

Testimonials

In *Why You Were Born*, Pastor David Johnston gently takes you on a journey into the knowledge of God's Word to reveal the answers every man, woman, and child so desperately need to know—that they are special, unique, and loved—and an important part of God's plan. But this is not just one of those “feel good” books. Pastor David takes you by the hand and shows you how to overcome your past and step into a future full of hope, promise, and divine purpose.

—**Dr. Jerry Williamson**
President, Go To Nations

Why you were born helped me reposition my mind in relation to hurts I faced. It brought a level of deliverance that was needed to free me from unforgiveness, bitterness and resentment. God used this teaching to help me navigate past painful experiences and prepare me for a new role in life.

—**Kent A Jacob**
Senior Pastor, Covenant Life Ministries
Trinidad and Tobago

If I hadn't been a Christian before seeing and hearing *Why You Were Born* I certainly would have become one. I found out who I really am. It is life changing.

—**Mark C**
Christian Bookstore Owner

Realizing the truth in *Why You Were Born* not only helped me wrestle with my own life challenges but equipped me to help my patients through theirs.

—**Dr. Paul Shirley, MD**

Thank you for speaking life into me through *Why You Were Born*. Truth is alive to me by Gods spirit through your faithfulness.

—**Kent Staples**
Educator and Coach

WHY
YOU WERE
BORN

*A Blueprint for
Discovering Your
Life Potential*

DAVID L. JOHNSTON

Why You Were Born

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to the single most important person – YOU!

Dear Reader, this book is to you, for you and about you. What others think of you is of little concern compared to what you think of you. Other people may have an opinion about you, the good, the bad, the ugly. But don't become a prisoner to their thoughts and opinion. Don't live your life held captive to other people's expectations for you and thoughts about you.

In the quiet, you can have serious thoughts about yourself. In reading this book I hope you choose to shake off all outside data, unmanipulated and uncoerced where even the memories of what others have said or done to you are summarily dismissed. Use your time reading this book to have a heart-to-heart with yourself – just you, mentally and emotionally naked, pondering and contemplating the meaning of you, your life and your future.

It is in this stillness that you will meet your Maker. You will hear Him speak to you – in a still small voice – a voice that is not brash, rash or harsh – just there as a voice to encourage, support, direct, sometimes correct but always LOVE you in consummate, immeasurable ways.

What does it take to “Know Thyself” as the ancient maxim inspires us to do? The answer can only be found in knowing the One who created you in the first place, your “personal Designer.” I'm not writing to tell you the answers to who you are, but to get you in contact, personal contact, intimate contact with Him.

God be with you on your journey.

David L. Johnston

There are two important days in your life: the day
you were born, *and the day you found out why!*

—Mark Twain

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Introduction

It's About You

This book is about you, just you, the real you, the only you, the magnificent you. And you, my friend, have intrinsic and inherent value. You are not valuable simply because of the sum of your parts. Your existence is much more profound than your mere biological arrival.

René Descartes, the French philosopher and mathematician, known as the father of modern philosophy, is famous for his statement made in 1637: *Cogito ergo sum*, which translates: “I think, therefore I am.”

And yet, simply knowing that you exist is hardly sufficient or inspiring. What you need to know about yourself is that you are not a copy. You're not a clone. You are an original, a “first edition,” if you please. There is *no one like you*. No one can ever take your place. You are indispensable.

Regardless of the circumstances of your birth, you are not an accident, a biological mistake, or the mere product of passion in the night. How you think about your “self” is vital and will be reflected in how you treat yourself, how you treat others, and how you live your life. You need to know the truth about yourself, no matter how wonderful it is. To be “true to thyself” is virtually irrelevant if

To be
“true to
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if we do
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to which
we should
be true.

Why You Were Born

we do not know the “self” to which we should be true.

How will you discover your real self? The answer lies beyond the rationale of parents or peers. In fact, if you want to remain frustrated for your whole life, just try being what everyone else thinks you should be. Terrifying, right?

However, there is a place of genuine self-realization. It awaits you. Where can it be found? Is it found in the corridors of academia? The annals of history or philosophy? On a psychiatrist’s couch? At the séance of a spirit medium? Shall we pluck it from our family tree? Or shall we just give up and spend our lives in the meaningless passage of time?

The answer is “no!” A thousand times, “no!” This book is about you. I get to walk beside you for a while. Together we will search; and if we search, we will find. Let me be your comrade. Let’s lock arms and minds, maybe even hearts. Let’s go forward together. Where do we start?

Who in the whole wide world can explain the mystery of you? From whom can we get such wisdom?

An ancient venerable philosopher both asked and answered this question. Here’s the question. His answer will follow.

*“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is
the place of understanding?”*

*Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it
found in the land of the living.*

*The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It
is not with me.*

*It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be
weighed for the price thereof.*

*It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the
precious onyx, or the sapphire.*

*The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the
exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold.*

*No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for
the price of wisdom is above rubies.*

It's About You

The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air:

Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.” (Job 28:12-22)

Let's note the following in summary:

- No amount of money can get wisdom.
- No living person knows the answers.
- Wisdom cannot be found in the depths.
- No amount of gold or silver or precious jewels can procure it.
- The price of wisdom is worth more than rubies (which are presently four times the value of diamonds).
- Not even 24K gold can purchase this wisdom (the ability to understand you).
- The wisdom is hidden from every living person.
- Death and destruction have only heard how famous wisdom is.

Now here comes the answer, the answer of how to find the wisdom to answer the great mysteries of life and particularly the mystery of you.

“God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.” (Job 28:23)

There it is: the first open door to finding the One who has the wisdom, who can explain the mystery of you, and the answer to life's most important question: *Why was I born?* God is the only One smart enough to answer the questions of your life. Why should that surprise any of us?

We are about to walk on holy ground. We are entering sacred

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territory. *El Shaddai*, the Lord God Almighty, the God of heaven, beckons us with open arms. He's very anxious to be in contact with you once again. He's been with you before, even though you might not have known it. He welcomes you now. Don't be fearful. You will be in safe hands: His! And I'll just walk beside you for a little while. Later, I'll leave you with Him, just the two of you, and it will be divine.

Here we go. We are tapping into vital information that comes from Him. Don't let the strangeness of new territory scare you. We are going back to you, to your real roots. We're going back to the "you" that existed before you were born. Don't be nervous. You were there, and so was He.

Chapter One

You, Before You Were Born

It started in darkness. It was an amazing moment. It happened in the quiet. It happened in secret. No human eyes beheld the scene. A mystery was unfolding, happening in real time and space. No one could see. For weeks, no one would know. Even then, they wouldn't know much. But you were there...all of you. You had to wait...and wait...and wait some more. A housing was being built; a body for you to live in was emerging, molecule by molecule, cell by cell, here a little, there a little. Sure, it was miniscule at first, but you didn't mind. You didn't have any control over the process, but Somebody did. You were not alone.

Like a seed planted in soil, you were planted in your mother's womb. I'm guessing you already know where babies come from, so I'll skip the details, but when a man and woman get together sexually, there is a good chance a baby will soon be on the way. I don't want to gross you out, but when your father and mother were...you know...doing it, they were not likely thinking about you. I'm sorry to disappoint you. They knew nothing about you—nothing. You were not on their mind. They didn't even really see you until about 270 days later.

