

A portrait of James Hughes, a man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a dark jacket over a dark shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred blue.

My TESTIMONY

James Hughes

EARLY TEENS

Preface - Early Teens

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A Prayer to Jesus

Heavenly Father,

In the quiet of this moment, I pause to lift my heart and spirit to You, seeking words that resonate with the melody of Your grace. I invite You, Lord Jesus, to captivate these pages,

to breathe Your life into my words, and to use this testimony as a vessel of Your transformative power.

With an open heart and a spirit willing, I surrender the pen of my life into Your hands. Guide my thoughts and my reflections, that they may echo the depth of Your love and the reality of Your presence in the lives of Your children. May this journey inked on paper be a testament to Your enduring faithfulness and a beacon of hope for the weary soul.

I pray, Lord, that through these words, hearts may be stirred, spirits uplifted, and eyes opened to the intimate ways You move within us. Let this testimony bear witness to the profound impact of Your love, the kind that transforms, heals, and renews.

As I share the story of how I came to know You, how I stumbled and was caught in Your grace, may it inspire others to open the doors of their hearts to You. For when we entrust You with the keys of our hearts, You embark us on a journey of inward transformation—surpassing our imaginations and transcending our understanding.

May this book serve as an invitation for all who seek, a whisper of Your love to those who doubt, and a declaration of Your mighty works in our lives. Let it be a source of renewal,

a path to deeper faith, and a celebration of the miracle that is life in You.

In Your holy and precious name, I pray,

Amen.

Chapter 1 - Early Teens

Learning faith in darkness.

From a tender age of thirteen, I was acutely aware of a difference that set me apart from my peers. It wasn't just the countless trips to the pediatrician or the diagnosis my mother fervently sought—it was a profound sense of being special, distinct in a way that was both challenging and enlightening. The revelation of having Asperger's, nestled within the autism spectrum, marked the onset of a lifelong learning curve, a journey fraught with challenges yet rich in potential for growth.

The prescription of Ritalin, a decision aimed at managing my ADHD, introduced an unforeseen battle. The medication, akin to speed in its makeup, ensnared me in a web of emotional numbness, severing the connections that bound me to the world of feelings and empathy. This emotional isolation was a stark contrast to the vibrant emotional life I yearned for, leaving me adrift in a sea of disconnection.

High school brought with it a stark realization of my social inadequacies. My inability to navigate the complex web of

teenage social dynamics led to numerous emotional breakdowns, each deepening the chasm of my isolation. It was a period marked by introspection and a growing awareness of the barriers my condition erected between me and the world around me.

Enter Robert, the youth worker whose message of hope and love under the banner of Jesus Christ offered a stark contrast to my lived experience. The allure of fairy bread and chocolate milk at his meetings might have been the initial draw, but it was the substance of his message that began to sow seeds of curiosity in my heart—a curiosity about faith, hope, and a love unlike any I had known.

As I delved into New Age practices, seeking solace in crystals and energy healing, a subtle yet undeniable shift began to unfold within me. This new path, illuminated by Robert's unwavering acceptance and the genuine interest he showed in my life, sparked the first glimmers of a dawn yet unseen. It was as though a light had been kindled in the depths of my soul, guiding me towards a truth I had yet to fully comprehend.

Robert's role in my journey cannot be overstated. His acceptance of my quirks and challenges laid the foundation for a transformative realization: that I was worthy of love and belonging, just as I was. This acceptance heralded the

dawn of my faith, a gradual awakening to the light of Jesus's love—a light that promised renewal and transformation.

In the months that followed, my relationship with Robert deepened, driven by a thirst for understanding. How could this light transform the darkness of my emotions? How was such freedom possible? These questions became the compass guiding my exploration of faith, leading me ever closer to the heart of Jesus's message.

As I drew closer to Robert, seeking understanding and craving the light that seemed to emanate from his very being, a myriad of questions flooded my mind. How could such lightness exist amidst the heavy, dark emotions that had become my constant companions? The concept of this light being freely available to me was both bewildering and incredibly enticing. Why did I feel this inexplicable pull towards something I had barely scratched the surface of understanding?

Robert's patience was a testament to the love he preached. With every question I hurled his way, he responded not with answers that could be easily digested but with invitations to explore, to seek, and to knock on the door that would lead to true understanding. He introduced me to the stories of Jesus—not just as historical accounts, but as living, breathing testimonies of love, redemption, and hope.

It was during these conversations that I began to see the world around me in a different light. The trees seemed to whisper stories of creation, the wind carried melodies of freedom, and the very earth beneath my feet spoke of a foundation stronger than any I had ever known. This was the handiwork of a Creator who delighted in His creation, who sought a relationship with us beyond anything I had ever experienced.

One evening, under a sky painted with the vibrant hues of sunset, Robert and I sat on the bench outside the school. It was here, amidst the tranquillity of nature, that I found myself pouring out my heart to him. I spoke of my struggles, my fears, and the deep sense of unworthiness that had plagued me for so long. With every word that left my lips, I felt a weight lifting, a burden easing.

Robert listened, truly listened, and when I had finished, he simply said, “Jesus understands. More than that, He loves you exactly as you are. He’s not waiting for you to be perfect or to have it all figured out. He’s waiting for you to invite Him into your heart, to let Him into the mess and the pain.”

That night, under the vast expanse of the starlit sky, I made a decision that would forever alter the course of my life. With Robert’s guidance, I uttered a simple yet profound prayer, inviting Jesus into my heart, and surrendering the keys of

my life to Him. It wasn't a magical moment filled with dramatic signs or wonders, but in the quiet of that evening, I felt a peace I had never known—a peace that surpassed all understanding.

In the days and weeks that followed, the transformation was gradual but undeniable. The heavy darkness that had once seemed impenetrable began to lift, replaced by a light that radiated from within. My emotional turmoil didn't disappear overnight, but I found a new strength to face it, a new perspective that brought hope amid despair.

Robert continued to mentor me, guiding me through the teachings of Jesus, helping me understand the depth of His love and the freedom that comes with truly knowing Him. As I grew in my faith, I realized that the light I had seen in Robert was not his own but a reflection of the Light of the World—Jesus Christ Himself.

As the days turned into months, my relationship with Robert and my newfound faith continued to deepen. Each conversation, each gathering, brought me closer to an understanding that had eluded me for so long. The light within me, once a faint glimmer, now shone with a steadiness that began to guide my steps. It was a light of hope, of faith, a beacon calling me to embrace a love so

profound, so unconditional, it defied every logic I had known.

In this period of seeking and learning, I encountered moments of profound revelation. The stories of Jesus, His compassion, His unfailing love, and His ultimate sacrifice spoke to the core of my being. I realized that the light I felt was His presence, a manifestation of His love that sought to fill the voids within me. This realization brought about a profound sense of peace, a tranquility that I had never experienced. The darkness that had once enveloped my spirit began to recede, overshadowed by the overwhelming sense of being loved, being valued not for what I could do or understand but simply for who I was.

