehicle was still at least two weeks from arriving, but the temporary housing was nice and within walking distance of the commissary.

One week after our arrival, the city got the worst snowfall of the season. We woke up that March morning to snow in the yard almost as deep as our toddler was tall! My mom flew in the next day so she could take care of our daughter while I was in the hospital having our son, and I still remember her struggling to push my daughter in an umbrella stroller through the snow-covered sidewalks while I fought the metal shopping cart laden with groceries.

Our son arrived, and a couple of weeks later, our car. We moved into an apartment while waiting for military housing to open up, and our strained finances continued stretching ever thinner. Our house in Ohio still had not sold and when the lady who rented it for a short time moved out, we discovered that she had destroyed the bathroom. It had to be gutted and redone. On a young airman's salary, we were paying a \$675 mortgage, a \$923 rent payment, and had less than \$100 in savings. We were sinking into deep debt.

Our church situation wasn't much better. Prone to shyness and still avoiding relationships, I did not make friends easily, and after five months of training in Texas, Brian was out of the habit of going to services. I tried everything I could think of to get him to go, flagrantly ignoring the Apostle Peter's advice to win our husbands through our life example (1 Peter 3:1-6). After nine months of attending services in our new town, though, I couldn't name more than a small number of people, and I'm not sure I knew any of their phone numbers or addresses. I spent most of my time at home alone with our two children.

Two weeks before Christmas and five days after we moved into our house on base, Brian left for his first tour in Saudi Arabia. We chose to open presents before he left. While I've never regretted allowing him the gift of seeing his children enjoy the holiday, it made December 25th the longest day I can remember. It seemed that everyone around me had family to enjoy, and I felt left out. I was too self-absorbed to care what my husband was going through on the other side of the world, much less the families of those he left with that lived near me on the base. I felt like I was the only one alone that Christmas.

Even though the separation was difficult, my husband and I grew closer during his time at Prince Sultan Air Base. We emailed as often as the system was functioning, and talked about almost everything. The little bit of extra pay for hazardous duty and family separation was nice, but it certainly didn't come close to covering the mortgage in Ohio. Emotionally, I dealt with most of his tour fine, as long as he didn't talk too much about crawling under cars in his cotton jumpsuit to look for bombs or the interesting items he confiscated from locals coming on base.

Shortly after Brian returned, we received a surprise bill from the Department of Defense. Our move north had been overweight and we owed them over \$1,900. On top of our other money problems, we simply could not afford the \$50 payments they told us they were going to siphon off each paycheck. Brian applied for a reprieve, and we received the one-time forgiveness. We absolutely could not go over weight on another move.

Our financial issues were becoming a larger problem. With an inconsistent work schedule, Brian's

prospects for a second job were nil and, with two young children, day care fees would cost us more than I would likely make in a typical job. I signed up to deliver papers for the Anchorage Daily News, but this still was not enough income to cover the mortgage. We finally decided to ask the state for help. I took the kids downtown and applied for public assistance.

The lady I spoke with was very nice. She looked at everything and quickly saw that the house in Ohio was creating the mess that was dragging us down. However, the law was set up to work against us. Because the house was in our name, she had to count it as an asset, which meant we owned too much to receive assistance. The state's position was that we should sell the house. She understood my frustration because she knew the house had been on the market for months, but there was nothing she could do.

The only other solution we could think of was home day care. I like children, and doing day care in our home would allow me to make money while caring for our own two children. I knew a lady at church was expecting a child soon, and although I didn't know much about her or her family, I knew she and her husband both worked and would need some day care for her baby. I approached her with my idea and she agreed to let me care for her infant.

At the time, Brian worked the 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. swing shift. I was up by 4:00 a.m. to pick up newspapers and get them delivered, sometimes with one or both kids in the car. I rushed home to make sure the sidewalks were shoveled as the base required, so I could open my door for my friend to drop off her baby at 6:15 a.m. We had to play quietly all morning so my husband could sleep, while also meeting the other base requirements, such as a minimum of fifteen minutes of outside play in the morning and monthly fire drills, sometimes during naptime.