Someone else did see you, however. It was your real Father. He was there. He is the One who designed your biology. He made the rules about how new humans are made. Sperm plus egg equals

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baby. That's what makes a baby's body, but that is *not* what makes the person. Many have the mistaken notion that God might have made the first man and woman, but that men and women have been the ones making babies ever since. Wrong! Check this out.

*“Know ye that the Lord he is God: **it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.**”*

(Psalm 100:3a, emphasis mine)

It is God who puts the real person inside the body of the baby. You got your body from the merging of your earthly father and mother. But the “you” that was put into that baby's body was made by God. *You came from God.* That is precisely why Jesus taught that the proper way to pray is to say, “**Our Father which art in heaven...**” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). God is literally your Father. He made you.

It's true that you live in a body and that you have intellect and emotion, but the *real* you is a “spirit.” That's why God is referred to as “the Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). Only God is able to create a person. Earthly fathers and mothers only create the flesh and blood in which we (who are actually spirits) live. In death, the real you will leave your body, but the real you will live on (more details on that later).

Let's go back now to that sacred place, that sacred moment, when you entered that baby's body sent from God. It was dark. What was the darkness? It was the darkness of your mother's womb. No one could see you except God. Darkness does not hide us from God.

“Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.” (Psalm 139:12)

Come gently and reverently with me to the next verse, the next truth about your creation:

You, Before You Were Born

“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.” (Psalm 139:13)

God was there in your mother’s womb, not only observing, but controlling, your entrance into that baby’s body. The phrase, “for thou hast possessed my reins,” means that God was personally steering, controlling, and forming the real you. Now look at the next verse, in which David is explaining the same thing of himself that was true of you:

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

My substance was not hid from Thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” (Psalm 139:14-15)

These, beloved friend, are the very words you can and should be saying about yourself: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” This is the truth about you before you were even born. Can you look at yourself and say, “Marvelous are Thy works”? Yes, you can. Yes, you must. Yes, it is true. Praise should leap from your heart and soul and be shouted forth by your voice. You are a work of God to be marveled.

Do not miss the issue here. David said, “This my soul knoweth right well!” Do you know this “right well”? Have you got it down in your soul? In your mind? In your understanding? In your emotions? Have you got it? You must get this! You must! You simply must! Do you know this is *right*? And do you know it *well*?

One of the words for “wisdom” in the Bible means “to pound in.” That’s how you learned the multiplication tables. You pounded them in. Now, years later, you don’t need to stop to figure them out. You simply know that seven times nine equals sixty-three. You know it because you pounded it in. That is what you must do with this truth. Pound it in. Get it. Settle it. Forever!

You and I are still walking forward. We’ve got more to share, but before we leave the moment of your real arrival, your real

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creation 270 days before you were born, let's see more of what was taking place in the seclusion, the secrecy of your mother's womb. Read Psalm 139:15 again.

When you were being made, you were under watchful eyes, the eyes of God. Accumulating around you was "substance." A botanist or scientist could probably tell you better the details of that substance. But whatever it was, thick or thin gelatinous material was being gathered around you to give you a body, and it was being watched by God. The "stuff" your body was being made out of didn't even have shape yet perfected, but God was watching. The next verse reads thus:

*"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being
unperfect."* (Psalm 139:16a)

Before you had self-awareness, God was aware, *very aware*, and very involved. So, what did God do besides watch? He created you and placed you in your mother's womb, and now He's been watching the formation of your body. But what then?

**Before you
had self-
awareness,
God was
aware, very
aware,
and very
involved.**

He made, or caused to be made, records of you and of the event. God keeps books. The Book of Life is mentioned eight times in the Bible. That book, my friend, has a starting page with your name on it. In chapter 1, in real time, as the members of your body were being shaped, each of them was written. They were written during that entire 270-day process. Some of your body parts got written down before they were even perfected or completed.

Such was your Father's zeal for you. Here's the Scripture that shares this with us:

*"And in thy book all my members were written,
which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet
there was none of them."* (Psalm 139:16)

That page in that chapter, in that book (the Book of Life) contains a list about you. You may well see that Book someday. I know I intend to see the pages that tell about my life. And I want you to see yours. Each of us is adding to that record every day we live by everything we think and say and do, and by every motive in our hearts. All of it is going into the record book.

The truth about you is astonishing, amazing, remarkable, extraordinary, even stunning—that you were created by God and placed in your mother’s womb, made a part of the Book of Life—and as you were being physically assembled, an eternal record was being made of each step in the process, and it was written with such excitement over you that the recording angels could hardly wait for the perfection of your body parts before writing them down. Go ahead. Be excited!

But there is more!

Even though you were not yet self-aware, from the instant you were created God was thinking about you.

**God was using
His mind to
focus on your
development
and attributes.**

*“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me,
O God! How great is the sum of them.”*

(Psalm 139:17)

Notice the word, “also” here. “Also” means “in addition to” or “furthermore.” As well as creating a comprehensive record about you, God was pondering, musing, contemplating, and thinking of you. God was using His mind to focus on your development and attributes.

To be thought about by others bolsters our sense of self-esteem. It’s nice, really nice, to know that someone is thinking of you. We get cards or notes, texts or e-mails, tweets or posts on social media. The pleasantness of these communications comes from the realization that we are being considered or thought about. It makes us feel significant. This significance is enhanced based on

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the significance of the Sender. Thus, a note from a grateful child, a message from the city mayor, even a personal expression from the president adds to the significance of the message. Now try to imagine this: God Himself was and is thinking about you! Wow!

God, Mister Big, Numero Uno; the Creator of the universe and the stars of the heavens; Designer of the earth, the land, the seas, the birds of the air, the flowers of the fields, the fishes of the sea, and the beasts of the fields, every tree, plant, insect—*He* thought about *you*. God is properly referred to as the *Most High* forty-eight times in Scripture. The psalmist David simply said,

“O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.” (Psalm 104:1)

Imagine with me for a moment that we have a PET scan (a positron emission tomography) of God’s brain. If you could inspect the thoughts of God, past and present, what would you find? The answer is...you. You were there! You were there!

How many times were you in the thoughts of God? Well, we just read that, didn’t we? Let’s look at it again:

*“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me,
O God! How great is the sum of them!”*
(Psalm 139:17)

How many times did and does God think about you? The writer inquires, “How great is the sum of them?” Ready yourself for the answer. You are about to view ultimate magnificence. There are not enough superlatives in any thesaurus to convey or portray, picture or present, describe or detail, relate or represent, this unsurpassed, unequalled, unparalleled, unrivaled reality. The only way to communicate them is by the cognitive process of analogy, and God answers the question. How great is the sum of God’s thoughts toward you?

