

God's Love For Me

His love never quits

A collection of short stories written by Christen Price and friends

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Acknowledgments

The Uncontainable Truth



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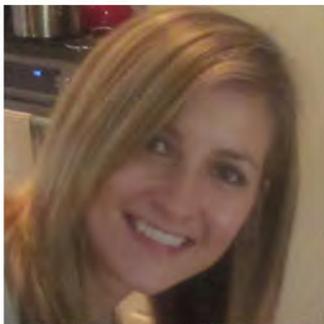
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For our readers:

Thank God! He deserves your thanks. His love never quits. Thank the God of all gods, His love never quits. Thank the Lord of all lords. His love never quits.

Psalm 136:1-3

Part One: The Chase

Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
Psalm 23:6

Saved by Love

I was on a mission. I needed to find a restroom. My eight year old legs walked swiftly through the trails of the Ocala National Forest campground. We were setting up camp... in the pouring rain... rain that kept coming and coming. Apparently we were the only family brave enough to face the elements and camp in the middle of such horrible weather!

It had been raining for hours, maybe days. Puddles of muddy water slept everywhere around me perfectly content to stay until the Florida heat and humidity would force the earth to drink them in.

As I walked it started to storm again. I walked faster, it rained harder, the thunder boomed louder. I started to run, charging through puddles, splashing through mud until what I perceived to be another harmless puddle proved to be a flooded retention ditch much deeper and wider than I had imagined when jumping from puddle to puddle.

My small frame was scooped up by the current carrying me toward a large cement pipe. My eyes grew wide, adrenaline rushed through me as I went into survival mode. Right before I entered the pipe my eye saw a lone tree root that had refused to part with the dirt. I threw my entire body toward it and caught it with my hands. For the moment, I was safe.

I tried with all my might to climb out of the ditch. The wall of the ditch was too soft and gave way each time I attempted to climb up the bank. I couldn't see over the top of the embankment and the root I was clinging to was losing ground the more I struggled to pull myself out. I started yelling for help, screaming, crying... begging, pleading..... praying.

The louder I got the harder the thunder would roll. The more desperate my pleas, the harder it rained. Lightening bounced all around me as if to mock my efforts. It was then I realized that no one could hear me. My family was at least a quarter of a mile away and there was no one else on the campground.

“Jesus,” I whispered through my sobbing. “I am so scared and alone. I can’t get out of this ditch by myself. I need help. Please help me Jesus.”

I was cold and getting tired. The water around me was moving fast and the wind was blowing pretty hard. But I didn’t give up, I held on.

A moment later I heard a voice. I looked up and an elderly man was looking down at me.

“Oh, you don’t want to be in there,” he said.

“Please help me,” I called out.

He had some sort of cloth in his hands and he threw it down to me. I grabbed it and he pulled me to safety.

“Thank you, thank you sir,” I said. I was crying again.

He shook his head and waved off my thanks and started walking to a trailer that I had not seen before. I started running back up the trail wailing for my parents. There they were, just where I had left them, setting up camp. Through my sobs I told them the story of the ditch, the rain and the stranger who saved my life. Then I changed into dry clothes and settled into a sleeping bag to warm up and think on the whole ordeal.

At once I knew that I needed to thank the man again, really thank him. I was grateful that he had come along, forever grateful. As soon as it stopped raining I was going to go see him.

The rain stopped right before dusk and, well, I needed to find a restroom, again. So I set out, carefully this time. I walked the trail, avoiding all puddles, ditches and anything that might resemble standing water. I recognized the ditch I had “stepped” into by the stubborn tree root that still slung to the earth and the cloth that had pulled me to safety lying beside it.

My eyes quickly turned toward where I had seen the trailer. But it was gone. Gone. Not even a trace that it had been there. No man, no trailer. There was no one to validate my story, only a wet cloth and a dead tree root.

I looked everywhere for the man while we camped there. He was nowhere to be found and it seemed his trailer had never even existed. But here I stood the product of his act of heroism. And all I could think was how I had not thanked him properly. He had saved my life, saved my parents and siblings from what could have been a terrifying ordeal. I believe he was sent by God, the answer to my cry for help.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Psalm 50:15, NKJ

Throughout my life I have at times found myself in a similar place. Not necessarily in a waterlogged ditch. But at the times I have felt alone and afraid I am reminded that He has never left not forsaken me, that like Joseph, my pit will lead me to a palace. I am reminded that even in turmoil and pain He has been faithful and comforts me in unlikely ways... just like he did Elijah.

And I am reminded that when I feel alone He surrounds me with His love and brings the broken and down trodden in need of the hope He has given to me to sustain me... just like He did David.

And when I feel I just can't hang on any longer, when the current threatens to take me under, when the thunder drowns out my cries, when the rain pounds and the lightening slams all around me I whisper His name and I pray, "Help me..."

He IS faithful...

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Psalm 50:15, NKJ

And He will extend His love, His mercy, his grace and His peace and He will pull me to safety... and for that I thank Him. I am forever grateful.

About Tara:

Coming from a long legacy of ministers, Tara Sloan was the first woman in her family to become a licensed, ordained minister. An experienced speaker, Tara shares her own joys, trials and triumphs as she empowers women to thrive in each area of their lives. Through humor, tears and heartfelt conviction Tara engages those she speaks to with passion. Tara and her husband Craig have been married 20 years. They are the proud parents of five beautiful and talented young ladies ages 18-5 who Tara affectionately refers to as "the belles."

Emily's Healing Hug

Over the years, I've struggled intensely with perfectionism. I felt like I was failing my family if I wasn't the perfect mom and wife. After all, that's what my amazing husband and precious kids deserved.

In my mind, anything less than perfection was compromise.

I was spiraling into a cycle of self-condemnation and crushing guilt. The rubble of my broken life was building a thick wall between God and me. I only felt shame and unworthiness when I tried to pray. All I could think about was all the reasons God was likely annoyed or tired of me. I didn't know how to break through this cycle of self-condemnation and shame.

One night I was tucking in my middle daughter, Emily. She was a tender-hearted first grader. Tearfully, she announced she was not going back to school tomorrow. Slowly, I discovered that she'd made a mistake in class that day and had been called out in front of everyone. She felt so embarrassed and didn't want to go back to school--thinking no one would like her since she made a mistake. We talked about how teachers make mistakes and we still love them; how friends make mistakes and she still wants to be their friend. Then, I heard myself saying, "...and you know how *I* make mistakes and you still love me? You wouldn't want me to stop being your mom just because I made mistakes, would you?"

As I was saying those words to her she didn't answer. She just wrapped her little arms in a fierce hug around my neck.