Shortly after Brian left for work about 1 p.m, we would all get into the car to go pick up another child from school who I kept until her mom got off work about dinnertime. Once everyone went home, I had to sanitize toys, clean and mop the kitchen, and vacuum the living room. By the time I got our two into bed, I barely stayed awake long enough to say hello to my husband when he got home from work around 11 p.m. As exhausting as this schedule was, life was about to get more complicated.

Brian received orders for his rotation back to Saudi Arabia. Trying to keep up with everything while he was gone was tough, but at least I didn't have to worry about keeping kids quiet during the day. Soon after he left, the mother of my school-aged day care child stayed one afternoon to talk. Her job was going well, even though she had been newly assigned to the second shift. The problem was that her husband, freshly returned from a twelve-month remote tour, was already being sent out on a three-month TDY. His mom was able to come up for the first month to help, and her mom would be available the third month, but she needed help for the four weeks in the middle. It would mean picking up their son from the base day care center before 6 p.m. each day and keeping both him and the girl I already picked up from school until about 10:30 each night through the week. This would be a huge task, but since they had been such great parents, how could I tell her no?

Thankfully I'd already quit the newspaper job, so I had the day only care to worry about. For three very long weeks, I signed in my first child at 6:15 a.m. and signed out my last child at 10:30 p.m. with no break in-between. I went to bed exhausted every night and looked forward to weekends when I could sleep in a little and go to bed early.

And then one morning, everything changed. I was home with my two children and the infant, ages three, two, and nine months, respectively. The baby began to get a little fussy, signaling her need for food, so I stood up from the couch and walked toward the kitchen to get her bottle. The next thing I

knew, I was lying on the ground having a minor seizure. When I regained control, I sat up. My shoulder ached from where I had hit a doorframe when I fell. I remembered nothing after taking a few steps toward the kitchen.

Seizures were new to me and I had never blacked out before, so I wasn't sure what to think of it. Perhaps I was just overly tired. Uncertain what else to do, I called the moms and canceled day care for a few days while I figured out what was going on.

A trip to the hospital emergency room found everything normal, so I went home with my kids to rest. After so many weeks of having anywhere from three to five kids running around, it was odd only having my two, but the quiet was a nice change. For the next few days, I rested a lot during the day, slept longer at night, and tried to eat healthy foods. Everything seemed fine.

Until it happened again. Once again, I had been sitting on the couch. When I stood and began walking toward the stairs, my vision started going black. I felt light-headed, and I barely managed to sit down on the first step before I fell down. As my vision and center of balance returned to normal, the phone rang. A friend was calling to check on me and when she heard what had just happened, she came over immediately to take me to the ER.

Once again, nothing seemed out of place. Pregnancy tests came back negative, no drugs in my system, hormones all within normal ranges. My blood pressure was fine, my heart looked good, my breathing was normal. I was a medical mystery, and the ER doctor wasn't happy. Considering my husband was TDY and I had two small children, the doctor wanted me to have a friend move in with us to monitor me, recommended that I didn't drive, and wrote in my file that I was to follow-up with a licensed medical doctor. I went home, made my follow-up appointment, and packed bags for us and our dog to stay with a friend.

In the meantime, Brian was stuck in Asia. We knew nothing except that I was blacking out. He desperately wanted to come home and his Commander overseas agreed that he should return, but until my doctor revoked my driving privileges, he had to stay put. So we waited. I felt like a trapped rat, not living in my own place and not really supposed to be driving anywhere.

After a few days of nothing happening, I moved back home. The episodes only seemed to happen when I was standing, so I felt confident that if I stayed sitting, everything would be fine. Still, as others speculated about what could be wrong, my imagination feared the worst.

