

## **BROKENNESS AND MYSELF**

I wish I could write this in a way that specified one single thing that God has rescued me from, in the attempt to keep it short and simple. But my rescue story is complicated and incomplete. He has saved me from a multitude of sins, addictions, sexual impurity, religion, partying/drunkenness, vanity, years of rebellion, brokenness, shame, regret, false identity, abandonment, abuse, anger, control, lukewarm Christianity, and much more. It's impossible only to pinpoint one because it doesn't tell the full story of His glory. My rescue story is one of continual transformation that will be completed on the day that I finally get to meet my savior face to face. I dream about this day, how amazing it is going to be when I will be officially free from the struggle of temptation and the desires of my flesh. Free from the chains and strongholds of sin. To be in His loving and welcoming arms. That will be the day I am finally rescued for good. But for now, I am a work in progress, and I am someone who fails daily. I am a child of God. I am not perfect, and I never will be on this side of heaven. But my heart chases after the One who is perfect.

While I have faced every sin listed above, they are no longer a part of my identity, I do still battle with them, but they are no longer who I am. Once I feel like I have overcome one, God decides to tackle another. Some rescue missions are quick and over-painless. While others take time, with heart-wrenching pruning, and more failure than I'd care to admit. I am at a point in my walk with Christ, where I am thankful for the brokenness. I am thankful my Father has pieced me back together. One struggle at a time. One broken piece at a time. Incomplete until the day He returns.

Growing up I had very little spiritual or parental guidance in my life. I grew up with a dysfunctional family that bled into my adulthood. I went to church regularly till my parents got divorced when I was 3. I got to watch my grandma serve in her little church on a hill in Colfax by playing the organ till her body began to fail her and she passed away in 2016. I am saddened by the fact that she never got to see me saved after all the years she prayed for me. When I was with my mom, the church was the last place you would find us. Between her full-time job, her live-in boyfriend, her own addictions, and living in evil, we didn't fit in at church and it wasn't a priority of importance. With my dad's new wife and newly adopted sons, there wasn't much time left for him to come get me on the weekends. I occasionally got to hear my dad preach on the weekends when it was convenient for them to come and pick me up.

### **I felt like the little girl that no one cared about.**

No one saw or wanted to be with me. I felt alone all the time. I felt abandoned. I was deeply hurt and broken and honestly didn't even know it. I thought it was normal. Chaos was my normal. A counselor once told me "My normal is chaos, so when things are calm, I create chaos to create my own normal." He was right.

I spent a lot of time by myself, searching for ways to get attention. For someone to give me love, where I could feel accepted, wanted, and cared for. It didn't take me long to figure out that what got me the most attention was getting in trouble. I had this figured out early on in middle school between getting into fights at school, smoking (both cigarettes and marijuana), drinking, and being promiscuous with anyone who would give me the time of day. This is how I would begin to feel noticed, loved, and accepted. My parents sure did pay attention when the school principal was giving them a call, or I would come home intoxicated.

### **My behavior was out of control.**

Yet, I thought I was in total control and had it all figured out. There was no punishment that I didn't just laugh at. My mom would try to ground me, but I had mastered the art of "getting my

way". I would do anything and everything I could to drive her crazy enough to give up on my punishment so I would get what I wanted. Then I would be out the door to drink my next drink, get my next high, or meet up with the next boy. My mom once bought me a shirt that said, "I want what I want and I want it right now." It seemed to fit my personality well. My patience was non-existent. Sitting still was not my forte, I had to always be doing something, and that something always seemed to get me in trouble. As a child who had ADHD school and daily life was a struggle.

My sister (9 years older than me) saw the destructive path I was on and sat me down on her couch. She had asked me if I remembered the time our mom had an asthma attack. I flashed back to the second grade when I had told my class for show-n-tell that my mom was in the hospital for that asthma attack. What my sister told me made everything start to click. My life started to make sense, the reason my mom would lock herself in her room the second she got home from work. The reason she would go back to her boyfriend after every physical fight. The reason why he filled our home floor to ceiling with his dumpster finds. Why dad said I was living in evil and why he didn't want me in his house with his family. He didn't want me to corrupt them. That was the day I found out my mom had overdosed on meth. That was the day I swore I would never touch hard drugs. And by the grace of God, I never have. But I had my fair share of destructive addictions and behaviors that should have shattered a family into pieces.

I wish I could say that moment changed my life forever and I started to be a good child, but it didn't. I continued to drink, smoke, get in fights, and spend too much time with the boys. One day I learned just how in control I wasn't. It was summertime, right before I started high school. I went to a college dorm party and made some very poor choices that left me scared and out of control of my own mind and body.

Scared to the point of calling someone to come get me. My sister came and got me and took me back to her house where I thought I would get another round of grace. But my grace was up. My mom had enough, looking back now, I don't blame her. My dad picked me up that Sunday morning with my bags packed and we were off to church and to start my new life living with my dad and his family. I will tell you one thing, sitting in church hungover is no fun, but it was necessary for me to change. And I did for a while. I stopped drinking, smoking, and hanging out with boys. That is until I met a boy. It was love at first sight at the young age of 14/15. I knew I was going to marry this boy. And I sure did after I got pregnant at 16 and my dad forced us to get married.