It felt like the arms of God—loving me beyond words.

In that moment, I had a realization that if I was the “perfect” mom, my kids would feel like perfection was the only option for them, too. Helping Emily to see that it’s still possible to *deeply love* an imperfect person made it *safe* for her to be imperfect and know she’s loved. I felt like God broke through to my heart in that moment. My daughter’s unconditional love and acceptance ministered healing to my soul in a way no one else could. That night was the first step toward really understanding the way God loves me.

Like Emily, He’s fully wrapping his arms around me, knowing my flaws and failures.

Un-surprised. Unrelenting. Passionate. Redeeming. I think I’m starting to understand what love really means.

About Christin:

Christin Nevins is a wife and mom--married to Adam for 12 years. They have 2 daughters and a son whom they had the joy of adopting from India. Christin is raising her family in an inner-city Indianapolis neighborhood and attends Common Ground Christian Church. She's passionate about ministering to women by inviting and equipping them to live into all that God dreams for them. She also loves to play in the garden and read to her kids. Connect with Christin on Facebook or twitter @christinnevins. Find out more at christinnevins.com

Valentine's Day

When I think about love I can't help but think of my sweet husband.

I have been ever so blessed to be married to a wonderful man who just happens to be my best friend. And I mean my best friend. David can make me laugh so hard that it hurts. He knows me better than anyone and loves me more than I could ever have imagined. He asked me to marry him our senior year of college and we tied the knot three weekends after I graduated. We have been married for six years and through these years there have been SO many days of joy and laughter but also days of trials. My bible study teacher in college, Mrs. Tabor, once said, "When two people become one there is just some friction involved!" Well, she is right!

Two sinners living under one roof is bound to bring some trials and hardships.

I am so thankful that our sweet Lord gives us everything we need to make it through our sin and glorify His name together. In marriage two verses have always been near and dear to my heart.

The first is:

We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4:19

This is the verse that is engraved into our wedding bands. The only way that I can truly love my husband is through the love that Christ first showed me.

The second is:

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance

2 Thessalonians 3:5

I love this verse! When times are hard, when our sin gets in the way, we are to first look to God to give us love for each other. When I feel like I cannot love I am assured that He can love through me. When it seems like the road is too hard, I am reminded that the power of Christ lives in me and nothing is too hard with His strength.

I am to have the same perseverance in my marriage as Christ did on the cross.

There is no challenge, no trail that is greater than what our sweet Savior accomplished as He gave up his life for us. I pray that you would be reminded of His great and perfect love.

About Stephanie:

I am a wife and mommy who adores my sweet Jesus, is madly in love with my family, and delights in sewing! I am also the owner of [Little Lights Boutique](#). Little Lights Boutique is a place where you will find custom made children's clothing and accessories stitched with love!

"She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands." Proverbs 31

Bro-Mance

As we come upon this Valentine's Day I would like to take a moment and reflect upon something that I have learned about over the past year and a half – the true meaning of

Bro-Mance.

About a year and a half ago we had a new youth minister arrive at our church. My wife and I quickly became good friends with him and his wife. Shortly after that we began to volunteer more in the youth department and were eventually asked if we would consider teaching a small group. We both agreed and I was assigned to this group of guys that some would classify as “energetic.” Looking back over our time together I would have to agree.

I was placed with the 10th grade boys. When I first met the guys I wasn't so sure how well we were going to mesh together. See I am very by the rule, matter of fact, and a follow the rules kind of guy. These guys push the limits, laugh at everything and don't really focus on anything longer than about 45 seconds. I began to wonder why God had me here and why I was supposed to be teaching these guys. Well, a year and a half later, those 10th graders, now 11th graders, have taught me so much about acceptance and friendship.

I have seen them stick together through some pretty tough times and stick up for each other in some pretty awkward and not good moments.

I guess one thing that really sticks out to me the most about this motley crew that I love hanging out with is their openness to everyone. I have guys who go to some of the most expensive private schools in town, I have ones who are homeschooled, ones that are in the magnet programs, and others who go to public school – and yet none of that matters to them.

Every week we will talk about what they have done over the weekend or the past week, and I can almost tell you exactly what each of them is going to say, and that is that they hung out with each other. They call/text each other if they aren't at church or at some event, they stand next to each other if they are doing something, and most importantly, and what I find to be the most amazing thing, they pray with and for each other, and they don't care who is looking.

These guys really are something special. As I said earlier, they have taught me so much about acceptance. They don't see each other, as I saw people in high school. They accept each other and anyone else who comes to visit or who joins the group. They do it whole heartedly and are genuinely sincere about it. The friendship that they have is a gift from God. I know people who have gone their entire lives looking for one close friend who will be willing to stand with them when no one else is, or who will stand for them when they can't stand on their own. They have that in each other, and I am honored to get to watch it.

So as you celebrate Valentine's Day this year, I hope you do so and remember your significant others as well as your friends.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

About JW:

JW is originally from Greenville, AL. He grew up the middle child out of nine in a strong Southern Baptist home. After serving in the Air Force he met his wife, KC, at college. They were married in 2008, had their first daughter, Olivia in Dec. 2009 and adopted their second daughter from Ethiopia, Zoe, who was born Nov. 2010, and came home August of this past year. JW is currently a law student, active at our church and enjoys documenting their lives on their blog - thegodwingang.com.

(They also have three dogs, a cat and the newest addition, a baby piglet. So go check out the craziness.)

Lessons in Love (from a 2 year old)

As many of you know I have the most precious 2 year old daughter any parent could ask for! She is dainty, sweet, kind, and gentle. She is also tough, loud, and demanding when she wants to be. As I was thinking about what I would write this month (taking valentine's day into consideration) the Lord brought some gentle reminders of his truths to mind via my little Amy Kate.

It's amazing what we can learn from the children in our lives, have you ever noticed that?

Just this past month my husband and I celebrated our 7 year wedding anniversary. In the past we've always celebrated our anniversaries with a nice vacation away from it all, but with Lucas only days old, we obviously decided to stay home this year. Instead of some fancy dinner out, or even gifts we decided to attend an event hosted by [Kirk Cameron](#) and [Warren Barfield](#) called "[Love Worth Fighting For](#)".