Finally the day came for my appointment. The doctor quietly read over my records and said the good news was that I didn't have a tumor or diabetes. In fact, nothing major was wrong with me. He said he had never told any patient this before, but he wanted me to take my dinner plate and sprinkle it liberally with salt. I'm sure my face showed disbelief. I had too little salt in my diet?

He went on to explain that I had low blood pressure. When I'm sitting or standing, it stabilizes and is fine, but when I am changing from a sitting to standing position, my heart simply cannot get the blood to my brain fast enough, so my body reacts by forcing me down so it can get the blood to my head. Eating salt would help raise my blood pressure enough to keep the blood moving at a good rate. I joyously left the doctor's office and began spreading the news.

When my husband returned home at the end of his TDY, preparations to leave Alaska began. We planned to drive to our next duty station, so we needed to be prepared to leave as soon as possible so we could maneuver the mountain passes in the best possible weather. Our scheduled departure date: September 14, 2001.

Everything was going smoothly. Anxious to make our weight limit this time, I cleaned out

everything we didn't need or didn't want to move, then allowed the packers to take over the rest. We spent the last couple of nights in town with friends. On September 10, 2001, we went to bed, expecting to clear housing in the morning.

About 5:20 a.m., our friend woke us up. A church family who had moved to Virginia about two months earlier had called our pastor to alert us to the chaos unfolding in New York City, four time zones away. I knelt on the floor of their bedroom in shock as we watched the Twin Towers burning. Our eyes met, and Brian and I knew we needed to get to the base.

Grabbing our children, now four and two years old, we got on the road as quickly as possible. The drive that normally took about twenty minutes stretched longer, and came to a screeching halt about a mile-and-a-half outside the base gate. When it was finally our turn to pass, Brian asked the guard on duty, an airman from my husband's squadron, if recalls had been issued yet. We were told that the night shift, still on duty two hours past their normal end time, had no idea when they would be relieved, but the Commander hadn't yet issued a recall.

We went to our empty house and waited. The neighbors with whom we shared an entry opened their door to us so the kids could play and we could watch events unfold on their television. Our entire move was now in question. As the borders were secured, we didn't know if Canada would let us in, and if they did, if the U.S. would let us back across the border into Montana. Most of our belongings were already on a ship headed south, so we would have very little if we were forced to stay in Alaska. And, as all the inspectors were civilians, we didn't know when they would be allowed on base, which meant we couldn't finish out processing to leave anyway. Questions circled through our minds, and we could do nothing but sit in an empty house and wait.

At long last, the inspector showed up and passed us through housing. Brian checked in with his First Sergeant and found out that no one really knew what was going to happen. PCS assignments hadn't been stopped, though, so we should proceed to our new duty station: Malmstrom AFB, Montana. The only advice anyone could give us about traveling through Canada was to try it and see.

We arrived at the Canadian border on September 15th and proceeded through without a problem, and three days after that, we passed through the U.S. border without incident. Instead of stopping at our new base, though, we continued on to South Dakota to drop off our dog with friends until we gained housing, then onto Kentucky and Ohio to visit family. We finally arrived back in Montana over a month later.

Housing opened up very quickly, and we got our belongings out of storage and arranged for our friends to bring us our dog. The more I found out about Brian's new job, the less thrilled I was about it, but at least he wouldn't be going TDY out of the country, facing the dangers that the new War on Terror was bringing to so many other military families. He would be guarding the U.S. nuclear missile supply, and it meant he would be in the field for five days, train for three days, one day of Commander's discretion, and one day off before the cycle started over again. We wouldn't see much of him.

To add stress to our situation, I was pregnant again and not doing well emotionally. After my first pregnancy, I'd experienced a brief period of post-partum depression, but this was considerably worse. I remember crying out to God, desperate for relief from my situation. My husband was rarely home, and when he was, he was irritable and didn't want to interact with us. I was exhausted from keeping up with a four-year-old morning person and a two-year-old night owl. Not to mention trying to keep up with all the base regulations, such as cleaning up daily after our dog and shoveling within

24 hours of it snowing. I tried calling credit consolidation companies for help with our finances, but they all told me the same thing: I had better rates on our credit cards than they could give me.