“If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.”
(Psalm 139:18)

You, Before You Were Born

If you were sitting in front of me, I could show you a high-definition picture of a handful of sand. I would ask you to try to imagine how many grains of sand are in that one handful. I'd give you some time to stare, and stare some more. I did this myself as a child. My father and mother would pack a few sandwiches, fill a gallon jar with Kool-Aid, and we'd drive to the beach about fifteen miles away. Lake Erie had lots of beaches, but our favorite was near the pier at Turkey Point. Mom would lay out the family blanket and Dad would set out the goodies that he had carried in a homemade insulated box. It was playtime.

However, instead of running toward the water, I would often just pick up a handful of sand and stare. I'd try to imagine how many grains of sand were in my little hand. I'd separate my fingers and watch the sand stream through my homemade hourglass back to the beach. The bright sun would send light sparkles in many a direction. I'd look at the pier about 200 feet away and try to imagine how many grains of sand there were between myself and the pier. I'd never heard of a trillion or a googol, a number followed by one hundred zeros, or a googolplex, a number followed by a googolplex of zeros, or a googolplexian, a number followed by a googolplex of zeros. I had no numbering system like that, so I would just say to myself, "There are more grains of sand here than there are numbers in the world."

If you were sitting in front of me, you would see a handful of sand—and then I'd show you real-life photos of the Sahara and more. Even if we could count the grains of sand around the Great Lakes, the oceans of the world, the thirty-three deserts of the world, which cover one-third of the earth's land surface, God's thoughts about *you* are *more in number* than that!

*"O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and
thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy
hand."* (Isaiah 64:8)

How could this be? That is a worthy question. The answer is simple, but it lies beyond measure, beyond calculation, beyond description, beyond imagination, and yes, certainly beyond

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comprehension. The answer is summed up in one word: God.

God has over twelve thousand titles and descriptions. Each of them is peerless and without parallel. Such is the greatness of His person. In a PET scan of God's mind, an inspection of His thoughts, what would find you there? You! How often would you be there? How many thoughts of you would you find in the mind of God? More in number than the grains of sand. You are there.

Why were you born? Because God wanted you! He wanted you:

Here,
Now,
At this time in history,
Living in a body whose gender was decided for you,
Embedded in a mother He assigned to you,
With strengths and weaknesses He preferred you to have.
He wrote the specs on you.
He doesn't make mistakes.
Divine wisdom devised you.
He c-r-e-a-t-e-d you!

He has a purpose for you, for your life, and for your eternity! Be careful how you respond to this vital information. The danger is that you would think it utterly impossible; that it's merely a fairy tale, a make-believe idea, a myth, a fiction, a falsehood, a fallacy, a fraud, a tale, a prevarication, a pretense, or an outright lie.

You might think that it's too wonderful to believe. You're not alone. David, the psalmist, to whom this was revealed, had the same response and the same problem. Here is what he said:

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." (Psalm 139:6)

The Message renders it this way:

"This is too much, too wonderful—I can't take it all in!" (Psalm 139:6 MSG)

You, Before You Were Born

When we began this walk together, I promised you that I would tell you the truth about yourself, no matter how wonderful it was. This would give you more detail than the simple sentence, “God loves you.” He is crazy about you. You are the object of His affections. You and I should be ecstatic by now: utterly enraptured, euphoric, and thrilled. Use whatever description fits.

These truths, properly responded to, should put you on cloud nine, so to speak, or in the seventh heaven.

The right response is to shout an unequivocal “Amen!” If you do, it’s as if God sends an angel down out of heaven with a golden hammer and a silver nail and fastens that truth to your life. You will never be the same again.

Before we move on, let’s review the documentation of the facts:

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well...

When I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth...

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” (Psalm 139:14,15,17-18)

Chapter Two

To Like You or Not to Like You: That Is the Question

Her name was Bonnie. She just showed up one night after a Thursday night chapel service at the Teen Challenge Center in Toronto. My father was the director and I was a young minister at the time. Dad would lead the chapel services, and I would go out into the streets and preach, hoping people would be touched and come in.

Dad was just finishing up when Bonnie snuck timidly in the back door. I was sitting in a chair on the other side of the room, which wasn't very far away as it wasn't a very big room. The chapel sat about twenty-four people altogether. A lot of kids like Bonnie would wander in and out, but for some reason I noticed her.

I can still remember the scene vividly. The red carpet on the floor. The blackboard pushed to the side of the room that my dad and I would draw diagrams on or where we'd write things we wanted people to remember, trying to help them learn about the love of God. Most of all though, I remember the rostrum near the front where a big Bible lay open for any to investigate. I remember how lovingly and reverently my dad used to turn the pages when he taught from it.

The instant I saw Bonnie I knew she was a runaway. She just had that look. She wasn't quite sure where she was. She almost tiptoed in as if she didn't belong there or anywhere, for that matter. It had been a while since she'd had a chance to clean herself up and probably longer since she'd eaten. She was the type who wouldn't have wandered in if she hadn't been desperately casting about for help.

It was then that I also noticed her cradling her wrists, continually pulling her sleeves down to hide them. Through her fingers, I could see long horizontal scars that were just beginning to heal—the kind someone makes when trying to kill themselves. At the same time, there was still some light in her eyes. Bonnie wasn't gone yet.

I crossed the room and greeted her, which was when I learned her name. I asked her where she was from and some other questions she didn't seem to want to answer. I could tell that the longer we talked, the more she wanted to turn and run out of the building, so I cut to the chase and asked her if there was anything I could do to help.

“Oh, I'm fine,” she lied. “I don't need anything.” Then, sort of as an afterthought, she said, “I'm not really worth your help anyway.”

“Hogwash,” I said. (To be truthful, I used the BS words in an effort to shock her.) She'd been turning to go, but stopped and looked back at me in surprise.

“What?” she asked.

“Hogwash. No, double hogwash,” I countered. She looked at me blankly, but her eyes pleaded. “May I show you something?” I asked. She shrugged.

I walked over to the big Bible on the rostrum and motioned for her to follow. She did. Then I opened the book to some of its most worn pages—a section I had heard my father quote many times—Psalm 139. I began to read from the first verse.

“O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.” I paused. “Each place where it says ‘me,’ I want you to imagine *your name* in there. I want you to imagine that it says, ‘O Lord, You have searched me—Bonnie—and You have known me, Bonnie.’”

To Like You or Not to Like You: That Is the Question

Bonnie's forehead scrunched. "Okay," she said tentatively.

I continued, "Thou knowest Bonnie's sitting down and her rising up. Thou understandeth her far-off thoughts. God, You've searched out Bonnie's path, and You know where she lies down to sleep, You are acquainted with all of Bonnie's ways."

As I read, I continued to look back and forth from the Bible to her face. I walked her through each phrase, telling her in the simplest terms I could, how much God loved her—even when she was in her mother's womb—how God had carefully woven her together, how she was His work of art, how she was the object of His affections. I watched as each phrase sank in, one by one.

Then something dark and terrible washed over her face. Suddenly, she jumped at me, fingernails flailing. I fell back, putting my hands up to protect myself.

"Can your God make me a virgin again?" she screamed in anguish. She was hysterical. As gently and as quickly as I could, I reached out my hand and touched her forehead.

"Jesus," I whispered.

She crumpled to the floor in a puddle of tears. She sobbed and sobbed.