We have been trying to get to this event for at least 2 years now, mostly to support Warren Barfield, who is a friend of my brothers, but also to take a chance to take in any Godly wisdom/advice to apply towards our marriage. I recommend any couple in any stage of their marriage relationship attend one of these events. I will admit we did not make it through the entire evening, due to our current state of sleep deprivation, we were doing good to be out past 7:00pm to begin with! The message was great – why not try extending the same kind of grace God has given you to your spouse, ESPECIALLY when things get hard. This sounds so simple, but is so hard to practice when you are in the heat of the argument, when you're so desperately trying to win at any cost, you know those times...the ones where you have the

weapons of mass destruction on hand JUST IN CASE you need to use them. We've all had those times; no relationship goes without them, including friendships, child/parent relationships, romantic relationships, working relationships, etc...

So when you think about God extending you grace for all the times you've managed to hurt him through blatant disobedience, for words and actions that are not pleasing to Him, and for the hidden things of your heart that may bring shame, you probably think about God's love and forgiveness for you; how he selflessly gave up his perfect Son who had NEVER caused him any pain to pay the price for all the sin and shame in YOUR life. We've all heard the saying that God forgives and forgets and we know that the scripture tells us in Psalm 103:12 that he has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.

What an amazing thing to know that our heavenly Father just tosses our sin aside when we take the time to lay down our pride to seek his forgiveness.

Do you know how humanly impossible that is for us to do? Oh we can forgive, but our mind will NEVER let us forget. We try to forget, we even suppress the feelings over time but in those moments, the ones where you have the weapons of mass destruction on hand, we always seem to remember, don't we? Where do we learn to do this? Who teaches us to do this? We learn from our own natural sinful nature. How do I know this? Because my 2 year old has taught me this.

Let me explain:

My sweet Amy Kate is enamored with a little boy in her class named Drew. Drew is the son of some dear friends, and AK and Drew have known each other since birth, being only 6

weeks apart, you could say Drew was AK's "first" friend. Everyday it's "Drew this" and "Drew that". If you ask her about her school, her go-to response is "Drew". If you ask her about church, her go-to response is "Drew", she pretend talks on the phone to Drew, she can spot Drew out in a crowded room of people. She even talks about Drew's Mommy and Daddy; she can even point out "Drew's Mommy's Car" in the carpool line at her preschool. You get the point...she LOVES Drew!

Back towards the beginning of the school year several of the children in AK's class went through the typical toddler "biting" phase, and unfortunately AK was a victim to one of sweet Drew's biting episodes. It has probably been at least 6 months and AK will still tell us and show exactly where Drew bit her that day. She still loves him dearly, but has never forgotten about that incident. She has obviously forgiven him, but never fails to mention where he bit her when the topic/disciplining of biting comes up in our home. Isn't that so like us to bring up a "forgiven" incident when we need to cover up our actions to make ourselves look better. We quickly find a way to make the other party feel guilty or take the focus off ourselves, because that is our selfish human nature.

Remember those weapons of mass destruction? We inherit the ability to use those from our sinful nature as well. More recently Drew and AK had another biting incident at school. This time we saw the bruise on her arm asking what happened.

She responded "DREW", followed by "Ms. Mary said No, No, Drew".

This type of conversation at our house always makes us giggle, because she responds to anything about school with "DREW". We thought that since she always brought up the previous

incident from months before that she must have been mistaken. I decided to investigate and ask one of her teachers about the recent biting event. The teacher giggled and responded with “Did Amy Kate tell you what happen”. I mentioned she said something about Drew but that we weren’t sure if that was the correct answer, she said Drew did bite AK, but that AK finally bit him back, in fact her exact words were “She nearly took his finger off.” At first I was shocked...not my sweet, kind, gentle AK?! Then I got tickled at the thought, then I was embarrassed, then I realized it just comes with the territory when you get a room full of 2 year olds together. The point here is that this time when Drew bit, AK pulled her weapon of mass destruction with intent to cause harm.

Now these two have definitely “kissed” and made-up, but the point is we never forget no matter how hard we try to forgive.

But the good news is God always forgives and never hold it over our heads again.

He just continues to forgive over and over again. This is not to say he doesn’t let us suffer the consequences of our actions, but he is faithful to forgive us and it is our duty as Christians to strive to forgive and extend grace just like God does towards us.

Do we do this enough in our relationships? Next time the battle starts to get intense, and you are ready to reach for those weapons of mass destruction, take a deep breathe, think about Drew and AK for a moment, and then think about God’s love for you. Now, do you want to replicate the actions of 2 year old children or the actions of a loving God?

About April:

April has been married to Matt for 6 years. After 3 1/2 years of fertility struggles the Lord blessed them with their very own miracle. April has a deep passion for encouraging teens to live a life of purity, and with her recent past dealing with fertility issues she want others to know they are not alone in their struggles or pains. She finds it important to tell her story to not only encourage those struggling today, but to also educate those who don't know much about the process, heartache, and joys the journey of fertility struggle can bring.

Part Two: The Beauty

For God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever.
Psalm 100:5

My Extravagant God

Beauty: what is it? Roses, sunsets, music, love?

I think of a rose on the brink of maturity, opening slowly, softly, to the first welcome rays of the dawn. In celebrating its beauty, I celebrate my God.

God did not have to make roses, nor did He need to create the sunrise. Yes, the reasons the earth circles the sun are all scientific enough, but God did not have to add the extra brush strokes of orange, purple and pink across the sky each morning and evening.

Birds are necessary in their own right, but God did not have to make their songs so sweet.

The sense of touch is necessary, but God could have made it a mere biological necessity without any feelings of joy or comfort or security in it.

He could have made life with no music. It is not necessary for our existence like oxygen or water.

Nature speaks of God, the Bible says so. Nature itself says so. So what should we hear from all the extra touches God created to infuse our lives with beauty? The very fact that we can recognize beauty and cherish it is in itself an extra gift.

These wonders do not portray a distant God of wrath and condemnation; they sing of a God Who loves. A gracious, tender and extravagant God, full of mercy and compassion.

Yes, there is evil in the world. There is harshness, horror, filth and poverty. But sin brought this on, not the Savior. He is the giver of life, joy, peace, love and all other good things.

God whispers love and tender care into every flower and every sunrise. If we have ears to hear, and eyes to see, in God we find all beauty.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

James 1:17

About Kimberly:

Kimberly Rae lived in several countries overseas before health problems brought her home from the mission field. She now lives in North Carolina with her husband and two young children. Her first novel, *Stolen Woman*, is about human trafficking and missions (see www.stolenwoman.org or www.stolenwoman.blogspot.com).

Icicles

The icicles are starting to melt.

There used to be a massive one visible from the small window in our upstairs bathroom. I liked to stare at it as I washed my hair. I'm not sure when it went, but it wasn't there this morning.

They crashed to the ground at random intervals last night, waking me from light sleep. Their melting is gentler this morning. There is a steady melodic pouring sound near each window, whispering promises that spring will eventually come. It won't always be winter.