I was reaching the end of myself and I wanted out. Not divorce and not abandonment—I was too weak to consider living on my own. I wanted to die. I wouldn't hurt the baby in my womb, though, so I felt stuck between a rock and a hard place, and I continued on a downward spiral. Still bound in my shyness, I had no one to reach out to in our town, even though I'd been attending church faithfully for several weeks.

Friends stationed at Ellsworth AFB, 550 miles away in South Dakota, were very worried, and they checked on me regularly through email and phone calls, offering what support and encouragement they could. During one of Brian's rotations in the field, I finally admitted to them where I was at, and they arranged to meet me about halfway between our homes. They took our children for a week to relieve some pressure from me and give me uninterrupted time to talk to Brian. With the pressure of the kids gone, I went home and cried. I knew I couldn't verbally speak all the things in my heart, so I wrote a letter.

My husband reacted quickly, giving me everything he could. He tried to spend more time with us, although he was in the early stages of his own medical issues that would soon cause other problems. He encouraged me to get more involved at church, and he took me to our friends' home in South Dakota or invited them to our home frequently. It was enough to get me through the last months of pregnancy and emotionally stabilized afterward.

He also stopped in to see a financial expert on base, reportedly the best in his field in our area. After looking through everything, the expert advised us to do something he rarely recommended to anyone: bankruptcy. He confirmed for us that we were not trying to find some extra room in our budget. We were trying to find a mortgage payment, and it simply was not there. He believed he might be able to help us trim a little here and there, but the truth was that we already had things pretty tight. Brian thanked him and brought the news home to me. I was not pleased.

I've never heard anyone say anything positive about bankruptcy. While I think many people get into financial crises by making bad choices or having poor management, I also know that sometimes bankruptcy just comes from life. Sure, we had made some bad choices, but ultimately we still had a house that no one wanted to buy that was costing us a significant percentage of our income. At the time, I believed that all our financial troubles were the house's fault and if someone would just buy it then we could climb out of the mess we were in. I wouldn't admit it to myself then, but the truth was that I was furious at God. If He truly cared, He would have brought a buyer months ago.

After a short time of fighting my husband, I grudgingly acquiesced, and we began the paperwork to file bankruptcy. We talked to a lawyer, stopped paying the bills we knew we could not afford, and reaffirmed our commitment to pay those we could. I felt horribly guilty. Few people knew what we were doing and some of those who did were encouraging, reminding us that God allowed a period of time in the Old Testament law when debts were written off. However, one person I told innocently said, "I thought debt was a sin for the Christian." That comment fed into my shame, and I went deeper into myself, sharing even less of my life with those around me.

As we waited for the courts to decide our case, I began homeschooling our daughter. This was not something I jumped into with great joy, but I knew that God had called us to it. Brian fully supported me, but I was overwhelmed with all the options, money was still largely not available, and homeschooling in our area seemed non-existent. I felt very alone, like I was being set apart again—

not for some grand purpose, but left behind; unchosen, like the kid no one wants to pick for their team.

To compound things, Brian was doing worse. His irritability was increasing and sleep evaded him. By the time he sought medical help, he was sleeping only every other night. His doctor ordered a series of tests including a sleep study; the results were overwhelming. He was diagnosed with insomnia, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea. The sleep apnea could be helped with a machine that provided continuous positive air pressure (CPAP), but that irritated his insomnia. And all the medicines used to treat insomnia would put him on a profile—removing him from his job protecting the country's nuclear arsenal.

The doctor wanted six months to stabilize my husband's sleeping pattern through the use of meds and new routines, so Brian temporarily lost his worldwide qualifications and clearance to carry a weapon. Not only did his commander not take this news well, he didn't believe the diagnosis. My husband was a cop, on a base that was roughly eighty percent cops, and he wasn't allowed to carry a gun. What was he supposed to do?