I knelt on the floor beside her and waited until she took a breath and had the chance to hear my words. "Yes," I said. She looked up at me again, puzzled anew. "Yes," I repeated. "Jesus *can* make you pure again. He can't change the past, but He can wipe away the guilt and the shame," I went on. "In fact, He gave His life for that very thing. He gave His life for that very 'Bonnie' we were just reading about. The 'Bonnie' God loved and planned good things for from the day she was conceived." I went on to tell her of the cross, the blood of Jesus, and more about God's love for her personally.

The moments grew into minutes and the minutes into an hour. In the end, sitting on that red carpet in that tiny chapel, Bonnie received three things: forgiveness, cleansing, and reinstatement to her right relationship to her loving Father God.

She didn't leave that place the same as the girl who had come in.

My hope is that you won't leave this book the same person now reading these words either. God had a reason Bonnie was

born, and He has a reason you were born. He has a plan and a purpose. He has gifted you and appointed a purpose for your life.

There's a reason you were born. This book is to help you find that out.

It Starts with Liking You

Like Bonnie—for various reasons, from things we've done to trauma we've experienced, to the nose that stares back at us when we look into a mirror—many of us don't really like ourselves. We tend to either look down on ourselves or we hunger for recognition so much that we go out into the world to force others to notice us. We may think looking down on ourselves is some form of humility, or we may think we have no worth until we've accomplished some great thing. Both are tricks to keep us down. If we don't like ourselves the way God made us, then we won't even try to reach the heights God purposed for us; we won't pursue the dreams He knit into us in our mothers' wombs. Instead, we try to get fame and glory for ourselves, following a world system meant to enslave us. Neither path holds the freedom and fulfillment God planned for us the very day He began knitting us into being.

What if you don't like yourself because of a traumatic background? What if you don't like yourself because you were mistreated or even abused as a child? What if you don't like yourself because you were rejected? Or what if you don't like yourself because you were deserted by one or both of your parents? What if you don't like yourself for any of a thousand other reasons?

I have some really wonderful news for you:

*“For I (**God**) will **restore** health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.”*

(Jeremiah 30:17, emphasis and additions mine)

I love the word *restore*. Have you ever had a computer that went haywire? You reboot it, and it gets *restored*. Once it's restored,

it functions properly again, doesn't it? (Usually, anyway.)

No matter what has happened to you, no matter how you've been broken or damaged, disgraced or shamed—God wants to restore you, to return you to your original design. Look at what He said above: “I will *restore* health to you: mental health, emotional health, and spiritual health. I will heal your wounds.” There's nothing broken He can't fix. That's why we call Him Savior. That's why we call Him Redeemer. *Blessed Redeemer*. He says: “I will restore your health. I will heal your wounds because everybody's treating you like an outcast, like there's something wrong with you, but *I* know better.”

**There's
nothing
broken
He can't
fix.**

Look at what else He says:

“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.” (Joel 2:25-26)

Everything that's tried to chew you up and spit you out, that wants to ruin your days, your weeks, your months, and your years, *He will restore*. God will bring you back to a restored point—as if none of that had ever happened. You'll eat plenty, and you'll be satisfied. You'll end up praising the name of the Lord, your God, because He will have dealt wondrously with you, and you will never be ashamed.

Here we are, created by God Himself, the One who is above all positions and degrees, the One with whom there is no rival, competition, or comparison, the ultimate Being. He made us, He was with us from our conception when no one else even suspected we existed, and He planned out a destiny and purpose for our lives that would have ripple effects for generations to come. And what is our typical human response? We look at what God created and

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intended to accomplish— marvelous things—and we look down on it. We despise ourselves. We scoff at and belittle the very work of His hands. We look down on ourselves in a way we wouldn't even let a person treat a dog. That said, will we bow before the God who created the universe in adoration, or will we spurn the work of His hands? (That work is you, by the way.)

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The *International Standard Version* translates this verse in this way:

*“For we are **God’s masterpiece, created in the Messiah Jesus to perform good actions that God prepared long ago to be our way of life.**”*

(Ephesians 2:10 ISV, emphasis mine)

This begs the question: If God says each of us is His work— His unique and special masterpiece—who are we to disagree?

The Bible even warns about the arrogance of rejecting the work of His hand. The Bible repeatedly says, “Woe to them.” The word woe or woes appears 107 times in 98 verses in the King James Version of the Bible.¹ Woe is an exclamatory crying out, a lament of caution, often prolonged, based on the intrinsic urgency. It refers to situations that have caused great distress, and warns us to take care and remain alert and attentive, vigilant, prudent, discreet. We must take heed. Here is a critical thing to heed: there are three serious woes of which the prophets warned us. It was their way of saying: “Big trouble is looming for any who do not take heed to these truths.”

One example is this:

“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!”

(Isaiah 45:9a)

You do not want to contend with God. Talk about a losing

1 “‘Woe’ or ‘Woes,’” Blue Letter Bible (Blue Letter Bible), accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/search.cfm?Criteria=woe+OR+woes&t=KJV>

To Like You or Not to Like You: That Is the Question

proposition! You will lose if you strive with the Maker of the universe (and your Maker). There's no room to disagree with His statements about making you and His big plans for your life—plans that will impact eternity. (See Jeremiah 29:11 again.) He produced, fabricated, fashioned, constructed, and built you. He brought you into existence. It just follows that if you like Him, and if you respect Him, you will like what He made. That means you had better like *the you* He originated. If not, “*Woe!*” You’re headed for big trouble if you don’t change course.

But that’s not all He said in this passage. He goes on to say:

*“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let
the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.
Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What
makest thou? Or thy work, He hath no hands?”*

(Isaiah 45:9)

Let me paraphrase: “Will the pot say to the Potmaker, ‘Hey, you did a lousy job?’ Will the clay tell the Potter His business? Will you carry on a dispute with your Maker? Will you tell God that His hands are clumsy and that He messed up when He made you?”

The idea is pretty laughable, isn’t it? Who could say such things to God? Who could criticize a design about which we understand so very little? Why would we criticize the art of an Artist we really love? “Oh, those other things You made are beautiful, but this one—this *me*—this is unlovable.” Of course, you can’t say that! It makes no sense!

Let’s look at another verse, this time in a more modern paraphrase to bring out its meaning:

*“Who in the world do you think you are to second-
guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of
us knows enough to call God into question? Clay
doesn’t talk back to the fingers that mold it, saying,
‘Why did you shape me like this?’ Isn’t it obvious
that a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump*

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of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans?”

(Romans 9:20-21 MSG)

That is why you should really, really like yourself. You were formed in the hands of the Artist that makes no mistakes, the hands of the Sculptor that makes no blunders. For God, even the potsherds—the broken pieces of pottery—have a beautiful purpose. We may not understand it, but what would be the fun of it if we did? There would be no mystery to solve! However, we do need to trust the Artist. At the core, the question is: Will you decide to accept your “self”—the you that God made—or will you decide to reject your “self”—the you that God made? Which do you think is more likely to propel you to your intended destiny? To accept the creation of the Divine Planner or reject it? How can you reject the you of your destiny, and still be all you were destined to be?