I am not someone who is highly affected by the weather. This is a very good thing considering the fact that we lived in a city in China that only saw sunlight approximately 50 days out of the year and we now live in the world of long New England winters. However, my mood is affected by a myriad of other triggers--too much time in isolation, sleep deprivation, unanswered questions, unfulfilled longings, hunger—so I can relate to those who feel as if this relentless winter is doing its best to beat and hold them down. Sometimes there is just not enough hot cocoa and snow angels in the world to make up for grey skies, lost mittens, shoveling, scraping ice, slipping, maneuvering tight roads, and feeling really cold.

I had a friend tell me the other day that she feels like she has been in a spiritual winter for years.

Having visited that place before, my heart breaks for her. As I look out my window at leafless trees, dirty piles of snow on the sides of the road, and the barren white field across from our house, I am reminded of what a wonderful analogy the seasons are to our spiritual life. The

trees only look dead. I saw their brilliant red and yellow leaves last fall and soon my eyes will strain to see their tiny buds of life again.

My friend cried as she shared her pain and I believe that longing is a sign that winter won't last forever.

We wouldn't search for something unless we believed it could be found. I think that desire, recognition, admittance, and hope are all melting icicle promises that spring will come. Not only for my friend, but for all of us who seek God in barren lands.

And I believe His love is big enough to melt all that is cold and hard in our hearts.

About Erika:

Erika Castiglione resides in Boston (by way of Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and East Asia), where she and her husband minister to the many international students there. She is a mother to three, an avid reader, an aspiring writer, and a clumsy, but growing follower of Christ. She blogs at [If You Find Encouragement](#).

Spring Cleaning

Our old house recently had a mini-makeover. Once squeaky hardwood floors have been replaced with newer wood, the walls have been re-plastered and the paint-chipped dust boards are now smooth and freshly painted white. After a week's worth of work, the house seems to have sighed and said thank you.

Once the repairmen left for good, I began to sweep away the dust that had settled during the restoration. It seemed as though the dust had been sprinkled this way and that, landing on our fireplace mantle, television console, and dining room table. As I swiffered away the dust on the floor, I saw the sparkle of clean hardwood. The floor was glowing in gratitude.

As we began to move furniture back into the living room, we decided to rearrange the space. Toys stayed in the back room, allowing the living room to be less junky and more mature-like. After that, I moved into the bedroom closets to consign clothes that have not been worn in ages. Then, I got into our decorating closet and tossed little trinkets, old paintings, and other less valuable objects that were just taking up space. I vacuumed the office, changed the sheets, and replaced dead light bulbs.

Spring cleaning had begun.

Not only had it begun in my house, but it had begun in my heart. This winter, seeds of bitterness were planted deep into my core.

Life didn't seem fair and I couldn't help but compare and compete.

With those around me and with people I didn't even know. Slowly, through all of these comparisons, my once faithful heart began to beat in a negative way.

Soon, my negative heart found a partner in my husband. He too, was struggling with sources of power in his life. Day by day, our hearts were beating in unison: *Life isn't fair, life isn't fair*. Our daily living was filled with sarcasm instead of laughter, frustration instead of peace, and tears instead of smiles.

Where did love go?

Love for life? Love for work? Love for times of affliction, suffering and pain? Where was God and why wasn't He giving us what we wanted instead of giving it to everyone else? *Why isn't life fair, God? Why isn't it fair?*

The world was dark and cold. Winter had set in and I had no desire to feel warmth from the light.

Even though I had the drapes closed inside my heart, God's love still found slivers of space to fill with light. Gently, he showed me areas of my life that needed to be renovated. Simultaneously, he was working on my husband. Graciously, he provided a path for us to walk on, hand in hand - a path that gave us hope even on dire days when we didn't feel very hopeful. God began to chip away at our negative attitudes and repaint them with fresh outlooks on the life we had been abundantly given.

Our loyal God was giving us a heart-lift.

Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss! Truth sprouts green from the ground, Right Living pours down from the skies! Oh yes! God gives Goodness and Beauty; our land responds with Bounty and Blessing. Right Living strides out before him, and clears a path for his passage.

Psalm 85:10-13

While the earth still proclaimed Winter, my heart began to feel Spring. My soul was satisfied and began to sing for joy. My husband and I began to make decisions together based off God's will instead of our own. Once again, I began to trust God's plan for our lives.

Soon, signs of spring began showing up all around us. Our once bitter seeds had been sowed away and gladness began to sprout into beautiful flowers of thankfulness, *eucharisteo*. Everywhere I looked, I saw God's Beauty. The earth had been drenched in God's affectionate satisfaction and I was thirstily drinking it in.

With Spring replacing Winter, I began to reflect on that season which brought me such pain and sadness. Light was shed and I saw things that I couldn't see during the cold, dark days.

I saw that my comparisons came from envy and my competition came from jealousy.

My husband realized that he wasn't struggling with powers of this earth but rather with being mad at God. We saw how, like our old house, our floors began to buckle, paint began to chip, and walls started to crumble because our hearts and our minds were not firmly planted in God's Truth for our lives.

The dust has cleared away, the renovations complete. Inhaling, I breathe in God's cleanliness. His righteousness fills my lungs, giving oxygen to my blood, allowing my heart to beat pure, rhythmic beats similar to his:

Your love never quits. Your love never quits.

God, I love living with you; your house glows with your glory.

Psalm 26:8

About Christen:

When Christen isn't being mom to her twin girls Adeline and Maralee, you can find her blogging away on her website, The Uncontainable Truth. In this community, she encourages her readers to let their light shine and shares her family's rollercoaster ride of raising premature infants. She is a sweet southern gal that enjoys a life brimmed with love and creativity. In her spare time, she seeks pleasure in baking, sewing, photography, and painting. After graduating from Auburn University and marrying her best friend since high school, she calls Montgomery, Alabama home. Find Christen on Facebook or tweet with @uncontain_truth.

If it's the Beaches

I'll never forget the day that I stood there on the beach with my best friend's mom outside of their condo in Destin.

It really wasn't any different from any other day on the beach, which I can say because for all of my life, the most beautiful beaches in the world were only a few hours away. On that day, I can't remember why we were there, though we probably didn't need a reason for the trip. Lizzie and I were either living in Birmingham or Auburn, and we'd decided to come down and get some respite from the rest of the world.

So I stood there with her mother, Jan, who is much like a second mother to me, in complete silence. Toes in the sand at the edge of the tide, staring into a beautiful sky painted with the golds, reds, and pinks of a beach sunset. It must have been spring or fall, because I was content. And I'm hardly content when I'm sweating. I felt the wind on my face, and I closed my eyes and just took it in. The smells, the sounds, and the feeling of complete serenity.