After working a short time managing a couple of the dormitories on base, Brian was assigned to work at the base jail. It was small, but able to hold several prisoners in varying stages of court proceedings or short-term confinements. As guards are not allowed to carry weapons, their demeanor is often the best method of maintaining control. The longer he worked at the jail, the more angry and pessimistic my husband became.

In an attempt to convince his Commander that he was serious about working in the field as he was originally assigned, Brian opted for surgery. Among other things, his tonsils, uvula, and part of his soft pallet were removed. Recovery was painful, and he had to learn to purposefully swallow his food. Yet we discovered that his Commander still didn't believe him. In fact, the Commander began paperwork to administratively discharge him from the Air Force. And that was before we found out the surgery had made Brian's medical problems worse. Additionally, his condition required a medical board be called to determine if he should remain on active duty, and his post-surgery diagnosis required the permanent suspension of his worldwide qualifications and ability to carry a weapon.

We weren't sure what else to do, so we prayed for God's guidance. After a lot of talking, we decided we should fight to stay in the Air Force. Brian completed the necessary paperwork and we waited. After weeks of uncertainty, trying to hope for the best and prepare for the worst, the news came back. The med board had ruled in our favor; we could stay in.

Again, the Commander was not happy. I'm sure in his view Brian was a useless troop, but that didn't help our situation. We again prayed about our options. Brian finally admitted that when he had enlisted it had been on his own terms, because he wasn't happy about God pushing him into the military. Now, he was ready to do whatever job God asked of him, so we asked for a change of MOS (Military Occupation Specialty).

The request went through with minimal drama. Brian was changing to the IT (information technology) field and would be assigned to Tech School at Keesler AFB in Mississippi. Because it was only a three-month-long school, we were not permitted a PCS, so the kids and I couldn't stay with him. We decided that if his follow-on base was anything east of the Mississippi River, the kids and I would move in with my parents in Kentucky while he went to school. Otherwise, we would stay put in Montana and wait for him.

We prayed and waited. And waited. And waited. A mere five days before he was scheduled to

leave for his follow-on school, orders finally came down: Pope AFB, North Carolina. A couple a church teased that we were going to “No Hope Pope,” but I couldn’t begin to consider what this meant, as I had only five days to prepare for a cross-country move with a six-year-old, a five-year-old, a two-year-old, a dog, and a cat. Five days to consider all we would need for the four to five months we would be without our household belongings. And my husband had to convince TMO that they had no choice but to pack us out in two days, because we had to clear housing before he left.

It was a whirlwind, but we got everything done, said goodbye to friends, and got on the road. Brian dropped us off in Kentucky and then arrived at Keesler only to find that they had no on-base housing for him. He spent his training living out of a hotel just outside the gates. Assigned to the second shift of classes, with every other Friday off, he traveled the 650 miles north to see us every other weekend.

The kids and I tried to fit ourselves into my parents’ lives with the least possible intrusion. Although I know my parents cherished the time we got with them, it was again an adjustment for all of us. At least this time they were living in a house! Even our dog, a seventy-five-pound shepherd/husky mix used to living inside with us, had to adapt to being an outside pup. But she faithfully followed my dad wherever he walked on their seventeen acres of land in the middle of nowhere, thankfully only surprising a skunk once. Soon it was time to move to North Carolina.

Our introduction to North Carolina was impressive. The towering pines were beautiful, and I marveled at them from the large picture windows in our temporary lodging on Pope. Within just a day or two of our arrival, as I sat relaxing in the living room reading through an impressive pile of information about the base, I watched airmen arrive in the grassy area around the quarters. They worked in teams of two, picking up the metal picnic tables and chaining them to the pine trees. I’d never seen such a thing. Soon I would learn more than I wanted to know about hurricane season.

