

Introduction:

Hello, friend! Too soon to call you friend? No worries, we're going to get acquainted pretty quickly! You're about to dive headfirst into my story of how God completely captured my heart and wrecked my life, Titanic style. It's going to feel like you're watching a train wreck at times, but in book form. You might consider looking away, but deep down inside, you'll want to see the catastrophe unfold. It's okay, I'm taking you on my journey, and by the end of this book, you're going to know way more about me than you ever wanted to.

There are going to be some great moments along the way and some moments where you probably think, “Oh no she didn’t!” There will be some cringeworthy detail provided, but I promise there’s a purpose behind it. It’s going to get pretty ugly at times, but I can guarantee every woman will be able to identify with some part of my journey. It’s okay if the parts you identify with are in some of the uglier moments. I always say, “I’ll go ahead and spill my tea, and if it happens to pour into your cup, you just go ahead and sip it too.” Feel free to add two sugars while you’re at it!

In case you haven’t caught on by now, this is not going to be a cutesy cookie cutter testimony of how I gave my life to Christ and from there just went skipping through the lilies, singing “This Little Light of Mine.” It’s been more of a skip mixed in with some falling and tripping over my own feet. Ha! Who am I kidding? There was a lot of falling, some facepalming, crawling, dragging, and even some limping. Oh yeah, instead of it being through lilies, it was more like being in the wilderness without ChapStick or a comb. Through it all, God saw fit to transform the messiest parts of me to be used for His glory.

My deepest prayer for this book is that each person who reads it will see that God doesn’t just use the perfect people or the ones who have it all together. He chooses those who have a heart that is receptive to Christ. Then He shapes

and molds it to reflect His. There truly is no clean up too hard for His transforming power, and no matter how far left you feel you've gone, He can still get you back on the right path.

Alright, if you're still looking to read about a perfect, easy, comfortable path that comes with giving your life to Christ, let me go ahead and stop you right here. Don't even bother turning the next page, seriously. If you're ready to get real, however, let's get into my journey.

Chapter 1: *I AM . . . Churched Out*

Oh hey there, you turned the page! I knew I liked you. Now that you've decided to stick around, let's get acquainted a little better. I could dive right into the part of my story of "how my life gets flipped, turned upside down" cue *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* theme song. Instead, let's lay some groundwork first so we know what we're working with. In 1988, a little Angel was born, and she came out of the womb so pure, precious, and perfect. Yeah, not quite...according to my mother, I had an explosive bubble gut during delivery and I came out covered in poop. Yup, that puts a new spin on the whole "born into sin" scripture (Psalm 51:5) if I do say so.

I grew up in Virginia, Henrico County to be exact, and I had what would be considered a normal childhood. My parents were married, I had an older sister, and we always had multiple four-legged animals running around. I was a pretty good kid, and even without bribing, I believe my parents would say the same. I was always on the honor roll in school, never got into any trouble, and teachers always had great things to say at parent-teacher conferences. I know what you're thinking, and yes, you are correct, I was the good girl. I was the quiet, compliant, introverted good girl. To top it off, I was also the good church girl.

My family attended a Presbyterian church, and every Sunday my sister and I would put on our poufy dresses with matching white ruffle socks. Although we were always at church, I had no interest in going, because, no offense, it was a little dry. Okay, it was drier than the Sahara Desert. Church was boring to me, and I was tired of singing hymnals out of the little burgundy book. Fast forward a few years to 1999, right before I started middle school; my mom switched to a different church while my dad remained at our previous one. My sister and I attended a Baptist church with my mom, and let me tell you, this was a huge change from what I was used to! The congregation actually responded back to the preacher, and people let out a war cry during praise and worship. I was looking around in complete shock and

amazement as I was hearing “Preach, Pastah” (yes, Pastah, not Pastor), “Amen,” and people shouting simultaneously. I saw people running around the church, falling out in the Spirit, crying, yelling, snotting, speaking in tongues (which I assumed was just gibberish at the time), and I was thinking, “These people are crazy...but I like it!” Church was fun now! There were more activities for the youth to be involved in, so I felt more connected. I enjoyed attending church, and I looked forward to Sunday mornings instead of dreading them as I had in the past.

Now one would think that because I enjoyed church, I was learning the word and building a relationship with God, right? Nope, let me tell the truth and shame the devil: I was there for the entertainment, and I was also there for the boys. That was what made me excited about church; not the sermon, not the worship, but being able to see my friends or a boy I liked. Ironically, the boys I liked didn’t like me. The ones who did like me, let’s just say they were precious in the Lord’s sight but not mine.

I was typically on the younger side of the youth, so that worked against me, and to top it off, your girl was built like a toddler. I’ve always been super petite, so while all the other girls were hitting puberty and blossoming, I was still shaped like a twelve-year-old boy on my good days. You see, my sister got all the va-va-voom because she is built like a brick

house, honey, and I did not get even an ounce of that blessing. I barely got blessed with one “va” once I was older, and I thank God for that now because He knew I would’ve been in a bodycon dress every single day of my life, posting booty pics on social media for attention. God knew what He was doing when He gave me this little sweet petite package. I’ve learned to embrace that my legs could be mistaken for caramel toothpicks, but it’s all good. (I still, however, am accepting intercession for the Lord to expand my territory...in all the right places...too much? Okay, let’s get back to the topic at hand).

I was in the youth choir, my sister and I were on the praise dance and step team that my mother had started, and we were literally always at church. Whether it was for practice, Bible study, a revival, or a second service on Sunday, we were always there. It’s interesting as I look back and think of how I was always in church but church was not even close to being in me. At this point, things were going great until my pastor at the time was caught in a huge scandal.

As a teen, I made the mistake of putting him on a pedestal. I thought that because he was the leader of the church, there was absolutely no way he could fall or make a mistake. In reality, he was human, and he was not God. I don’t say this to condone what happened, but oftentimes, we

make the mistake of looking at people with a title and putting them on the same playing field as God. Then we just end up disappointed when they fail us. It's important to understand that people make horrible gods! No, seriously, I don't care what their title is, how often they pray, or how often they touch the hem of Jesus's garment. There is only one God, and there is not one person, regardless of their attempted goodness, who comes close.

Nonetheless, as a result of the issues with my pastor, and other things I had become aware of, I was completely turned off to church. I felt like it was filled with nothing but fake and phony people, and I wanted no part. However, because I was still a child at this point, I didn't have the option of whether I was going to church. I wasn't even going to risk having to pick my teeth up off the floor if my mother told me to get ready for church and I told her that I wasn't. No thank you, I choose life today!

I was still attending church, but I was completely checked out. When it was time for the pastor to preach, sometimes I would go downstairs to the basement and wait for it to be over. To be honest, I felt like I didn't have to listen to him anymore, and I didn't really want to because I didn't want to be there. Once issues hit an all-time high, my mother decided to leave, and we eventually found a new church home. By this time, my parents had separated and my sister

was in college, so it was usually just my mother and I attending this new church. I still was not here for it, as I was just going through the motions. As drama began, I quickly checked out even more. I was so over church people and all their mess and pretending. Church was no longer fun; it was a headache and a place where people praised and shouted one minute, then the next they were outside fussing, cussing, and talking about one another. This is what I associated with church: messiness, pettiness, and phoniness. I was done with church, but I thank God, He was not done with me.