And before I knew I was even talking, I said to Mrs. Jan, "This is my God place."

I looked over, and she, eyes closed, taking it in just as I had been, smiled and said, "Mine too." She knew.

I feel God's presence most tangibly in moments like those. I've felt Him in the Blue Ridge Mountains, too, and even in a small park in Tennessee. There's something about those moments when your mind stills, and you are able to take in everything else and realize it is God speaking to you.

The winds are His arms enveloping you, telling you, "I've got you. None of this was an accident."

These moments bring me clarity, perspective. Bring me to tears in awe of the natural beauty in this world. Sometimes I leave with crazy ideas of leaving my city life and living raw, out in the wild. But I know I'll never do it. I'm thankful, however, that I have the beaches. And the mountains. And the parks in Tennessee.

So that if I need a break, need a reminder that God LOVES me, that I'm part of the biggest love story this world has ever seen, I can go there.

And be still. And know that He is there, too.

About Lauren:

My former boss once told me I was "superfluous and overdivulgent." Which was just a nice way to say I talk too much. I'm an unabashed dork, book-and-music enthusiast, and a Christian who loves to ask questions. All in all, I make sure to soak as much out of the life my God has given me as possible, and you can find me doing so currently in Nashville.



Part Three: The Giving

Generous in love—God, give grace! Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record. Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry. I know how bad I've been; my sins are staring me down.

Psalm 51:1-3

Pride Comes before the Fall

Before I moved to college, wise friends warned me that many devout Christians turn from Christ during the trying, tempting, alluring years at a university. With great arrogance, I bristled at their words and declared, “You don’t understand how much I love God! I will never turn away from Him!”

Pride comes before the fall. I fell.

God saw my gaping need for humility and allowed severe failure to swallow my conceit. Then, He healed me. He redeemed that dark, sinful time to teach me that it’s His love that matters, His love that holds, and His love that preserves; not mine.

In those early years of Christian naivety and pride, I sounded much like Peter before Jesus’ crucifixion.

“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” (Matthew 26:33). Like Peter, I bragged about my devotion, my steadfastness, the loyalty of my love for Christ. “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Matthew 26:35).

But like Peter, when the rubber met the road and the rooster crowed, I had denied my Savior and I wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:74-75)

Like Peter, I thought the measure and strength of my love would hold me to Him.

But while my own love lay dying in the strength of its impurity, (a beautiful line I stole from an Indigo Girls’ song,) God’s love held me. Even during my sin. His love patiently watched my rebellion. His love took my abuse. His love preserved me and reshaped me into something usable for Him.

The disciple John understood that God’s love for us is the point; not our love for Him.

In the Book of John, he describes himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” John was so blown away by divine love that he needed no other identity for himself. If Jesus loved John, then John would forever define himself by that miraculous, healing, shaping love.

And so I repeat to you now the words that were spoken by the disciple who best grasped the Savior's love: “This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.” 1 John 4:10. Yes, we love God. But what ruins our sin changes our world is that He loves us.

God loves you. It changes everything.

About Rachel:

Rachel Goode is a wife, mother of two, accountant, and adoption advocate. You can read about God's work and her life at www.heirswithchrist.com.

A Hope for the Future

Jeremiah 29:11 is a scripture I am sure many of you are familiar with. It says,

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,” plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

At one point in my life I would not have believed a word of this scripture and probably would have laughed in your face if you would have told me that I had hope and a future.

You see, starting at the age five I was raped for the first time by a family friend and then by one my brothers and other family friends. I also endured physical, verbal and emotional abuse. I felt so alone during this time of my life, I felt like there was no one there for me. Not even God, I felt he abandoned me.

Our family seemed like a normal family: we attended church, had a decent house and my mother was the president of the PTA. But that was not the case.

When my mother found out she opted to side with my abuser and I ended up in children services custody where a whole list of other issues occurred.

I started down a long road of sexual perversions and used sex to get love, money, to just feel wanted by someone. Eventually, sex was not enough and drugs and alcohol became involved as well. I also ended up pregnant by a one night stand and had an abortion. Drug and alcohol use escalated and I attempted to take my life several times but God would not allow that to be.

As everything continued I ended up pregnant again with my son. Then I met my husband and thought things were going to be different but I soon realized I was an object of sex within my marriage.

We separated several times and went to marriage counseling. The marriage almost ended in divorce. Through the grace of God we are in the process of reconciliation after three years of separation.

In May of 2006 I had reached my lowest point and while contemplating suicide the Lord spoke deep into my spirit saying, "My child come home, I am all you need."

Not truly knowing and understanding what this was going to be like I recommitted myself to the Lord and have been growing in my relationship with Him ever since going deeper and deeper with every step of obedience.

So now, if you ask me what Jeremiah 29:11 means I can truly say the Lord has a plan and a purpose for me and it is not one to harm me.

He has given me great hope and excitement for the future.

About Unity:

I am sinner saved by grace who lives to glorify the Lord in all that I say and do. I am a servant of God, a mom and a nurse. I am a writer, speaker, and training to be a Christian life coach wanting to glorify the Lord, by reaching out to his hurting people, especially women. I Am Pouring Out What God Has Poured In.

Finding a Friend in God

I grew up in a close relationship with both my parents. No little girl was ever more loved. I never suffered from that teenage affliction, rebellion. However, some might conclude I'm a late bloomer—I went through the rebellious stage after I was an adult. I'm not sure what I rebelled against. Life, possibly. Myself, more likely.

I was 27 when I asked the Lord to come in and take over my life. But first, let me back up a little less than a year. That's when one night after another bout of partying the Lord informed me my life was a mess and things needed to change. What's odd is that I didn't even think about sounding crazy that God spoke to me.

Now I need to back up even further. I don't remember a time when I didn't think Jesus was my ticket to Heaven. I attended Sunday School for about a year. I had to have been preschool because I remember objecting to a Sunday School teacher who tried to get me to write my name "Anne" instead of "ANNE," the way my parents showed me.

(Excuse the digression—just establishing the approximate time of the beginning of my knowledge that the Lord existed.)

All that adds up to is that I had head knowledge of the Lord, but didn't even know one could invite Him to come in and be a personal Friend.

So I knew how to pray, not that I employed that knowledge much. And I recognized Who was talking to me when that Voice in the night told me my life was a mess. I told him I couldn't change at that time.