The questions that had once tormented me began to find their answers in the quiet moments of prayer and reflection. “How can this light be free?” I wondered. The answer lay in the grace of Jesus, a gift unearned and freely given. “Why do I feel this light?” It was because I was seen, known, and loved by a God who had been calling out to me through the darkness, waiting patiently for me to turn towards His radiance.

It was in these early days of my faith journey that I started to grasp the essence of what it meant to be a follower of Christ. It wasn't about adhering to a set of rules or performing

religious rituals; it was about entering into a relationship with Jesus, allowing Him to work within me, transforming my heart and renewing my mind. The joy and love I experienced were not just emotions; they were the very presence of Jesus in my life, a testament to His promise to be with us, to guide us, and to bring us into the fullness of His love.

As the initial chapters of my faith journey were being written in the depths of my heart, a new chapter was about to unfold—a chapter that would challenge me, shape me, and ultimately draw me even closer to understanding the boundless love of Jesus.

In those six months, as I gravitated towards the light Robert introduced me to, I began to question everything I knew. It was as if scales were falling from my eyes, allowing me to see the world, my struggles, and myself in a new light. I learned about Jesus, not just as a historical figure, but as a living presence capable of transforming the darkest of nights into the brightest of dawns. This newfound knowledge was both exhilarating and daunting.

The more I understood, the more I realized how much I needed this light in my life. It wasn't just about finding a way out of the darkness; it was about embracing a truth that spoke to the core of my being. Robert's teachings, coupled

with the genuine warmth and acceptance I felt in his presence, made me ponder deeply about my own existence and the purpose of my struggles.

It was during this period of profound introspection and spiritual awakening that I began to experience a series of small yet significant miracles. Instances where I felt an inexplicable peace in moments of turmoil, or when I found solace in prayer during times of loneliness, started to become more frequent. These experiences, though subtle, were undeniably powerful, reinforcing my budding faith and the belief that perhaps, I was on the path to something truly transformative.

Chapter 2 - Early Teens

Arguments and Disagreements with an Unexpected Diagnosis.

However, this path was not without its thorns. My journey towards faith was marked by a series of conflicts and challenges, notably with my mother. Our relationship, already strained by misunderstandings and emotional turbulence, was further complicated by my new spiritual direction. The battles we fought were not just verbal; they were battles of the spirit, tearing at the very fabric of our familial bond.

As I delved deeper into my faith, attending church and building a relationship with the senior pastor, Richard, I found myself at a crossroads. Richard's example, his passionate pursuit of a relationship with Jesus that transcended societal norms, offered me a glimpse of something profoundly different. Yet, this growing spiritual awareness only seemed to widen the gap between my mother and me.

The night of one of our most heated arguments, left alone and unsure of how to care for myself, I reached out to Megan, a figure who had come to embody the spiritual maternal presence I so desperately needed. Her guidance, in something as simple as opening a can of baked beans, was a poignant reminder of the gaps in my life—gaps filled with longing for love, acceptance, and basic care.

It was also during this tumultuous time that I was diagnosed with a pilonidal cyst, adding a layer of physical pain and distress to the emotional and spiritual turmoil I was already experiencing. The condition, as physically debilitating as it was, became a metaphor for the internal wounds I was carrying—wounds that required daily attention and care, much like the packing and covering of the cyst.

Amidst the battles with my mother, the struggles with my health, and the sinking grades, my mental health began to deteriorate. Thoughts of suicide crept in, painting my world in shades of despair. Yet, it was the unwavering support system of the church, led by figures like Robert and Richard, that anchored me to life. Their presence, guidance, and the safe haven they provided were the bulwarks against the tide of depression threatening to engulf me.

The intervention of the school counsellor, prompted by fears for my mental health, marked a critical point in my journey.

It was a stark reminder of the fragility of my state but also of the network of support that had formed around me—a network that was, in many ways, the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out to me in my darkest hour.

My first Pentecostal experience at church was nothing short of revolutionary. For the first time, I witnessed the tangible manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power. As I observed others around me, visibly moved and transformed by this power, my curiosity was piqued. Richard's humorous invitation to experience prayer was the catalyst for what would become a pivotal moment in my faith journey.

As Richard laid his hands on me, the sensation that coursed through my body was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was as if a dormant volcano within me had erupted, releasing years of pent-up emotions, fears, and pains. The physical act of falling to the ground symbolized a deeper spiritual surrender, a letting go of the barriers I had built around my heart. In that moment, the Lord began the work of breaking open the hardened shell I had become, allowing the light of His love to penetrate the deepest recesses of my being.

This encounter marked the beginning of a profound transformation. It was as though I was being reborn, not just spiritually, but emotionally and mentally. The experience of

being “slain in the Spirit” was not just an emotional release; it was a divine intervention, a clear sign that God was real, active, and deeply invested in my healing and restoration.

As I reflect on this journey, it becomes clear that the path to faith is not a linear one. It is a journey marked by moments of revelation, deep pain, and incredible joy. The battles I faced, both internal and external, were not merely obstacles but opportunities for growth, for deepening my reliance on God, and for understanding the true meaning of grace.

The transformation I underwent, from a place of darkness to one of light, from a state of despair to one of hope, is a testament to the power of faith. It is a story not just of personal triumph but of the collective strength found in a community of believers, a reminder that we are never truly alone in our struggles.

As my home life grew increasingly toxic, marked by my mother’s insistence on severing ties with my father, an unexpected invitation from Stephen offered a brief respite. He invited me on a holiday to Queensland, marking a series of firsts for me: my first plane flight, my first experience out of state, and my first holiday. This trip was a beacon of light amidst the turmoil at home, offering a glimpse into a world beyond the confines of my immediate struggles.

However, the shadow of my health issues loomed large. The pilonidal cyst that had been a source of physical and emotional pain required immediate surgical intervention. The weekend slated for a final check before scheduling the surgery coincided with one of the most intense arguments I can recall having with my mother. This argument, set against the backdrop of my impending medical procedure, underscored the deepening rift between us.

The day before a crucial appointment with the surgeon, our disagreement reached a boiling point. Coming from a New Age background, my mother found my newfound Christian faith unacceptable. This clash of beliefs only served to exacerbate the already fraught relationship between us, driving a wedge that seemed insurmountable.

Amidst this chaos, a profound spiritual experience at church provided a stark contrast to the conflict at home. Overwhelmed by pain and confusion, I was immediately comforted by the church elders upon my arrival. Their prayers in a quiet corner of the hall invited the Holy Spirit's presence, marked by a brilliant light that pierced my closed eyelids. This light, visible to both me and those praying with me, was a clear affirmation of God's presence and power, a divine intervention that offered peace amidst turmoil.

Chapter 3 - Early Teens

Self-care and Changes to My Environment at Home.