Upon your answer to this fundamental question, your future will be determined. My advice, in the strongest of terms, would be for you to say, “I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psalm 139:14). Say it every time you look in the mirror and every time you see a picture of yourself. You can’t imagine how much good that will do you!

It helps. It’s good to remember it’s not really about *you*. It’s about Him and what He made. You will either be grateful for the way God made you or not. You will either celebrate yourself or criticize yourself. Suicide does not begin with a bottle of pills, a razor blade, or a rope. Self-destructive behaviors begin by criticizing what God has made. If the devil can get you to despise God’s creation, then he can destroy you. If, however, you think of yourself and treat yourself the way you would regard and treat anything else God made, self-destructive behaviors won’t even cross your mind.

The person who does not like him or her self will spend the rest of their lives trying to be like someone else, always comparing themselves with others, and feeling they fall short. Or they will fall into the ditch on the other side of the road, always trying to

prove they are better than everyone else by putting others down. It is thus that superiority or inferiority complexes are created. Neither are healthy.

We weren't meant to look to the right or the left to figure out who we are. We were meant to look *up*. Look to your Father in heaven who loves you. Get your worth from Him. Then you can look to the right and the left to help others, to look up to receive that same love and approval. That's the origin of true humility. You don't have anything to prove because God loves you, but, in response, you want to be everything you can be because you want to reciprocate that love. True humility doesn't say, "I'm nothing." It says, "I'm loved. Even if I'm a little imperfect and broken, I'm on the path to something better, something my God has had planned for me before I was even a twinkle in my parents' eyes!"

It's Not Your Parents' Fault Either

If that's not enough, then here are two further *woes*:

"Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? Or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?"
(Isaiah 45:10)

Some of us blame our parents for what we've become in our lifetimes. That's not a helpful choice. Here God says *woe* to those who blame their father, and a further *woe* to those who blame their mother. Self-rejection plus blame is still self-rejection, no matter whose "fault" it is.

But what if our parents *did* do bad things to us? Why is it woeful to blame them for what you've become when who you are now is at least partially the result of how they brought you up? The attitude we are supposed to have toward our father and our mother is well-known, but unfortunately not often lived out. From the beginning, we are instructed, thus:

"Honour thy father and thy mother."
(Exodus 20:12a)

Why You Were Born

Honoring your father is the antithesis of indicting him for “begetting” you. Honoring your mother is the polar opposite to incriminating her for what she “has brought forth.” Your father and your mother were indeed the conduits, the instruments that God used to bring you into the world. God is saying here that anybody who had a significant role of bringing this “one of a kind” *you* into the world should be esteemed. The rejection of your father and mother, regardless of their faults and failures, brings to us these *woes*.

Disregarding the woe warnings will bring damage and destruction into our present and future lives.

“Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.”

(Proverbs 20:20)

This simply means that our light, our ability to influence others the proper way, will be obscured and clouded. We will not have a positive effect on those around us if we can’t respect others. And if you can’t respect those to whom you are closest, then you won’t ever really respect anyone, especially yourself. In contrast, if you honor your father and mother, you will not have woes, but blessings. As the apostle Paul wrote:

“Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

(Ephesians 6:2-3)

What is the essence of the promise Paul is referring to here?

- It will be well with you; you will have success in every area of your life; the condition of your spirit and your conscience and your example will propel you forward.
- You will live long on the earth; you will have fewer health issues; your spirit and this right condition of your mind that comes from the proper honoring of your

parents will prompt, induce, stimulate, and encourage you forward because the spiritual clutter that comes from dishonoring parents will not contribute to your physical and emotional demise.

The health of your relationship with your parents will affect the health of your body and your success—if you honor them, you will live long *and well!*

The Heart of the Question before Us

The heart of the question here is not merely, “Why should you accept yourself?” The question is: “*Will you accept yourself—joyfully, enthusiastically, even fanatically?*” Because it’s not just about getting by, it’s about being all you were intended to be.

My best advice to you is to be exuberant, cheerful, and energetic about you. Why? Because you were designed by God Himself. You are the work of His hands. You are loved, desired, and sought after. You are His masterpiece, created to do good on the earth.

Since
feelings
come from
thoughts,
you can only
change your
feelings by
changing
your
thoughts.

*“I have loved thee with an everlasting love:
therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”*
(Jeremiah 31:3)

I know very few people who don’t need to upgrade how they think of themselves. If we’re to do it right, we’re to think of ourselves like God thinks of us:

*“Not...more highly than he ought to think; but to
think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every
man the measure of faith.”* (Romans 12:3)

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Since feelings come from thoughts, you can only change your feelings by changing your thoughts. That's the benefit of reading this book and spending time with me here. You get a chance to change the thoughts you have about yourself.

How can you be sure that what I am telling you is the right way to begin thinking about yourself and pondering why you were born? Because these thoughts come from God Himself. They are *the facts*. They come from the Holy Bible. They are *the truth*. Who can calculate the human pain of a life based on false illusions? Believe these things and the pain will begin to go away. Depression will be vanquished. The truth of the matter is that you have better things to do than fight with yourself. God has a wonderful plan for your life.

There is a penetrating insight in 1 Timothy. In this book, Paul tells Timothy,

“Let no man despise thy youth.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

Paul also instructs the young Timothy, thus,

“Flee also youthful lusts.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

Paul is instructing this junior progeny on how to handle and help people. He tells him not to get into strife, to be gentle, to be able to explain what he preaches when asked, to be patient with people, to be meek, and then instruct “those that oppose themselves” (2 Timothy 2:24–25). That's an interesting way to say it, don't you think? “Those that oppose themselves.” It is possible, as we've been discussing, that people can hold counterproductive views about themselves. Self-destructive behaviors abound in our culture, and I believe this is the source of many of them. The non-acceptance of one's self, the non-celebrating of one's self, fits into the category of holding views that oppose one's self. If not confronted and debunked, such opposition will irritate and corrupt any good in a person's self-image and life.

There is good news, however. God is on your side, even when you are not. He is always *for* you, never against you.

To Like You or Not to Like You: That Is the Question

*“When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies
turn back: this I know; for God is for me.”*

(Psalm 56:9)

Why not join Him?

Of course, there is also someone who is against you, as we’ve already mentioned.

*“Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,
walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”*

(1 Peter 5:8b)

So, if God is for us and the devil is against us, who is going to win? I like what the old-time preacher said: “I believe in *election*. God votes for you, the devil votes against you, but *you* get to cast the deciding vote.” In the end, the deciding vote is yours. Will you be *for* you? Or will you be in the number of “those that oppose themselves”?

To like you or not to like you? That is the question. What is your answer?

I’d suggest agreeing with God. If you still can’t let yourself do that, go back to the beginning of this chapter and Psalm 139, and read it like I read it to Bonnie. Put your name into the verses every time it says “me” or “my.” Do that until you can agree with God about how special you are to Him.