The truth was that I didn't want to change; I was having too much fun. God is a gentleman—He will never force His way into anyone's life. I said, "Wait until I move to Montpelier," (Idaho)—which I knew would happen about 9 months from that time" He heard me.

God managed to send a Godly woman to Montpelier at the same time as I moved. It just happened that she had a little girl the same age as my little girl. We registered them for the second grade at the same time. She also had this cute little boy, age 4, who loved to fish. I'm a sucker for kids—they can talk me into almost anything. We just happened to live right next to a creek, and it had a fence that he could drape a fishing pole over safely. His mother came with him, of course, and she talked about God this and God that, and Jesus here and Jesus there. My goodness, was that all she ever thought about?

She talked me into coming to a Bible study at her house. I still have no idea how she did that—I seldom darkened the door of a church and didn't know why anyone would ever want to study that stodgy old Book. It was bad enough that the few times I went to church always left me feeling guilty, defensive, and grouchy.

It wasn't long before I was on my knees asking God to come into my heart. In fact, I asked numerous times over several weeks before realizing He heard me the first time.

I wish I could say that event ended my partying days. It did for a few years, but then I started up again with the same old stuff. Eventually, He got through to me again, and turned me back around, this time for good. He never gave up on me. He's patient and loving and faithful beyond belief.

Thank You, thank You, thank You, Lord. You are so good.

About Anne:

Anne M. Baxter, a Christian, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and writer, takes active leadership roles in her church, ACFW, Inspire Christian Writers, and Toastmasters.

She's the author of two children's picture books and is working on a series of historical romances set in the time of Christ. The first one she began 30 years ago, set aside, and completed two years ago. The second is approximately one quarter finished and anticipated to be finished within a few months, and the third is yet to be outlined. Another completed draft has been shelved for the time being. Still another, a young adult Christmas story, has been begun and might be finished this year.

Anne also writes a blog called "The Pew Perspective" and edits her church's newsletter. As you can tell, she loves writing. In fact, she loves writing just a bit less than God, her family, her pets, and her friends.

Restoration of Intimacy with God

Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it—because it does.

Give yourselves to the gifts God gives you. Most of all, try to proclaim His truth. If you praise Him in the private language of tongues, God understands you but no one else does, for you are sharing intimacies just between you and Him. But when you proclaim His truth in everyday speech, you're letting others in on the truth so that they can grow and be strong and experience His presence with you. (I Corinthians 14:1-3 MSG)

Restoration: According to the dictionary, "to restore" means to "bring back to a former or original condition." God multiplies when He restores. And so, in His restoration work today, God is not simply restoring the church to the glory it displayed in New Testament times. He is seeking to restore it to a state more powerful, majestic, and glorious than anything the world has yet seen.

Intimacy: The Lord illustrates the restoration of His intimacy with His people through the analogy of the Bride and the Bridegroom. (Rev. 19-7-9)

God is preparing the Bride with beauty and power and dressing her in His glory. By allowing herself to be cleaned by the washing of His Word she will be presented to the Bridegroom without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

God's work of restoration is a work of the Holy Spirit in and through the lives of those who have believed in Jesus being born from above. (John 3:3) His Spirit will be poured out "on all flesh". (Joel 2:28, 29)

Thus His power would be shared with all His people and not limited to one chosen individual. (John 16:7) The Holy Spirit could be sent to indwell each of them, to fill them and to enable the Supernatural works of God to be done through them.

God is bigger than anything in your life.

He can help you with anything that comes up against you through the Blood of the Lamb and His mighty Holy Spirit. After the Baptism of the Holy Spirit you can expect to live in Unity with others in the Body of Christ. They will know we are Christians by our Love. (Titus 3:5)

EXPECT:

- **Supernatural Wisdom** - Wisdom how to take care of challenges in your family and witness. Give your life to Worship, to Bible reading. It is easier to live a Holy life. (Acts 6:10; Matt. 10:19)
- **Supernatural Love** - The Holy Spirit will release the perfect LOVE. You will be able to meet the needs of those around you, the kind of Love Jesus demonstrated. (John 13:34, 35)
- **Supernatural Fruit** - Receive all the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Gala. 5:22; I Cor. 12:8)
- **Supernatural Gifts** - Supernatural gifts without restraint or restriction under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Covet the best gift that is in the situation at that moment. (Romans 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:31; Ephesians 4:7-16)
- **Supernatural Strength** - Strength to live a consecrate life. (Rev. 12:11)
- **Supernatural Anointing** - The ability to resist and defeat your enemies, Satan, sin and self. Expect a brand new ability.

Receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and begin to respond to His gifts, which are given to expand each believer's capabilities beyond the created order and toward the redemptive dimension of ministry, for edifying the church and evangelizing the world.

As the church becomes a spiritual house inhabited by a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, all men will be drawn to Him; the world will at last see the glory of God through the restored church.

Restoration means more than becoming a reproduction of the New Testament church. It means becoming all God originally intended the church to be.

Remember, restoration means the establishment of something more and better than the original.

About Debi:

Jesus is Lord over my spirit, my soul, and my body. I am the Body of Christ. I am redeemed from the curse, because Jesus bore my sicknesses and carried my diseases in His own body. He who began a good work in me will continue until the day of Christ. You can find Debi at livegodblessingsfrommyrock.blogspot.com.

The Rose

My high school resume was a long one: cheerleading captain, track, cross country captain, basketball, marching band, jazz band, lead role in school play, president of SADD, and the list went on.

I was busy all the time, and that's how I liked it. Why?

Because being engaged in extracurricular activities kept me from facing the monster at home.

There was one thing in my teenage life that changed me most, and it wasn't exactly on my resume: sexual abuse victim---at the hands of my own step-father.

It was a dark life, constantly hiding the pain. I found it felt worse at youth group, where I received lessons on God's love. It was the week of *True Love Waits*, and the speaker passed around a rose, encouraging everyone to hold it.

"Smell the rose! Touch the rose!" He passed it around the church. When it returned to the speaker, the poor thing was wilted and dying. Then came the gut-punch.

This rose was a symbol of purity.

Protect your purity or be the wilted rose. And what godly man wants a wilted rose?

"Come to Jesus," they said. "Come to Jesus, and he will make it better."

I ran to that altar, tears streaming down my face. I didn't want to be that rose. Never mind that my wilted petals were not of my own making.

The abuse didn't stop until I reported it to the police. My skeleton closet, hidden and secret, had its door swung wide open. Details of my most intimate secret were printed across television screens in the state. I was a minor, so my name wasn't attached, but I knew. And I felt like the world knew.

Grand jury. Cheerleading tryouts. News Reporters. Spring Break. Trial. Prom.