The continuous escalation of conflicts at home, particularly concerning my faith, led to tangible changes in my living situation. With food becoming scarce at home unless prepared by my mother, and becoming increasingly reliant on my mother's partner for food money, the situation became untenable. The school counsellor, aware of my circumstances and the spiritual encounter I had experienced, reached out to my grandmother with an ultimatum: if the living conditions with my mother remained unchanged, immediate action would be taken to remove me from the environment.

My grandmother Norma, already in her sixties and having previously taken care of my estranged brother, stepped in to provide the support I desperately needed. After a lengthy conversation with the counsellor, she decided to assume parental care to ensure an improvement in my living conditions. The question of how this transition would occur loomed large, given my mother's instability and the emotional and physical neglect I had endured.

The answer came unexpectedly during another heated argument with my mother. When she offhandedly remarked, “If you don’t like it here, go and live with your grandmother,” I seized the opportunity, replying, “Okay, I will.” This decision led me to pack my bags and call my grandmother, who quickly came to my rescue.

Moving in with my grandmother marked the beginning of a profound transformation. For the first time in my life, I began to experience a range of emotions that had previously been inaccessible to me. This change in my environment, away from the toxic atmosphere of my mother’s home, allowed me to explore and express my feelings freely. The stability and care provided by my grandmother opened up new avenues for healing and growth, both emotionally and spiritually.

This transition was not just a change of residence; it was a pivotal moment in my journey toward self-care and understanding the importance of a nurturing environment. With my grandmother’s support, I was able to focus on recovering from the emotional scars of the past, and building a foundation for a future guided by faith and love.

As I settled into this new chapter of my life, the challenges I faced were far from over. Yet, the shift in my living situation brought a sense of hope and renewal, a testament to the

power of change and the resilience of the human spirit when supported by love and faith.

This newfound stability under my grandmother Norma's care was like drawing a fresh breath after being submerged underwater for too long. Her home became my sanctuary, a place where I could truly rest, heal, and contemplate the whirlwind of changes that had upended my life. It was here, in the quiet moments of reflection, that the full impact of my journey began to crystallize.

With the emotional turmoil of my previous living situation behind me, I found myself exploring what self-care truly meant. It was no longer about merely surviving each day but thriving, nurturing my body and soul in ways I had never considered before. My grandmother, with her gentle wisdom and unwavering support, introduced me to routines and practices that prioritized my well-being, teaching me the importance of self-compassion and patience in the healing process.

Moreover, this period of transition was a time for spiritual deepening. Away from the conflicts that had marred my faith journey, I could now engage with my beliefs without fear of judgment or reprisal. My grandmother, though not as overtly religious, respected my faith and encouraged my exploration of it. This freedom allowed me to delve deeper

into prayer and study, solidifying my relationship with God and understanding His place in my life.

The change in my environment brought unexpected blessings in the form of community and connection. With my grandmother's encouragement, I became more involved in church activities, finding a sense of belonging among those who shared my beliefs. These relationships, built on mutual faith and understanding, were instrumental in reinforcing my identity as a child of God. They reminded me that I was not alone in my journey, that there were others who had faced similar struggles and found solace in their faith.

As I adjusted to life with my grandmother, I began to see the world through a lens of gratitude. The trials I had endured, while painful, had shaped me in profound ways, teaching me resilience, compassion, and the true meaning of strength. I learned that self-care was not a solitary act but a communal one, shared with those who lifted me up and supported me through my darkest times.

This chapter of my life, marked by healing and growth, was a testament to the power of change. It demonstrated that, even in the depths of despair, there is always the potential for renewal and hope. My journey from a place of pain and conflict to one of healing and faith was not just a personal

victory; it was a reminder of God's presence and guidance in even the most challenging circumstances.

This period was also marked by a significant focus on spiritual healing. The healing of the cyst, while daunting, was a necessary step toward overcoming the challenges posed by the pilonidal cyst. The recovery process, supported by Norma's care, allowed me to reflect on the resilience of the human body and spirit. It was a tangible reminder of the power of faith and prayer in the healing journey, reinforcing my belief in God's providence and care.

This nurturing environment fostered a sense of belonging and community that had been missing from my life. The church community, once a source of solace during difficult times, now became a family. The relationships I built within this community were instrumental in my spiritual journey, offering guidance, support, and unconditional love.

The lessons learned during this period were invaluable. I discovered the strength in vulnerability, the beauty of genuine connection, and the peace that comes from surrendering to God's will. These revelations were not just milestones in my spiritual journey; they were stepping stones toward a future filled with hope and purpose.

As I look back on the journey from darkness to light, from conflict to peace, I am filled with gratitude for the divine guidance and the unwavering support of those who stood by me. The transition into Norma's home was a turning point, marking the beginning of a new chapter filled with possibilities.

With each passing day, my faith grows stronger, and my heart more open to the lessons and blessings that lie ahead. This chapter of my life, rich with growth and healing, sets the stage for the continued journey of discovering God's plan for me. The journey is far from over, but with a foundation built on faith, supported by love, and guided by divine light, I move forward with confidence and hope.

Chapter 4 - Early Teens

A New Beginning in Healing and Faith.

The transformative power of faith and the profound impact of spiritual experiences became even more evident during a Sunday church service, marking a significant turning point in my journey of healing and self-discovery. This moment, engraved in my memory, symbolized a departure from the grayscale existence that had characterized much of my life up to that point. My life, fraught with dysfunction and devoid of peace, mirrored a movie lacking in color—filled with wild experiences that led only to destruction. Yet, it was within the nurturing embrace of the church community that my recovery from this pervasive trauma began to take root.

As I stood up for prayer, surrounded once again by the prayer team, the elders of the church encircled me, ready to intercede on my behalf. Their profound sensitivity to the movement of the Holy Spirit in that moment was palpable; they knew it was a time of significant impact in my spiritual journey. As the prayers ascended, one of the elders' prayers catalyzed an overwhelming experience: I was slain in the Spirit. Tears streamed down my face as years of pent-up

pain began to dissolve, marking the first time in my life I truly allowed myself to feel. A light permeated my being, and I found myself collapsing to the ground, overwhelmed by a sense of release and liberation.

The emotions that washed over me were unlike anything I had ever experienced. As I stood up, my tears were replaced with laughter, my sorrow with joy. The transformation was so profound that those around me could only watch in wonder at the sudden shift in my demeanor. Overcome with an irrepressible joy, I sought out Robert, bursting into the room where he was hosting Sunday school. My announcement, “ROBERT! I’M HEALED! I CAN FEEL,” elicited a response that was both affirming and heartwarming. His laughter and loving smile in acknowledgment of my healing was a clear affirmation of the journey I had embarked upon.