At the same time, it’s worth looking at the lives of some people who had a lot more going against them than you do, and see what they did with what God gave them. I think you’ll be as amazed and moved by their stories as I have been. They are truly inspiring. Additionally, be sure not to miss Supplement 2 which lists thirty consequences of not liking yourself, as well as what to do about that. :-)

Chapter Three

You Are Not a Mistake

*“I am come that they might have life,
and that they might have it more abundantly.”*
(John 10:10b)

Nick Vujicic was born with no arms and no legs. At sixteen, Ryan Troutman was in a car accident that left him brain-damaged and in a coma for six weeks. He remained in the hospital for a year and a half as he struggled to retrain his body to walk and speak. Gianna Jessen survived a saline abortion attempt on her life. (In a saline abortion, a corrosive fluid is injected into the mother’s womb with the intent to burn the baby inside and out and cause its death within twenty-four hours.) An eight-second *YouTube* video labeling Lizzie Valesquez as the ugliest woman in the world went viral when she was seventeen. It was viewed by over 4.8 million people, many of whom left comments telling her to kill herself. Ji Seong-ho was a starving boy in North Korea whose limbs were run over by train after he collapsed on the tracks from exhaustion, as if things weren’t bad enough when he was starving to death! Rebecca was sexually molested and abused from age five to seventeen by a trusted friend of the family.

How would any of these people become someone of note?

In a moment, I will tell you more of their stories, but first a fundamental truth must be understood. Their lives are living proof of this truth:

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“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

I know this will stagger your mind, your intelligence, your reason, and your heart. Those who underestimate the “God Factor” will never get it, but you can comprehend it.

Can God turn no arms and no legs into something good? Even something *very* good? Can God make something wonderful out of a saline-burned baby? You bet He can! Can God turn ugliness into beauty? Can God take a tortured boy, who was run over by a train, and turn him into a statesman who can save thousands? Can God take a beaten-down, molested child and turn her into a successful advocate and rescuer of hundreds of other sexually assaulted and damaged children and women? The answer is a resounding, “Yes!” This is why we call Him the Redeemer!

Let’s look a little closer at this astonishing truth. It’s flabbergasting. It’s dumbfounding! It’s breathtaking! But just before we move on, let’s look at several other wordings of this often untold and mind-boggling Scripture:

“We can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.”
(Romans 8:28 MSG)

“Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.”
(Romans 8:28 PHILLIPS)

God is a tragedy-to-triumph fanatic. He makes everything good!

God is accurately referred to as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3 ISV). After that, it is said of Him that He:

You Are Not a Mistake

“Comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:4)

The same verse in other versions is translated this way:

“He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.” (2 Corinthians 1:4 MSG)

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.” (2 Corinthians 1:4 NLT)

Here’s the truth:

- God has a comfort, an answer, a solution, a fix, a recovery act for every test, trial, tribulation, tragedy, or trouble of every and any sort. That’s the meaning of “God of all comfort” and that’s the magnitude of “comforts us in all tribulation.”
- God’s purpose in supplying the solutions to us is so that we can pass on the solutions He personally gave us to others who are in the same situation we once experienced. Our influence is enhanced. We have greater potential after a difficulty than we would have had without it. It’s being able to say with conviction, “I would rather be with God in the dark than in the light without Him.”

You become God’s purveyor of hope to others. Your purpose and meaning in life—the reason you were born—cannot be thwarted, frustrated, derailed, or foiled. You cannot be impeded, hindered, obstructed, stymied, or defeated by anyone or any

seeming tragedy *if you will respond to God*. He is the God who can “make everything work together for your good” if you love Him and walk according to His plans.

Nick Vujicic

Take Nick Vujicic as an example. He was born without arms or legs. He was born with tetra-amelia syndrome. Can you imagine living life without limbs? Yet Nick has become a symbol of triumph against all odds. His videos have been watched over a hundred million times.

**You
become
God’s
purveyor
of hope to
others.**

It wasn’t easy for him. For years, he was harassed and tormented at school. At the age of ten, Nick attempted suicide. However, Nick, the boy born without arms or legs, had an encounter with God, who is (remember) “the God of all comfort.” That changed everything. During an interview on *Oprah*, he summarized his life:

“I know that God didn’t give me this pain, but what the enemy tried to turn into bad, God made it into good. I want everyone to know that we are wonderfully and fearfully made by God. And until you can actually understand that we are all wonderfully and fearfully made by God, you will always be trapped and chained and stopped, but when you have the incredible power of faith in action, nothing can hold you back and you are beautiful just the way that you are—no worries.”

With regard to being connected, he said, “I can’t get married. I can’t even hold my wife’s hand. What connection am I going to have?” But then he declared, “You know what? All things come together for the good for them that love Him.” (However, on February 12, 2012, Nick married Kanae Miyahara.) He went on to say, “Being without arms and legs is all about choice. I had parents who were my heroes. They said, ‘You can always be angry for what you don’t have, or you can be thankful for what you do have. Do your best and God will do the rest.’” He went on to say, “Because I gave my life to Jesus Christ and [underwent] the

renewing of my mind, I knew I could be unstoppable.”²

Nick graduated from university at age twenty-one with a bachelor of commerce degree, with a double major in accounting and financial planning. He founded Life Without Limits, an international nonprofit organization and ministry. He also founded Attitude Is Altitude, a motivational-speaking company. He starred in the film *The Butterfly Circus* and was awarded Best Actor in a Short Film by the Method Fest Independent Film Festival.³

Nick has written eight books, including *Life Without Limits*; *Love Without Limits*; *Be the Hands and Feet: Living Out God’s Love for All His Children*; and others. Nick and his wife, Kanae, now have two sons and twin girls. You simply must see and hear his story. You can easily search his name on *YouTube*. He is living proof of how God can take what seems like the worst situation and turn it into the best.

Ryan Troutman

Ryan Troutman is a business sales rep at my local Apple store. A car accident left him in a trauma hospital and in a coma for six weeks. His time in rehabilitation lasted over eighteen months. He has written the details of his experience in his book, *Second Chance Story*. He transparently tells of the battles he lost and the battles he won.

When your brain doesn’t work, neither does your body. Ryan had to start from scratch. Ryan once described it to me thus: “I was trapped inside my own body. My eyes were open, but I could not respond. I simply stared off into space and was unable to communicate. I was unable to walk, talk, use the restroom, or feed myself. I was a sixteen-year-old, 120-pound baby.” Meanwhile, Ryan’s parents suffered with him. The issue for Ryan became, in his words, “how to complete life’s puzzle or even how to put the first two pieces together.”

2 Tabernacle United Methodist Church, “Nick Vujicic on Oprah.” YouTube video, 3:30. January 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmvtuB0gtGg>

3 ILiveInANoMansLand, “The Butterfly Circus [Short Film HD].” YouTube video, 22:35. October 12, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p98KAEif3bl>

Ryan did put it together; and although he has worked for Apple for more than seven years at this time, his eyes sparkled when he told me how he now lives to help others survive and thrive in spite of brain damage. He has a nonprofit dedicated to helping people around the world. I think he personifies the adage of how to turn lemons into lemonade. Who knows the scope of his help to others? The solutions he found and has handed on will give a meaningful life to many.