I managed to paint my face with a smile, limping along toward graduation. In 2002, I left Northview High School and Dothan, Alabama in a cloud of dust, still nursing my wounds and determined to never return.

The funny thing about pain is, you can't outrun it.

I joined the UAB dance team, and tried to out-fun it. I joined a sorority and tried to out-friend it. I partied and tried to out-drink it. I got a boyfriend and tried to out-love it. I numbed my pain until it returned with a vengeance. I was running and chasing all at the same time. Running from pain; chasing worldly things to fix my broken heart. Then, as a last resort, I brought my broken heart through the doors of UAB Baptist Campus Ministries.

That night, the spirit of God found me like a warm blanket. Brian Fulton, the president of the BCM, read this scripture from Matthew 11:28-29:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND

REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

I found rest for my soul that night in falling at the feet of Jesus. I found a father who was loving and good, and only wanted my best by falling into the arms of my father. And I found

encouragement, like water to a thirsty soul in the solid foundation of his word. I read that scripture sometimes and think, “how was that enough?” That’s the neat thing about the living word. It was life to me. It found the innermost parts of my soul and spoke a truth so deeply-needed.

It was comfort, and that is the love I have found in Christ.

And you know what? It turns out that rose, wilted and broken, was EXACTLY what Christ wanted.

About Mary Katherine:

MK Backstrom lives in Huntsville, Alabama and is married to the love of her life and best friend, Ian. When she isn't working her "big kid job" (medical marketing) she enjoys riding horses, writing her second fiction novel and playing guitar.



Part Four: The Behavior

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?

Luke 6:31-34

Loving the Unlovable

A few months ago God began to really challenge me. Here I had so freely accepted His undeserving love, yet I had not really learned how to extend the same onto others. It's easy to love my family. It's easy to love my friends. It's easy to love my church.

But can I love a stranger? Now that's exactly the kind of love He calls us to, yet can be so difficult to extend.

His Word tells us in John 14:15 that if we love Him, we will obey His commands. And the commands He was asking me to obey pertained to the poor. It would force me to get outside of myself and see others through the eyes of Jesus, to love them as God loves them.

So one day as I was making a typical trip to the grocery store, I made eye contact with a homeless man. He was sitting outside the store on a bench.

Now this wasn't the first time I saw him. I had passed his way many times. However this was the first time I would *truly* see him. **Because in that moment, when our eyes met I saw the face of Jesus.**

It's hard to describe to people what I mean by that. I felt like I was literally looking at Jesus. No longer was he just a stranger to me. He was someone to love.

My 12-year-old son was with me and so when I announced that I was going to buy the man a bottle of water, he seemed a little apprehensive. He gave me that "Really?" look. It felt so good when we stepped back outside and I handed him the water.

He looked at the bottle and then looked at me with a quizzical expression. I simply said, "God bless" and moved on.

I would have thought the story would end there. "There God, I have done what you asked. I showed love to a stranger." But He wasn't through with me yet.

Over the next few months God began to direct me in different ways every time I saw this man. It was probably the second or third time that I ran into him in which God wanted me to ask what his name was.

You see, that man has a name. He is not just a homeless man. He is not just a man to pity. He is one of God's children and he has a name.

I learned his name was Dan. Over the course of the past few months I have done everything from giving him spare change to much higher amounts of money. I have purchased food for him and right now I have a coat in my trunk, for the next time I see him.

God's love isn't a selfish love.

When He decides to pour it out upon us, it's because He wants us to then pour it out upon others. And not just on those who are easy to love. He calls us to love the unlovable.

About Stephanie:

Stephanie Romero is a wife and mom to three children. She works from home as a web content writer for law firms. In her spare time she blogs on the topics of [motherhood](#) and [pursuing your dream](#). She is seeking a publisher for her devotional "Heart of a Mother's Prayers" and is currently in the midst of writing an eBook on dealing with the battle scars of life.

Finally Grieving

"You're different from other Christians."

I've heard this quite a few times over the course of the last year. Mostly from nonbelievers. When I defend Christianity to people who have been hurt or scarred by Christians or the Church (my atheist friends, my gay friends, etc.), the response I get is, "Well, not *you*, Rachel. I know you're not like other Christians."

Why?

I'm not a particularly great Christian.

I mean, this whole blog is about how *not* great I am and how much better I could be—how much better I *want* to be. Generally, I'm a very selfish person. Selfish, sarcastic (and sometimes unintentionally mean), ungrateful, lazy (see blog title for confirmation on that one). When I compare myself to other Christians (not recommended, by the way), I land squarely in the bottom of the middle. There are Christians who are more well-read than I am. Christians who are better prayer warriors than I am. Christians who give God more glory. Better Christians. Nicer Christians.

Something about that last statement strikes me: nice. It's not really about being nice, is it? I mean, you can be nice to someone and not actually love them. Heck, you don't even have to *like* someone to be nice. You just have to—I don't know. Not punch them in the face? It doesn't take much to be nice.

What should set Christians apart is not how nice they are but how *compassionate* they are. The true love they feel for others.

Some Christians spew hate for other religions or for gays or for whatever other group they don't like. Why? God doesn't hate those people. God loves them. God is not willing for anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance. He didn't send Jesus to save a precious few. Jesus came to atone for everyone's sins.

Everyone. He loves everyone.

I've heard people pray that God would break their heart for what breaks his—that they would grieve over sin. Every time I hear that, I think, "Oh, boy. I'm not grieving over anything. I don't really get that upset over sin in the world."

I grieved today. I cried today thinking about the people who think Christians hate them. It's been weighing on my heart for some time now, but today the weight seemed to crash down on me. People I love and admire who think I'm the only Christian in the world who loves them.

That's not what God wants from us.

All we have in this world is God.

He's the only thing that won't pass away. Material possessions, money, our bodies—they'll all go away at some point. At the end of the world, all we have is God. He's all there is.

I can't bear the thought of someone not coming to know God because we have taken it upon ourselves to tell them God doesn't want them. God is the only thing that lasts. Who are we to take that away from anybody? I don't want to stand in front of God one day and feel the weight of other people's salvation denied because I told them God hated them.

Do you?

My job—if Christians have a job—is [to love](#). The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others.

Not, "Love God and others, except _____."

When I'm following those two commandments, God is evident in my life. Other people are drawn to that. People should say, "Rachel is different," not because I'm not like other Christians, but because I'm trying my best to be like Christ. The result is that people see God in my life and decide they want to know God, too.