This experience marked the beginning of my emotional availability, a pivotal moment where the journey of unlearning old patterns and re-learning how to live truly began. The significance of this moment extended far beyond the immediate emotional release; it signified the start of a deeper, more profound healing process. My encounter with the Holy Spirit that Sunday was a clear demarcation line between the life I had known and the life I was stepping into

—a life marked by healing, growth, and an ever-deepening faith.

The process of unlearning the dysfunctional patterns of my past and re-learning how to navigate the world with a renewed sense of purpose and identity was not without its challenges. Yet, the support and guidance of the church community, alongside the newfound connection with my emotions, provided a solid foundation upon which I could build. The journey ahead was as much about rediscovering who I was in Christ as it was about healing from the wounds of my past.

This chapter of my life, rich with spiritual encounters and marked by significant personal growth, underscored the transformative power of faith and the importance of community in the healing process. It was a testament to the fact that, no matter how deep the wounds of our past, there is always hope for renewal and restoration in Jesus Christ. My story, from the depths of despair to the heights of spiritual awakening, serves as a beacon of hope for all who find themselves lost in the grayscale of life, reminding them that color, joy, and peace are possible through faith and surrender to God's will.

As I continued to navigate this journey of healing and discovery, the lessons learned and the growth experienced

during this period would become foundational to my understanding of faith, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The path ahead was filled with both challenges and victories, but with a heart open to God's transformative work, I was ready to face whatever came my way, armed with a newfound strength and a deep sense of purpose.

The journey of healing and transformation that began with my profound spiritual experiences in church marked the onset of a new chapter in my life, one characterized by self-discovery and a deeper understanding of my own feelings and emotions. As I navigated this newfound emotional landscape, I was also awakened to a sense of purpose within the church community. This chapter of my life was not just about healing; it was about stepping into a role of service, guided by a desire to share the freedom and liberty I had found in my faith.

For the first time, I was truly in touch with the breadth of my emotions. Feelings that had once seemed foreign or inaccessible to me were now vivid and tangible. Joy, sorrow, peace, and love—I experienced these emotions in their fullness, each one a testament to the healing work that had been done in my heart. This emotional awakening was not simply a personal milestone; it was the key that unlocked a deeper empathy and connection with those around me.

Navigating this new emotional reality required patience and grace, both with myself and with others. I learned to sit with my feelings, to understand them rather than push them away. This process of self-discovery was challenging, yet incredibly rewarding. It allowed me to connect with others on a level I had never experienced before, offering comfort and understanding that was born of my own journey through pain and healing.

As my emotional landscape expanded, so too did my desire to serve within the church. The same community that had supported me through my darkest times now became the place where I sought to give back. I was inspired to join the prayer team, a decision that was as much about my own spiritual growth as it was about serving others.

Praying for others with freedom and liberty was a profound experience. Each prayer was an act of faith, a belief in the power of God to heal, transform, and renew, just as He had done in my life. This service was not just about the words spoken in prayer; it was an expression of gratitude, a way to share the love and peace I had received. It was a reminder that my journey, while deeply personal, was also part of a larger story of redemption and grace.

Serving in the church and praying for others taught me the true meaning of freedom in faith. It was not just freedom

from the pain and struggles of my past, but freedom to live a life of purpose, to love deeply, and to serve joyfully. This liberty was not bound by the constraints of my previous experiences; it was a freedom that transcended circumstances, offering hope and peace in the midst of life's storms.

This freedom also manifested in how I approached my own spiritual journey. I learned to pray with a sense of openness and surrender, trusting in God's sovereignty and His perfect plan for my life. The liberty I found in prayer was mirrored in the way I lived my life, marked by a willingness to follow where God led, even into the unknown.

The theme of self-discovery and service that defines this chapter of my life is a testament to the transformative power of faith. It is a reminder that our journeys, no matter how marked by pain and struggle, can lead to profound growth and purpose. In discovering my own feelings and emotions, I was not only healed but also equipped to serve others with empathy and love. And in stepping into a role of service within the church, I found a freedom that continues to shape my walk with God.

As I reflect on this chapter, I am reminded of the journey still ahead. The path of self-discovery and service is not a destination but a continual process of growth and surrender.

With each step, I am learning more about the depth of God's love and the freedom that comes from living a life fully surrendered to Him.

As I ventured deeper into my journey of faith and healing, I found myself on a path of self-discovery, exploring the depth of my feelings and emotions in ways I had never before considered possible. This exploration was not just an inward journey; it also ignited a passion within me to serve within the church and to pray for others with a newfound freedom and liberty. My experiences of spiritual awakening and healing had instilled in me a desire to extend the same hope and restoration to those around me.

One service, as I stood praying at the back with the elders of the church, a profound sense of knowing stirred within my spirit. Amid the congregation of over 500 people, I sensed that someone was suffering from neck pain. This wasn't just a fleeting thought; it was a deep spiritual conviction that demanded action. With the service drawing to a close and the congregation rising from their seats, I felt an urgent need to act on this prompting.

With Megan by my side, we made our way downstairs to the person who had been on my heart throughout the service. Approaching her, I inquired about her condition, asking, "Do you have pain in your ear, your neck area?" Her response was

immediate and filled with surprise. “Yes! How did you know? I’ve had an X-ray, physio, chiro, and nobody can fix it!!!” she exclaimed. It was clear that her suffering was significant, and her journey to find relief had been long and fruitless.

Seizing the moment, I asked if I could pray for her. With her consent, I gently laid my hand on her neck, calling upon the Lord’s healing power. The moment I did, she jolted, leaping to her feet with a scream that filled the hall, “JAMES HEALED ME! MY NECK IS HEALED!” Her reaction was one of pure astonishment and joy. She ran around the hall, visibly overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, her joy uncontrollable.

This encounter marked my first experience of being used by God to facilitate healing. The woman’s immediate and tangible response to the prayer was a powerful testament to the reality of God’s power to heal and transform lives. Her declaration that her neck was healed, coupled with her exuberant reaction, was a moment of divine intervention that left an indelible mark on my heart and my journey of faith.

This experience of supernatural healing was not just a milestone in my spiritual journey; it was a catalyst for further growth and service within the church. It reinforced the belief that God could use me, despite my own struggles and past, to bring healing and hope to others. The freedom

and liberty I found in praying for others, especially witnessing the direct impact of those prayers, deepened my commitment to serving within the church and exploring the gifts of the Spirit.

The journey of self-discovery, understanding my emotions and feelings, and stepping into a role of serving others was a profound process of transformation. It taught me the power of faith in action, the importance of being sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the joy of seeing God's healing power at work. Serving in the church and praying for others became a vital part of my identity, shaping my understanding of what it means to live a life surrendered to God's will and purpose.

As I reflect on this journey, I am reminded that the path to self-discovery and spiritual service is one of continuous learning and growth. Each experience of praying for others, each moment of stepping out in faith, adds another layer to my understanding of God's love and power. It is a journey marked by moments of profound impact, both on my life and the lives of those I have had the privilege to pray for. This journey of faith, service, and healing continues to be a source of strength, inspiration, and unwavering hope as I walk forward, eager to see how God will continue to use me in the lives of others.