Not dramatically different from the earthquake preparedness I’d learn in Alaska, our first month in North Carolina introduced us to hurricane preparedness as we sat through Tropical Storm Bonnie, Hurricane Charley, Hurricane Frances, and Hurricane Gaston. At least living in Montana had prepared us for the winds!

In between storms, God brought us a fantastic realtor who tirelessly showed us home after home on our pathetic post-bankruptcy budget, even bringing a birthday present for our daughter to lighten the lack of festivities in our small, constantly changing quarters. Pope’s temporary housing could not keep us long term, so we moved out every few days to a local hotel until the much more economical lodging on base had room for us again. Eventually we found a hotel that would accept pets at a reasonable rate so we could get our pets with us and end the kenneling fees. Every couple of days, we all had to leave the room for the maid to clean, but the kids and dog made the best of it. The cat tolerated it.

Ten weeks later, we finally moved in to our new home. It was a foreclosed modular home, dirty from lack of care, and considerably smaller than our home in Montana had been, but it was ours. I could paint the walls if I wanted to, replace flooring if I so desired, and not shovel the snow if I didn’t feel like it. If this part of North Carolina ever got any snow. I expected life to level out.

Instead, my husband’s health continued to go downhill. In addition to the sleeping issues, he’d injured his back, and his arms would sometimes go to sleep in the middle of the night. Swollen legs, pain radiating from everywhere, and other symptoms began showing themselves with greater frequency. He endured more medical tests than I can remember, yet the doctors couldn’t figure out the

problem. Many tests came back *normal*, but even the ones that didn't were not very helpful. Yes, they could see a small problem in his back, but it was too small to be causing the amount of pain he experienced. Yes, they could see a small tumor on his pituitary, but many people live with similar benign tumors and the size was too small to be causing his symptoms.

Physical therapy, occupational therapy, chiropractors, neurologists, endocrinologists, urologists, psychiatrists, pain management clinics. Truthfully, I've lost track of the many different types of doctors Brian's seen over the years and the medications he's tried. And while we have concrete explanations for some of what's going on in his body, much of it is unexplained and therefore dumped into the category of fibromyalgia.

We finally came to the realization that my husband might not live a long life. So his thoughts turned to protecting his family and deciding what he needed to do in case he ever got to the point where he could no longer work. We opted for a medical board, asking for medical retirement. The board ruled in our favor, granting a temporary medical retirement that would be re-evaluated annually for up to five years.

Brian started looking for a civilian job, but hiring managers wouldn't consider him without his official release from the military. So the job search couldn't begin in earnest until his DD-214 was in hand. It was tough because he was dealing with so much more than just changing careers. His health problems loomed before us, forcing us to look at reality. It felt like dreams ending, as if I could no longer expect a full and vital marriage. His diseases took so much from him, and I wondered if he'd see his children grow up, walk his daughter down the aisle, teach his boys basic automobile maintenance. So many emotions. And he was home—all the time.

Finally, after four and a half months, a job with the civil service came through. He'd be working for the Army on Fort Bragg, so we didn't have to move. That was a moment of relief in the midst of all the other turmoil in my heart.

Emotions were bubbling to the surface as I dealt with my husband's mortality, and I began seriously dealing with emotional pain from my past. As a child, I'd been molested. As a pre-teen, I'd taken the pain of that to God. I'd heard a sermon, by some well-known preacher I've since forgotten the identity of, who said that some pain is so big that we can never forgive it—only God can forgive it through us. That resonated with me. I wouldn't even consider forgiving the perpetrator. I didn't *want* to forgive him. But I also didn't want to live tied to the anger I felt forever. It had to go. So I asked God to forgive him through me and help me release the anger.

It was a huge step on the journey to forgiveness, one that slowly, over many years, gently led me from hating that man to loving him as Christ commands us to love others. But it was during this time that my husband transitioned into the Army world that I again felt like I had unfinished business. I went to my pastor, a licensed family and marriage counselor, to talk about it. I discovered that the issue I was having didn't have anything to do with the molestation itself. I was struggling with the bigger question of "why?": Why did God allow this?