Gianna Jessen

Gianna Jessen survived the silent holocaust of the abortion industry. A doctor attempted to perform an instillation abortion on her: A chemical solution including salt was injected into her mother's womb, which was intended to asphyxiate and blind the fetus, burning it inside and out, then cause contractions in the mother, which would then expel the deceased infant in twenty-four hours. The lifeless body could then be thrown away. However, Gianna was still alive when she emerged, and because of the Born Alive Infant Protection Act, which had recently been passed into law, the doctors were required to do all they could to save her life. She was two and a half pounds at birth, and a lack of oxygen to her brain had left her with cerebral palsy. Despite her poor prognosis, she lived, and the abortionist who had intended to toss away the lifeless fetus had to sign her birth certificate instead.

She spent three months in the hospital before being placed in foster care. Despite being dismissed from the hospital, doctors believed she would never be able to raise her head on her own. Instead, she began walking at three with the aid of a walker and braces, and today she walks on her own with only a slight limp. She has even run marathons. (Oh, and she's also an accomplished singer!)

Her first months were spent in a "mean" foster home in which she was hated, but she eventually was placed in a loving home, and later discovered how greatly she was loved by God.

As a result of that encounter, she now calls herself "God's girl." She admits that she is weaker than most of the rest of us,

but she has a message. She speaks regularly, offering hope to masses of hurting, forgotten, and discarded people. She tells her audiences how God can make the most miserable thing beautiful. She challenges men to stand up and be men because she believes God made them for greatness. She calls on them to defend women and children, even those yet to be born. “You women,” she says, “are not made for abuse, but you are made to be fought for.”

She told Mike Huckabee the following on his television program: “So you can imagine how I feel when I hear the argument: ‘If the baby is disabled, we need to terminate the pregnancy.’ Well, who are you, healthy person, to look at me and decide for me what my quality of life is? You have *no idea* how beautiful my life is because I have something to overcome— because I actually *need* Jesus.”⁴

What a will to make the most of what God has given to a person, don’t you agree? Oh, that the rest of us would do as much with what God has given to us! “As for me,” she says of her life, “I hope to make God smile.”⁵ I wept the first time I heard her speak. She has appeared on numerous television shows, in numerous nations, and has testified several times in the halls of government. (You can hear her story for yourself on *YouTube*.)

Lizzie Velasquez

And then there’s Lizzie Velasquez. When she was sixteen, an eight-second video of her went viral, labeling her the ugliest woman in the world. It was viewed by over 4.8 million people. The comments below this viral video asked such things as: “Why didn’t your parents abort you?” and “Can’t you just find a gun and kill yourself?” They called her a monster and something that should be “destroyed with fire.” Can you image what it would be like, as a sixteen-year-old girl, to stumble across a site like that

4 Huckabee, “Gianna Jessen’s POWERFUL Abortion Survival Testimony.” YouTube video, 8:00. January 20, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwpJTY1pEns>.

5 Jennifer Johnson, “One of the Best Pro-life Speeches EVER! Gianna Jessen abortion survivor Full video,” YouTube video, 15:41. August 21, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOwMmx6eBjU>.

with your picture on it and read comment after comment, not only degrading you, but telling you that you don't even deserve to be alive? She determined to read every comment, looking for at least one person who would stand up for her. She didn't find a single one!

Lizzie looks the way she does because she was born with a disease called neonatal progeroid syndrome. It inhibits weight gain and leaves a person with weak bones and a weak heart. She was 2.1 pounds when she was born, she has zero body fat, and she has never weighed more than 64 pounds in her entire life. The disease also caused blindness in one of her eyes. She is one of only three people in the world known to have this disease.

Never able to get beyond emaciated, Lizzie was bullied in grade school and constantly ridiculed, mocked, and berated for an appearance over which she had absolutely no control. She was called things like “skinny bones,” “grandma,” and “pork chop legs.” In high school, things only escalated. How could such a person ever be happy? How could her life have meaning or purpose? How could this “trashed girl” ever have a livelihood? Did God create her just to be ridiculed?

Lizzie's answer would be a resounding “No!”

“God is the reason why I'm here,” she tells audiences today. “God is with me, and if He's not leaving this path, neither am I. I'm not going to let that video, or those people, become the definition of who I was meant to be.”

During her junior year in high school, Lizzie was asked to address the freshman class of four hundred students about her condition. Instead of the anticipated chaos and rowdiness expected from young students, the room listened in rapt attention. Most were silent, but many wept. At the conclusion of her speech, students lined up to hug her and thank her for how her story had touched them. It was in the midst of this that Lizzie realized her purpose in life: She was called to be a messenger of hope and lead a constructive movement against bullying. God did have a purpose for her after all!

Today, she is the author of three books and the producer of numerous videos. Her TEDx Talk in Austin, Texas on self-image

has also gone viral, with more than 7.1 million views the last time I looked. In it, she says of the bullies who tormented her all those years, “Tell me those negative things... I’m gonna turn them around and use them as a ladder to climb up to my goals.”⁶ In Mexico, more than 10,000 gathered to hear her story. In Washington, D.C., she influenced Congress in the creation of the Safe Schools Improvement Act.

Her message is simple: “We were all put on earth for a purpose. Be brave! Find your purpose! Succeed! ...I feel that Jesus put me in this little body to show people that no matter what size you are, or where you come from, or what you go through, there is a God who is there, who will never leave you. And that will surpass any obstacle.”⁷

Ji Seong-ho

Ji Seong-ho was born in North Korea. In his teens, Ji Seong-ho used to scavenge coal that had tumbled out of trains and try to trade it for food for his family. In one instance, while jumping from one train car to another, he lost consciousness due to hunger and fell through the gap between the cars. When he awoke, he discovered only “a piece of very thin flesh was holding my leg to the rest of my body. Blood was gushing out.” He realized immediately that he needed to stop the bleeding. When he tried to work on his leg, he realized that three of his fingers on his left hand had been sheared off. His younger brother was able to help him stem the bleeding, get him into a cart, and to a hospital. Had it not been for the pleading and crying of his mother, the doctors would have left him to die. To save costs, they used no anesthesia when they amputated his leg and hand.⁸

6 TEDx Talks, “How Do You Define Yourself? | Lizzie Velasquez | TEDxAustinWomen Brave Starts Here,” YouTube video, 13:10. January 16, 2014, 13:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzPbY9ufnQY>.

7 Ibid.

8 Paul Bond, “North Korean Defector-Turned-Radio Broadcaster Reveals Cruel Treatment: Hand, Leg Removed Without Anesthesia,” The Hollywood Reporter, April 20, 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/north-korean-defector-turned-radio-789919>.

Once he survived and had healed enough to walk with a crutch, he was back to foraging for food, which included smuggling rice from China, a criminal offense in North Korea. Eventually, he was caught and arrested. In prison, he was beaten worse than others who had committed similar crimes. He was told by an agent, “You went over to China hobbling on crutches. You’ve dishonored the leader by doing that in a foreign land. Sons of bitches like you are throwing mud on the face of our leader, who is doing all he can to provide.”

Just how could a young man like this have any real purpose in life? What would his answer be if you asked him, “Why were you born?”