Following my first experience of supernatural healing within the church, I found myself standing at the threshold of a new realm of spiritual understanding and empowerment. This moment of healing was not just an isolated incident; it was the beginning of a deeper revelation of my gifting in the Holy Spirit. The empowerment I received through this experience was unlike anything I had encountered in the New Age realm. It was a profound realization that the gifts of the Spirit were real, tangible, and accessible to those who believed and were willing to be used by God.

As I delved deeper into the study of spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of healing, I began to understand the biblical foundation for such miracles. Passages from the Scriptures that spoke of healing and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers took on new meaning. I realized that what I had witnessed and been a part of was a fulfillment of the promise that believers would do greater works in Jesus' name. This understanding fueled my desire to seek God more earnestly, to understand His will, and to be a vessel for His power.

The empowerment I felt was distinct from any previous spiritual experiences I had in the New Age realm. In those practices, power often felt elusive, shrouded in mystery, and dependent on one's ability to harness and manipulate energies. In contrast, the power I experienced through the

Holy Spirit was freely given, not as a result of my efforts or abilities but as a manifestation of God's grace and love. It was an empowerment rooted in relationship—with God and with others—and marked by a desire to see lives transformed by the gospel.

This revelation of healing and gifting in the Holy Spirit prompted a significant shift in my identity. I was no longer just a seeker of truth; I was a bearer of God's power, called to bring healing and hope to those around me. This new identity was both humbling and exhilarating. It came with a sense of responsibility to steward the gifts I had been given wisely and to remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The journey into the gifts of the Spirit also brought about a deeper level of discernment. I learned to distinguish between the genuine move of God and the counterfeit experiences I had encountered in the New Age. This discernment was crucial as it guided me in my interactions with others, ensuring that what I imparted was rooted in God's truth and love.

My experiences of healing and the subsequent revelation of my spiritual gifting had a broader impact than I could have initially imagined. It opened doors for ministry opportunities within and beyond the church walls. I found myself praying for healing in various settings, witnessing

God's power at work in the lives of individuals from all walks of life. Each testimony of healing added to the growing conviction that God was moving powerfully in our time, just as He did in the days of the early church.

This journey of embracing the gift of healing and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit has been a transformative process. It has not only changed the trajectory of my spiritual journey but has also impacted the lives of those I have had the privilege to pray for. The revelation that God could use me, with all my flaws and past mistakes, to bring about healing and restoration in others has been one of the most humbling and exhilarating aspects of my walk with Him.

As I continue to explore the depths of this gifting, I remain in awe of God's goodness and faithfulness. The journey into the gifts of the Spirit is a journey of endless discovery, a testament to the boundless grace of God. It stands as a powerful reminder that when we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, there is no limit to how God can use us to impact the world around us. The empowerment I have experienced in the Holy Spirit far surpasses anything I encountered in the New Age realm, marking a profound shift in my understanding of true spiritual power and my role in God's kingdom.

Chapter 5 - Early Teens

Learning to Trust.

My early teens were not just a period of personal turmoil and spiritual awakening; they were also my introduction to a concept that would profoundly shape my understanding of faith and relationships: community. In the aftermath of my transformative experiences, I found myself being gently nudged into the heart of a community that was unlike any I had encountered before.

This community wasn't just a group of people who gathered to worship in the same building each week. It was a living, breathing embodiment of Christ's love—a network of individuals who genuinely cared for each other's well-being, both spiritually and physically. For someone like me, who had struggled with feelings of isolation and misunderstanding, this was a revelation.

One of the most daunting aspects of entering this new community was the challenge of getting to know people. For the first time, I was in an environment where people seemed genuinely interested in who I was, beyond the surface level.

These weren't superficial interactions; they were deep, meaningful conversations that often left me feeling both vulnerable and valued.

Building trust was an intricate dance. My past experiences had taught me to be cautious, to always wait for the other shoe to drop. But here, in this community, I was introduced to a different way of relating. People didn't just offer friendship; they lived it out through their actions. They showed up, they listened, and they extended grace in a way that mirrored the teachings of Jesus.

It was a gradual process, learning to trust that someone could have good intentions towards me. Every act of kindness, every word of encouragement, and every gesture of support was a brick in the foundation of trust we were building together. It wasn't always easy. There were moments of doubt and fear, times when I questioned the authenticity of their care. But at every turn, I was met with a consistency that slowly eroded my defenses.

One of the most profound lessons I learned in this community was about intention. In the New Age practices of my past, intention was often a concept tied to personal desire or gain. But in the context of my faith community, intention took on a deeper, more selfless meaning.

I learned that to live intentionally within a community meant to actively seek the well-being of others, to pray for them, to support them in their struggles, and to celebrate their victories as if they were your own. It was about setting aside personal agendas to serve the greater good, to embody the love and sacrifice that Jesus demonstrated.

This understanding of intention radically changed my approach to relationships. I began to see interactions not just as opportunities for personal growth but as chances to contribute to the growth and enrichment of others. It was a shift from a mindset of scarcity—where I had to guard myself against potential harm—to one of abundance, where I could freely give of myself, trusting that the community would reciprocate in kind.

As my trust in the community deepened, so did my desire to contribute. I started small, volunteering for tasks that seemed inconsequential but were essential to the life of the community. Whether it was setting up chairs before a service, staying late to clean up, or offering to pray for someone going through a tough time, each act of service was a step towards deeper integration into the community.

This phase of my journey wasn't just about doing; it was about becoming. With each act of service, I was not only contributing to the needs of the community but also shaping

my own identity. I was becoming someone who lived out their faith through action, who saw the value in every task, no matter how small, and who understood that every contribution mattered.

Through these experiences, I also discovered my own spiritual gifts. Prayer, which had once been a personal lifeline, became a tool for ministry. I found that I had a knack for intercessory prayer, for standing in the gap for others and bringing their needs before God. This gift of prayer wasn't just about speaking words into the air; it was about connecting with the heart of God for the people He loved.

The more I engaged with the community, the deeper my relationships became. Trust was no longer a scarce commodity but a plentiful resource. I learned to open up about my struggles, to share my victories, and to be genuinely present for others doing the same. This mutual vulnerability was the soil in which true friendships grew, relationships that were rooted in faith and bolstered by shared experiences of God's grace.

In this community, I found a family. Not a family bound by blood but by a shared commitment to following Jesus and living out His command to love one another. This was a love

that didn't shy away from the messiness of life but embraced it, offering hope and healing in the midst of pain.

My journey of discovering community, building trust, and learning about intention laid a foundation for my life that would endure far beyond my early teens. It taught me about the power of belonging, the strength found in collective faith, and the beauty of a life lived for others. This chapter of my story is a testament to the transformative impact of Christian community—a community that not only welcomed me with open arms but also equipped me to extend the same invitation to others.