So, there I was 16, pregnant, married, in high school, living on our own, and working to support our little family. It didn't take long after for the fights to begin. Fights that would start out as yelling and screaming and eventually turned into physical fights. We spent the next 3ish years with more bad days than good until we both had enough and went our separate ways.

Shortly after we divorced, I was introduced to this guy living in Mississippi through a mutual friend of ours. After talking on the phone for 3 months, we met face-to-face in the fall of 2008. We were married in 2010 and quickly went from a family of 3 to 4, and then to 5. We welcomed our first baby girl into this world in 2010, and our son in 2013. I would love to tell you that I got over my need for attention once I found the love of my life, but that would be a lie.

We spent many years playing Church. We attended and served at a Church in Altoona for quite some time until a family fallout happened. Then we just stopped going altogether and we became the stereotypical "Chr-easters" (people who only go to church on Christmas and Easter). During this time, we spent many weekends drinking, partying, and bringing our kids along for the ride. All the while I had a secret life that no one knew about. In 2014 I began my fitness journey. As a mother of 3, I was ashamed of how I physically looked so I did something about it.

I started to work out, eat right, and began living what looked like a healthy lifestyle. That is until God opened my eyes to show me how unhealthy it really was. My lifestyle was destructive, I was addicted and obsessed which led me to extreme vanity, self-promotion, and still attention-seeking. My husband's dedication to me wasn't enough. The online attention wasn't enough. I was battling multiple addictions, working out, eating right, still smoking, and drinking. I was holding on to years of anger, unforgiveness, feelings of emptiness, and brokenness. Constantly waiting for the ball to drop. Waiting for the next person to hurt me or leave me. I needed to truly heal, and I had no idea how to.

Instead of dealing with my emotions, I bottled them up, and swept them under a rug, or so I thought. I just dealt with them in unhealthy ways. I went outside of my marriage multiple times, seeking love, seeking to fill a gaping hole in my heart that I thought could be filled by someone else. If I could just get someone to love me perfectly and in my way, I would be healed.

In 2020, I had a wake-up call. What started as a "Covid-rabbit hole", turned into a life-changing encounter with God. I was fighting my own battles for so long; God called me to let Him fight them for me. When you hit rock bottom and fall to your knees and beg God to take it all away, don't be surprised if He calls you to do hard things to heal. He did for me with quickness.

I was working a very well-paying job from home, and I was starting to be transformed by the grace of God. I had felt Him nudging me for quite some time to confess my sins to my husband. God already had forgiven me; it was my husband's turn to forgive me if he would.

The morning I woke up and decided to finally say yes to God, was the day I had no idea just how much of God's grace I would really see. I lost that amazing paying job that same day I was to confess to my husband about the secret life I had lived for a good two(+) years. Mind you, by this time, the secret life was thankfully in my past and no longer still going on. But God knew it needed to come out in the open.

I attempted to refuse to tell my husband what I had already told God I would confess. But God pressed it on my heart so strongly and with such power. I kept hearing Him say to my heart "just rip off the Band-Aid." So, I did. And for a moment, I felt as if my world was never going to be the same again, not only did I lose my job, but now I was going to be a broke single mom with nowhere to go. Yet, at the same time, I had this peace that washed over me. I knew I was going to be ok no matter what, because for once in my life, I was seeking the right things in life. I was seeking God.

God's grace came flooding in a way I had never thought possible. I had prayed for my husband's forgiveness, but I never thought I would actually get it. I saw God's grace through my husband when he did forgive me and didn't leave me. I give all the credit to God, if it wasn't for the changes He was making in me, I know my marriage would have been over. We renewed our vows in 2020, this time, with Christ at the center of our marriage.

God has been on the move ever since in big ways. I'd love to say that the moves have all been sunshine and rainbows, but there have been many storms and valleys since that day. There has been a lot of pruning in our lives. More pruning of vanity, religion, self-promotion, relationships, addictions, and more. It's been an ongoing learning process to take my thoughts captive and line them up with God's will.

I have failed as a mother as I began my walk with Christ with a religious mindset because I didn't know about the relationship side. I was trying to lead by the example I grew up with. Yet,

I was missing a vital part of my walk with Christ. To love others as He loves us. To follow His ways, not mine.

He is still working on me and in me. He is showing me what it is like to walk with Christ and not just go to church. To be less like me, and more like Him. I fail at this daily but He has never left me. I have watched Him move mountains in my life and seen life-changing miracles happen over the last couple of years. He has not only mended my broken heart, but He is mending broken relationships by His Grace and I know He will continue to do so.

I am now learning to stop being so fearful of saying yes to God, and that I can trust Him when He calls me to do big and small things for Him. I still have a rebellious mindset and I have fought back and told God no many times. I am learning that I have a Father I can trust, that loves me unconditionally, who sees me and will never abandon me. I no longer want to fight for attention because I have His. My flesh still gets the best of me, but I want my life to reflect being sold out and on fire for the one who rescued me from the depths of my brokenness and the pits of hell. I know God wants to use my pain for His purpose, to use my tests for His testimony, and all my messes for His message of grace and Love. He is going to use this story for His glory. I am ready to say YES to God!

This is my rescue story in progress. There is no "the end" till "THE END."