And yet, Ji never gave up his hunger for freedom. In 2006, he and his brother escaped to South Korea, walking with the help of wooden crutches made by his father. He fell in among a group of Christians who helped him obtain prosthetics and find a way to provide for himself and his brother. A few years later, he established a group, Now Action and Unity for Human Rights, to speak out about human rights. He began rescuing North Korean defectors trapped in China. He traveled a 1000+ miles across China and Southeast Asia, spreading his message of hope and deliverance. He has since addressed the British Parliament.

Meanwhile, his father, previously a member of the “regime,” was caught trying to escape, and he was tortured and murdered. Though Ji Seong-ho now has an artificial limb and can walk on his own, he brandished those same father-made wooden crutches when he was hailed in the Presidential State of the Union Address.

Ji became a Christian. He now lives in Seoul. His purpose? The reason he was born? To rescue defectors from the tyranny of the rogue nation of North Korea and broadcast the truth of deliverance (the gospel) throughout the region.

And Rebecca

Rebecca was tormented, violated, assaulted, manipulated, exploited, and degraded for twelve long years. When she was only five, the perpetrator, disguised as a “friend of the family,” started

to influence the life of this innocent child. A full-grown adult, he began to engineer, orchestrate, choreograph, and program her little mind in such a way that she would be held captive by him at his will and whim for twelve years: for four thousand, three hundred, and eighty-three days.

Unscrupulously, he held her as in a vise; he held her by enticements and fear. It's hard for me to tell Rebecca's story. I wept inwardly (and at times outwardly) as I interviewed her for an hour and a half on (of all days) Valentine's Day. The details of the torture and sexual exploitation should never be conveyed or graphically described. I know that's contrary to our degraded culture, which seems amused and entertained by degradation. Thank you, Helliwood! In the Bible, these acts are called "the works of darkness," and we are well informed that "it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephesians 5:12).

In civil dialogue and academic terms, Rebecca's situation is referred to as complex trauma, the result of a prolonged, repeated experience of interpersonal trauma in a context in which the individual has little or no chance of escape. She describes it as living in a war zone from which there was no escape; a lack of safety on multiple levels; loneliness that simulated being exiled from everyone else; manipulated into silence by threats that you wouldn't believe. The candy was poison and the poison turned to pain, pain beyond the physical that reached to mental and emotional depths unspeakable. She was a trashed human, relegated to a garbage can and feeling like she belonged there.

Rebecca! Now what? She connected with God. Jesus became her friend. She learned who she really was. She got the truth about herself, and it was wonderful. Unspeakably terrible things might have happened to her, but she animatedly declared, "What happened to me does not define me. I am a daughter of the Most High God." Every time a lie would come into her mind, she would repeat this phrase. She "pounded in" the truth, and she no longer lives with a damaged version of herself. Her advice to would-be survivors is: "Put all the pieces of your broken heart into the hands of God. He knows how to mend them and put them back together in a beautiful way."

Why You Were Born

I asked Rebecca if there were any long-term consequences from her abuse. She said, “No, I’m happy; I’m blessed. I love my life. I love what I do.” I asked, “What is that?” Without hesitation, she responded, “I help others.” “How so?” I asked. She replied, “I help abused and damaged girls to not just merely survive but recover, so that they thrive in life. I tell them to never give up and be sure to connect with God.”

I had two more important questions for her. “First, did going through what you went through help you to be more effective in helping others? She responded, “Definitely.” And dear reader, that is the essential point of this chapter, that no matter what hurt, damage, abuse, or tragedy you’ve experienced, our wonderful God wants to fix whatever is broken, heal whatever is hurt, and empower you to be more effective in life than you otherwise would have been.

My final question for Rebecca was, “Rebecca, what is your purpose in life now?” Her answer was simply profound and profoundly simple. She said, “It is to love.” I ended the interview by asking Rebecca how she would pray for an abused girl if one should walk into my office right now. This is how she prayed. (Maybe this prayer is for you.)

Dear God, Thank You for Your love. Thank You for what You created Your daughter to be. God, we know You are here, that You are with us; You are with her. God, we may not feel Your presence but we know You are here. We ask for Your help. We ask for Your guidance. We ask for Your wisdom.

I ask that Your daughter would know that even in dark moments, she is not alone. I ask You to give her others who would help, defend, and protect her, even angels who would protect her. Help her to know what You truly created her to be. You love her and You still do miracles today. Amen!

What Will Your Story Be?

What will the story of your life be? Why were *you* born? I'm sure it was for some greatness that may be too wonderful for you to believe. And yet, each of the people I've written about in this chapter probably had far more circumstances opposing them than you do. Finding that belief in themselves—seeing themselves through the eyes of God instead of being limited by human perception—they continue to achieve wonderful things every day of their existence. Truly, the world is a better place for having them in it; and as handicapped and deformed as the world might see them, they have instead expressed the beauty of lives trusting in God.

I sincerely want you to know that nothing, absolutely nothing, can destroy your God-implanted purpose, if you will only reach out and take hold of it. No tragedy, no setback, no circumstance, no bully, no demon, no nothing can prevent God's purpose. As Lizzie Velasquez proclaimed, "*You* are the biggest influence in your life, not anyone else."⁹ God is on your side, and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

So, what about you? Have you only been told what's wrong with you your entire life? Do you feel like you're "less than" for some reason? Do you only count all the reasons you're not important and believe you don't deserve some kind of happiness in life? And at the same time, looking at the lives of Nick, Ryan, Gianna, Lizzie, Jo, and Rebecca, do you really think that any interference can prevent you from achieving the reason you were born, if you will plug in to your purpose in life as they did theirs? No! I'm telling you, no! Nothing can defeat you if you pursue your dreams with God.

You have as much, if not much more, going for you. Despite their "defects" and debilitating circumstances, each of these individuals found a way to not only *like* themselves, but also to turn the obstacles they faced into stepping-stones toward success, and making a difference for others. Life plagued them with lemons,

9 TEDx Talks, "How Do You Define Yourself? | Lizzie Velasquez | TEDxAustinWomen Brave Starts Here," YouTube video, 13:10. January 16, 2014, 13:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzPbY9ufnQY>.

and they have each become experts in making the most wonderful lemonade.

Why would God want any less for you?

If you will but respond to the simple truth that *you plus God can triumph in life*, then who knows what you can accomplish? The Bible tells us the angels in heaven actually sit on the edge of their seats, watching in anticipation of seeing God's plans for the earth revealed through our lives (Ephesians 3: 9-10). What are you going to do with the gifts, the life, and the purpose you've been given?

**God intends
to partner
with you
to help you
fulfill your
purpose,
the reason
you were
born.**

None of us is alone. God intends to partner with you to help you fulfill your purpose, the reason you were born. There is no adversity too great, no devil so strong, no circumstance so overwhelming that can

keep you from achieving the reason you were born, if— and “if” is the hinge upon which the gates of heaven swing—*if* you will believe and live these four truths:

1. God has a purpose for you.
2. God will make a way when there seems to be no way.
3. God will teach and train, comfort and equip you, if you will turn to Him and follow Him with all of your heart.
4. You are then called to teach, train, comfort, and equip others, using what God has given you.

There is only one *you*. Who is that *you* supposed to be? It's time to take off the limits and start dreaming again. What has God purposed for your life?