This foundation, firmly rooted in the fertile soil of community and trust, became the bedrock of my spiritual journey. It was in this nurturing environment that I began to truly understand the breadth and depth of God's love—not just as a concept to be studied, but as a reality to be lived and shared. The Christian community taught me that belonging wasn't merely about being included; it was about being part of something much larger than myself, a collective endeavor to embody Christ's love in the world.

As my sense of belonging deepened, I noticed a ripple effect in other areas of my life. School, which had once felt like a battleground of social navigation, became an arena where I could practice the lessons of empathy and kindness I was

learning within the church. The confidence I gained from being accepted and valued in my faith community empowered me to reach out to others who, like me, were searching for a place to belong.

This wasn't always easy. Extending an invitation to others, especially those not familiar with the Christian faith, required a level of vulnerability and intentionality that was often met with skepticism or indifference. Yet, driven by the conviction of what I had experienced, I persevered, guided by the Holy Spirit's prompting to share the love I had received.

Service became a significant theme of my life during these formative years. I learned that serving others wasn't just about fulfilling a need; it was a form of worship, a way to thank God for His blessings by blessing others. This understanding transformed my approach to service. It was no longer about the accolades or even the immediate results of my efforts but about being faithful to God's call to love and serve.

This perspective shift was particularly impactful when I began to engage in outreach programs. Working with those less fortunate, I saw firsthand the stark realities of poverty, addiction, and despair. Yet, even in the midst of such hardship, I witnessed the power of hope and the difference a community of believers could make in the lives of those who

had lost everything. These experiences solidified my belief in the Gospel's transformative power, not just for the next life but for this one.

Of course, my journey wasn't without its challenges. There were moments of doubt, times when the weight of what I had experienced at home and the struggles I faced seemed to overshadow the progress I had made. Yet, it was in these moments that the community stood by me the most, offering prayers, support, and a reminder of God's faithfulness.

One of the most profound lessons I learned during this time was the importance of perseverance in faith. The Christian life, I came to understand, is not a sprint but a marathon, filled with ups and downs, victories and setbacks. Trusting in God's plan, even when the path seemed unclear, became a daily exercise in faith and surrender.

As I reflect on the impact of my early teens and the role of the Christian community in shaping my path, I am filled with gratitude for the journey thus far. The seeds of faith, hope, and love that were planted in those years have grown into a deep-rooted tree, providing shade and shelter not just for me but for those I encounter along the way.

Looking forward, I see a future bright with possibility. The lessons of community, service, and faith that were so integral to my story continue to guide me as I navigate the complexities of life. My hope is to carry forward the legacy of love and transformation I received, extending the invitation of belonging to a new generation.

In this way, my testimony becomes more than just a personal narrative; it is a living testament to the enduring power of God's love, a love that invites us all into an ever-expanding circle of grace and redemption. As I close this chapter of my story, I do so with a heart full of anticipation for the chapters yet to be written, trusting that the same God who guided me through my early teens will continue to lead me into a future filled with His purpose and presence.

Chapter 6 - Early Teens

The Unspoken Struggle.

In the quiet moments of reflection, the weight of unspoken truths pressed heavily on my soul. The journey through faith, filled with newfound hope and spiritual awakening, now tread alongside a shadow, a secret so deeply ingrained within me it felt like a second skin. This secret, my same-sex attraction, was a silent specter at every prayer, every gathering, and every moment of communion with the divine. The fear of this truth coming to light, of being seen as fundamentally flawed or worse, unworthy of the love and acceptance I had found, was a constant companion.

Hiding something so integral to my being was like holding my breath indefinitely, hoping against hope to remain submerged without being noticed. The effort of concealment was exhaustive, a relentless endeavor that consumed energy, thought, and spirit. Each interaction within the church, every fellowship, was tinged with the latent fear that someone might see through the facade, might notice the incongruence between the person I presented and the truth I harbored.

The emotional toll of this secret was profound. Joy was always tempered by fear, and sorrow felt doubly heavy, laden with the realization that my deepest sorrow could not be shared or understood by those around me. The isolation was paradoxical; I was surrounded by a community that offered love and support, yet I stood apart, separated by an invisible barrier of my own making.

This isolation was not merely physical but deeply spiritual. My conversations with God were punctuated by pleas for understanding and guidance. How could I reconcile the truth of my identity with the teachings I was embracing? The fear of rejection by my church community was mirrored by a deeper, more insidious fear—that of rejection by God Himself. This fear was a specter that haunted my prayers, a question mark that lingered after every scripture reading, every sermon that spoke of love and acceptance.

The cognitive dissonance of living a divided life was disorienting. I knew myself to be a person of faith, drawn to the teachings of Christ about love, compassion, and acceptance. Yet, I also knew myself to be someone who could potentially be ostracized for an intrinsic part of my identity. The discord between these two truths created a chasm within my spirit, a space where doubt and fear flourished.

Living with this secret also meant living in a state of constant vigilance. Every word, every action, was measured against its potential to reveal too much. This state of heightened awareness was exhausting, a mental and emotional balancing act that left little room for peace. The fear of slip-ups, of inadvertently revealing my secret through a misplaced word or an unguarded expression, was a source of constant anxiety.

Amidst this turmoil, the moments of genuine connection within the church were bittersweet. I cherished the sense of belonging, the communal worship, and the shared pursuit of spiritual growth. Yet, these moments were always shadowed by the realization that my belonging was conditional, contingent on the concealment of my true self. The fear of losing these connections, of being cast out, was a sharp undercurrent to the love and acceptance I experienced.

This internal conflict was not merely about fear of judgment from others but reflected a deeper struggle with self-acceptance. The teachings of the church that had offered so much hope and solace now seemed to stand in judgment against a part of myself I could not change. The promise of unconditional love from God was a concept I clung to, even as I feared my own unworthiness.

The emotional landscape of my life during this period was a terrain of peaks and valleys, moments of profound connection with God and the community, interspersed with deep valleys of isolation and fear. The spiritual growth I experienced was real and deeply felt, but it was growth that occurred in the shadow of a great secret, a truth about myself that I felt could not be reconciled with the life I was building.

In this context, the concept of grace became a focal point of my spiritual contemplation. The grace I had learned about, which promised acceptance and love without precondition, became the lens through which I began to view my struggle. Could this grace extend to someone like me? Was there a place within the vastness of God's love for a person who harbored a truth so at odds with the perceived norms of the faith community?

The journey through this period of my life was a solitary one, a path walked in the quiet spaces of my heart and mind. Yet, it was also a journey marked by moments of unexpected beauty, instances where the presence of God felt so near, so tender, that the fear momentarily lifted, replaced by a sense of divine compassion and understanding. These moments, fleeting and precious, offered glimpses of a possible future where fear did not hold sway, where my identity could be embraced in its entirety, both by myself and by the community I had grown to love.