My pastor gave me some practical advice, prayed with me, and sent me home with homework: deal with God. If I was going to fully trust this Supreme Authority, I needed to know that He truly was in control, even in ugly circumstances. If He couldn't control situations like this, then what else could He not do? Was He even aware of what had happened to me? Had He been present? Did He care?

As I prayed and asked for answers to these questions, God gave me a picture of the room where the incident had happened so long ago. As I looked around for evidence of Him, I saw Jesus, standing

in a corner, tears running down His face. Not only had He been there; He cared. A lot. It was all the proof I needed to be able to release my other questions into the categories of *free will* and *everyone sins*.

As you read this, it may come across as a quick process, like TV sitcoms that solve all the family's problems in one thirty-minute show. Let me assure you that this was not quick. In fact, some of its remnants continue to rear their ugly face from time to time. The difference is that now I see it more clearly for what it is: the enemy's attack on my life. I know that my enemy wants to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10), and many times with me it was no more difficult for him than providing an emotional distraction.

But I don't want to live distracted. I want to grab hold of the abundant life promised to me (see John 10:7–10). I want to encourage you—healing from past hurts is possible! It is hard work. It is painful, particularly at first. But with God's help and guidance, it is worth it! On the other side of the pain and fear I have found great freedom—freedom that makes every battle worth the fight.

And that's where I want to leave you. I'll talk more about living with a husband with medical issues later in this book, but right now I want you to see great hope for yourself (Jeremiah 29:11). Hope that things don't have to be perfect for God to work. Hope that God really does transform pain into something beautiful (Isaiah 61:1–4). Hope that He really loves you and is seeking you out.

Reach for Him. He's waiting.

Kathy Barnett

Married at age eighteen, Kathy began her journey with Sam right out of high school. Having always had a love of reading and writing, she pursued a degree in English Language and Literature while beginning their family. After teaching for one year, the Lord called Kathy home to minister to her own children through homeschooling and to serve Sam while he was busy serving in the US Army.

God had a beautiful plan of faithfulness and joy lined up for Kathy in exchange for her previous personal marriage, family, and career goals. Twenty-four years, nine children, and more than a dozen deployments resulting in over ten years of separation in their marriage, finds Kathy still seeking obedience to her Father's plan.

Recently retired, Kathy and her husband reside near Ft. Bragg, NC, where they continue to raise their family and minister to the needs of the military within their church and community. She loves running on long roads, reading long books, and having long conversations about what Jesus has done in her life. Her heart is to see people find freedom in Christ—her greatest joy is seeing that liberty become reality.

For more information about
KATHY BARNETT
please visit:

www.facebook.com/TheWarriorsBride
WarriorBride90@gmail.com

Carrie Daws

Over the years, God rewrote Carrie's dreams to include being a stay-at-home mom and a writer. She started by simply writing weekly devotionals online, before a mentor at the Christian Writer's Guild encouraged her to try writing fiction. However, even in her fiction books, Carrie's stories are based on the struggles of real people and convey the hope that God never abandons His people.

After almost ten years in the US Air Force, Carrie's husband medically retired; they now live in Virginia with their three children. Besides writing, she stays busy homeschooling and volunteering within military ministries.

More than anything, Carrie strives to write clean fiction and encouraging non-fiction that demonstrate practical Christianity. She says, "I didn't want to be embarrassed for my daughter to pick up any of my books. But I also wanted to do some exploration. Imagine what your life would look like if you stood up to your greatest fear. Or someone close to you deeply believed you were made for more! I want my readers to find the courage for those things, and that's what compels me to write."

For more information about
CARRIE DAWS
please visit:

www.CarrieDaws.com

[@CarrieDaws](https://www.instagram.com/CarrieDaws)

www.facebook.com/Carrie-Daws

Contact@CarrieDaws.com

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