In the end, the fear of discovery, the emotional turmoil of hiding, and the spiritual wrestling with my identity were all part of a larger narrative. They were the dark before the dawn, the necessary night before the arrival of a new day marked by understanding, acceptance, and a deeper, more inclusive love. This chapter of my life, though fraught with challenge, was also a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the boundless capacity of faith to guide us through the darkest of times towards a future filled with light.

The solitude of this internal struggle was a crucible, transforming fear and uncertainty into a forge for character and faith. Each day presented itself as a paradox, a battle between the desire to be fully known and the instinct to conceal, to protect the fragile edifice of belonging I had constructed within my church community. Yet, within this battle, a profound transformation was underway—a slow, often painful realization that my identity, in all its complexity, was not a deviation from the divine plan but a part of the wondrous tapestry of creation God had intended.

This realization did not come easily nor quickly. It was the culmination of countless moments of prayer, of tears shed in the quiet sanctity of God's presence, and of wrestling with the scriptures that I had both clung to for comfort and recoiled from in fear. The verses that spoke of love,

acceptance, and grace began to overshadow those marred by interpretation and condemnation. I started to see the Bible not as a weapon wielded to exclude and judge but as a love letter, written to all of humanity, including those who, like me, had felt on the margins of God's grace.

The journey through this dark night of the soul was not a solitary one, though it often felt so. In the silence of my prayers, I found a companion in the Holy Spirit, a presence that comforted, guided, and, at times, challenged me. This divine companionship was a beacon of hope, a reminder that even in the depths of my fear and isolation, I was not alone. God was with me, walking alongside me through the valley of shadows, leading me toward a place of peace and acceptance.

The fear of discovery, which had once loomed over my every moment, began to lessen its grip on my heart. The realization that my worth in the eyes of God was not contingent on my sexuality, that my identity was a divine creation, brought a sense of liberation previously unfathomable. This was not a sudden epiphany but a gradual awakening, a dawning understanding that the love of God was expansive enough to encompass all of me, including the parts I had feared were unlovable.

As this understanding deepened, so too did my relationships within the church. Though I had not yet spoken my truth aloud, the shift within me was palpable. I approached my interactions with a newfound authenticity, no longer hiding behind the facade of conformity but engaging with my community as my true self, as much as my fears would allow. This authenticity did not go unnoticed, and in the eyes of some, I found reflections of the acceptance I so deeply yearned for.

The decision to eventually share my truth with the world, to step out of the shadows and into the light of authenticity, was a horizon that slowly brightened. The path to this decision was paved with moments of divine assurance, with the strengthening of my faith, and with the realization that my story could be a beacon of hope for others walking a similar path. The thought of being a vessel of God's love, of embodying the grace that had been so freely given to me, became a guiding light, leading me toward a future where fear no longer held dominion over my spirit.

This chapter of my life, marked by the struggle to reconcile my faith with my identity, was indeed a dark night. But it was also a journey toward dawn, toward a morning filled with the promise of understanding, acceptance, and a love that knows no bounds. It was a testament to the truth that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, that our stories

are woven into the fabric of God's grand design, and that within the heart of the divine, there is room for everyone, including those who have walked through the night, guided by the light of faith, toward the warm embrace of day.

Chapter 7 - Early Teens

The Courage to Be Seen.

The journey of reconciling my faith with my sexuality reached its zenith in a period of profound internal struggle. Each day, as I navigated this personal turmoil, the Holy Spirit's presence became a beacon of light, offering glimpses of hope and love amidst the darkness. This divine grace began to sow seeds of confidence within me, a fragile yet burgeoning sense of self that dared to imagine a life lived openly and authentically.

Encounters with two individuals from my church, who confided in me their own struggles with same-sex attraction, cracked the veneer I had meticulously maintained. Their vulnerability laid bare my own fears and the immense burden of carrying a secret that had become too heavy to bear alone. In the solitude of prayer, I reached a breaking point, pouring out my fears, desires, and pleas for guidance and protection to the Lord. The prayer was a surrender, an admission that the path I had walked in isolation was no longer sustainable. "Lord, they persecuted you, and I fear they will do the same to me. Please protect

me,” became the mantra of my heart, a plea for strength to face the unknown.

Buoyed by a newfound resolve, I took a step that would irrevocably change my journey. I composed a Facebook status, a declaration of my truth: “I’m actually gay and I’m proud to be...” This digital proclamation was my line in the sand, the moment I chose visibility over the safety of shadows. The response was immediate and overwhelming. Likes, comments of encouragement, and messages of support flooded in, painting my world with colors of acceptance and love I had never dared to hope for. For the first time, I felt seen, truly seen, by my community and the world.

The outpouring of support was not just a series of digital interactions; it was a profound affirmation of my existence. Each like, each comment of encouragement, felt like a brick being removed from the wall I had built around my heart. Among the messages was my declaration, a testament to the journey I had undertaken:

“This is something that I have held so close in my life for years. It’s something that I have to stand up for and be proud of who I am. This is something that is not going to go away just because somebody says ‘It’s a phase; you will grow out of it.’ Or ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about.’ And

my favorite ‘You gotta try both sides before you decide...’. Well tonight I am being honest with you all from the upmost bottom of my heart. I’m actually gay and I’m proud to be, as some of you may know it’s been a hard path for me over the years, and this is something I have not shared before. So I ask that if you feel you want to leave a negative comment. Please remember that I was the same person that I was yesterday, and this is who I am!”

This moment was transformative, not just for me but potentially for others in my community. For the first time, my secret, held so close, was embraced by 25 people, a small but significant number in an environment that often seemed impenetrably against this way of thinking. The likes and comments of support were rays of light in what had often felt like an unending darkness. They represented a shifting tide, a crack in the longstanding facade of rejection and condemnation.

Yet, this journey was not without its shadows. Alongside the voices of support were those who sought to scold and shame. Some within the church, having known nothing of the depth of my struggle or the years of prayer and internal conflict that led to this moment, chose to see my declaration as a defiance of faith rather than an affirmation of God’s creation. It was during these times that the senior pastors of the church stepped in, not just as leaders but as protectors.

Their interventions were not merely administrative but deeply pastoral, a demonstration of Christ's love in action. They shielded me from further harm, pulling me away from those who could not see beyond their own judgments.

I am eternally grateful for those who stood by me during this time. Their support was a lifeline, a beacon of hope that guided me through the tumultuous waters of coming out in a faith community. They were the tangible manifestation of God's love, a reminder that I was not alone, that I was valued and loved not in spite of who I am but because of who I am.

Reflecting on this chapter of my life, I am struck by the complexity of human emotion and the capacity for both great love and profound misunderstanding. My journey of coming out has been marked by fear, yes, but also by incredible courage—both my own and that of those who have stood by me. It has been a journey of learning to see myself through God's eyes, of understanding that His love is not conditional, not a prize to be earned through conformity but a gift freely given.

This chapter of my life, while deeply personal, is also a call to others. It is a plea for understanding, for compassion, and for a broader embrace of the many ways in which we manifest the image of God. It is a reminder that our faith is

not a weapon to be wielded in judgment but a bridge to understanding, a path to unconditional love.

As I move forward, I carry with me the lessons of this journey—the pain and the joy, the rejection and the acceptance. I step into the future with a resolve to be a beacon of hope for others, to share my story in the service of a world where love is understood as expansive, inclusive, and all-encompassing. This chapter, while closed, is far from the end of my story. It is, I hope, just the beginning of a larger dialogue, one that I am proud to be a part of.

Continuing from where we left off, embarking on a new chapter of openness and self-acceptance, the evening of my Facebook post presented itself as a trial by fire, a pivotal moment that would either solidify my place within my faith community or mark the beginning of its end. Despite the swirling storm of emotions, I decided to attend the night service at church, stepping into an environment that had always been a sanctuary for me, yet now felt like walking into the unknown.

The atmosphere in the church that evening was palpably different. The air seemed charged with unspoken questions and whispers of curiosity. People greeted me, their warmth genuine, yet beneath their smiles, I detected a flicker of something else—surprise, perhaps, or the remnants of

hushed conversations held in my absence. It was a surreal experience, standing at the nexus of my old life and the new path I had chosen to walk.

Taking my place next to the senior pastors, I found solace in their acceptance. Their presence by my side was a silent testament to their support, a bulwark against the sea of uncertain faces that filled the room. It was in this moment of vulnerability, surrounded by my faith community, that the guest speaker paused his sermon, his gaze locking onto mine across the crowded room.

“You!” His voice, firm yet filled with an undercurrent of divine urgency, pierced the silence that had enveloped the church. “The Lord has given me a message to give you.” The congregation’s collective breath seemed to catch, a tangible sense of anticipation hanging heavy in the air.

As I made my way to the front, a thousand thoughts raced through my mind. What message could be so important that it needed to be delivered in such a public manner, at this of all moments? The guest speaker’s eyes met mine, a depth of kindness and understanding within them that eased my trepidation.

He took my hands in his, and as he spoke, his words not only reached my ears but resonated deep within my soul. “I see

you preaching on a stage, your hands like fireballs of fire beaconing out into the crowd, two stories of this grand building are being filled with revival and their spirits revived. You are called to revival and let nothing get in your way from excelling in Christ's gift in your life.”

The weight of his words settled over me like a mantle, a calling that seemed both impossibly grand and intimately personal. In that moment, any doubt that had clouded my decision to live openly was dispelled. The message was clear: my identity, my journey, was not a barrier to my calling but a vital part of it. I was not to be sidelined or silenced but was called to be a beacon of revival, a vessel for the Holy Spirit's fire.

As I returned to my seat, the church erupted into applause, a sound that felt like the very heartbeat of the community pulsating around me. The encouragement and affirmation from the congregation were overwhelming, a balm to the wounds of fear and uncertainty that had marked my path.

This experience, profound and affirming, solidified my resolve. It was a divine confirmation that my journey, with all its trials and tribulations, was not just my own but part of a larger narrative God was weaving. I was called to serve, to speak, and to spread the fire of revival, regardless of the challenges that lay ahead.

The journey forward is filled with promise and purpose. As I embrace my calling, I do so with the understanding that my story is a testament to the power of faith, the importance of authenticity, and the transformative love of Christ that calls us all to live fully in the light of His grace. This chapter of my life, marked by a public declaration of my truth and a divine affirmation of my calling, is just the beginning. I am committed to walking this path with courage, serving as a beacon of hope and revival, and letting nothing stand in the way of the gifts Christ has placed in my life.

In sharing this story, my hope is to inspire others to embrace their truth, to seek their calling, and to remember that they are not alone. The road may be fraught with challenges, but it is also paved with moments of divine intervention, community support, and the unshakeable love of God that guides us through every storm. Let us walk this journey together, with hearts open to the endless possibilities that faith in Christ brings.

As we draw Chapter Seven to a close, and with it, the final pages of this installment of my journey, I'm filled with a multitude of emotions. Reflecting on the path traversed, the valleys navigated, and the peaks ascended, I'm reminded of the transformative power of faith, love, and acceptance. This narrative, laid bare for you, is not merely a recounting of

events but a testament to the resilience of the human spirit when guided by the divine.

The very act of sharing my story, particularly the revelations and trials encapsulated in these chapters, has been both a challenge and a catharsis. It's been a pilgrimage back through moments of profound pain and unparalleled joy, each step an act of faith in itself. To have arrived at this point, to have the courage to live openly and authentically, is a grace I attribute to the unwavering love of God and the support of those who've walked beside me.

The evening of my Facebook declaration, and the subsequent affirmation received both online and within the hallowed halls of my church, marked a pivotal moment in my journey. It was here, in the act of coming out, that I found not the end of my story, but the beginning of a new chapter—one characterized by living truthfully in the light of God's love. The message delivered to me that night, foreseeing a future of ministry and impact, further solidified my resolve to embrace my calling, whatever form it might take.

Yet, for all the progress made and the battles won, this narrative is far from complete. The complexity of navigating faith and sexuality, of seeking acceptance within both religious and LGBTQ+ communities, is a continuing journey. It is a path I know many walk alongside me, often in silence,

grappling with their truths in the shadows. My hope is that by sharing my story, I might offer a glimmer of light, a beacon of hope for those still searching for their way.

As we conclude “My Testimony – Early Teens,” I extend an invitation to you, the reader, to join me as I continue this journey in my next installment, “My Testimony – The 20’s.” The road ahead is filled with unknowns, but it’s a road I step onto with faith, hope, and the knowledge that I do not walk it alone. The presence of the Holy Spirit, ever clearer and more comforting with each passing day, assures me that whatever challenges lie ahead, I am equipped to face them. The support of those who’ve shown me love and acceptance strengthens my resolve to persevere.

To those who’ve walked with me thus far, through the pages of this book, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Your willingness to engage with my story, to reflect upon the themes within it, and perhaps to question and challenge your own beliefs, is a gift of immeasurable value. My story is but one of many, a single thread in the rich tapestry of human experience. Yet, it is my fervent hope that it might serve as a catalyst for conversation, for understanding, and for change.

Keep an eye out for “My Testimony – The 20’s,” where the journey continues, the narrative deepens, and the exploration of faith, identity, and love evolves. The path

forward is paved with lessons from the past and dreams for the future, each step an act of faith, each chapter a testament to the enduring power of God's love.

Until we meet again on the pages of my continuing story, I pray for peace, love, and understanding to fill your hearts. May we all have the courage to face our trials with faith, to seek our truths with honesty, and to love one another with the boundless, unconditional love that mirrors that of our Creator.

Farewell for now, but not goodbye.