To my friends and readers who have been hurt by Christians, I'm sorry. Matthew 24:12 (in talking about the end days) says, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." I'm sorry if you've encountered people whose love has grown cold. Christians are human. We make mistakes. We misinterpret scripture, we take it upon ourselves to do the judging that only God can do, and we tell you that God can't love you.

Go to God. If you've stopped trusting or liking Christians, go straight to The Man himself. Christians can't mess God up. Our hypocrisy doesn't change who God is. In fact, it just proves God's awesomeness because he can forgive his followers despite all of our shortcomings. And he has enough forgiveness for all of us—all of us. Jesus never encouraged his believers to hate or condemn others. That's something some Christians have taken it upon themselves to do. I promise you, God does not approve.

And to the Christians out there who harbor anger and hate in their hearts, please reconsider. Those feelings aren't from God. They pull you away from God. Anger and hatred

cause others to put up barriers that prevent them from knowing God. *God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Tuck that in your heart and remember it always.

Don't let me be the only Christian who truly loves others. Really. I'm a lousy specimen.

About Rachel:

Rachel A. Snyder lives in Indianapolis with her husband and son (and has a daughter on the way!). After some time as a journalist and an English teacher, she is now a stay-at-home mom and freelance editor. Contact Rachel at TheLazyChristian@yahoo.com or tweet with [@LazyChristian](https://twitter.com/LazyChristian).

Love, Affliction, and the Refiner's Fire

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
Lamentations 3:22 (NIV)*

How do I perceive the Lord's love for me? Let me count the ways ...

- A wonderful husband and daughter
- Provision in these crazy economic times
- Merciful protection through the loss of one business and the establishment of another
- And should I fail to mention salvation, His work on the cross that is the very foundation for Life itself?

But in this past year and a half, I have perceived the Lord's love for me most keenly through affliction ... an on-going vertigo that, at various times, squeezes, twangs, or spins my head like a top.

In lighter moments, I call it "crazy-brain."

The lexical dictionary in the Key Word Study Bible (NAS) paints a clearer picture with the word "distress," defined as "a narrow place ... being pressed from the sides." That really fits. Vertigo can dramatically narrow a person's world.

Thankfully, the Lord has set me on a path toward healing, and I praise Him for it. But in the midst of the crucible, when I am at my weakest point, the refining fire burns clean and true and He teaches me something essential: that sometimes He removes my ability to *do*, so I can simply *be* His child. He shows me that He is far more concerned about our relationship than anything I might accomplish for Him. It's as if the God of the universe hands me a piece of Valentine candy inscribed with two words: Be Mine. And then a P.S.—that's all that matters.

Therein lays a great and mysterious love. Why does He care so much? He doesn't stop there, either. He delves deep into our hearts, creating in us a place where we can say the same thing back to Him. "Be Mine. That's all that matters."

A decade ago, when God called me out of a teaching career and into writing, He nudged my heart with that very truth—the sufficiency of just being His child. Through years of attending writing conferences, studying the craft, and meeting editors and agents, I reveled in His guidance and encouragement. Eventually, though, I became more focused on the thing itself than on the One who invited me to it. Writing became an obligation, a concern about word count, about how perfectly I could pen a sentence (ha!), about whether or not I'd land the best agent (double ha!).

God called me to this, I reasoned. I had to muster all my discipline, be constructive, and produce something. And if that something wasn't a publishable work within the time standard I had set, well, I deserved to be fired from my calling.

Truthfully, my self-created rules only made it harder to produce.

One day, driving home from a life-changing conference where I had surrendered to the Lord all expectations for my writing, He said to me, "Now I am going to teach you how to remain in Me and be about the work."

Several months later, the vertigo struck, and in the midst of my anguish, He gave me this promise: "... But the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a broad place. He rescued me, because He delighted in me." (Ps. 18:18b-19 NAS)

True to His Word, He is drawing me into a spacious, carefree, limitless expanse, free to write because I desire it. Not for future glory, the best agent, or even some grandiose publishing contract. (Though a small one might be kind of cool. Wink.)

I write simply because it's where He abides, and I'm learning, sentence by sentence, scene by scene, chapter by chapter, that there's nowhere else I'd rather be.

Be Mine, Lord. That's all that matters. Your love has brought me to this place.

About Miriam:

Miriam C. Cheney is a wife, mom, and fiction writer. She taught high school language arts for four years before the Lord invited her to follow Him down the writing path. Presently at work on her second novel, she writes during school hours so she can devote afternoons to her seven-year old daughter. Miriam's first novel received a glowing rejection letter and is resting quietly in a file folder on her laptop. She enjoys reading, crafting stories, editing, attending writing conferences, visiting family in her beautiful home state of Colorado, and time spent with her daughter and husband. She can be found at <http://miriam-cheney.blogspot.com/> and on Facebook.

Perfect Love

We have had a lot of firsts in the last four months or so. Baby coupons arriving by mail, noses pressed into books about raising children and adoption, a full battery of pokes and prods (in one day), loving someone we've never seen, heard, know their name, or may not even be born.

The journey to bring home our baby has blossomed, in us, a new kind of love.

We are getting the first glimpses of what it is like to love a child, as a mama and daddy love a child. I have seen such a love in Hubs' eyes, words, and actions for our baby. It is truly the sweetest thing ever! Seeing my husband fall head over heels in love with our baby makes my love for him continue to flourish.

They say a father is a child's greatest influence. I completely agree that a daddy's presence and involvement in the life of a child is crucial.

An earthly father has such a huge impact on the family as a whole. It is our prayer, that we can surround our child with the love of earthly parents while we teach him/her about a love that is far greater; our Heavenly Father's. His love is the ultimate; far superior.

I find complete reassurance in the fact that: not if, but when I fail, as a parent, that God will still love me. That, He will not only completely love me, in my mistakes, but He will forgive me and lead me to love as He loves. Perfectly, error free.

The Lord your God is with you,

He is mighty to save.

He will take great delight in you,

He will quiet you with His love,

He will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

I am thankful that God loves our child more than we do. I praise Him that He is in control and that He is guiding each step in this process. I am beyond grateful that He alone can love our baby's hurt and nurse all wounds when we fall short.

I pray that Hubs and I are able to live a life that reflects the heart of Christ, so that our child will get a small hint of what it is like to be loved by the greatest Daddy. And that as our child grows, will find his/her own relationship with Him.

Just like our daddy, here on Earth's presence is needed, our Heavenly Father's company is welcomed. Like a child looks for his/her earthly father, we search for answers from our Heavenly Father. Just as a baby cries for the arms of their daddy, we cry out for the comfort of His embrace. I notice the difference in my day when I am walking closely with Him verses those when I am distant. Same goes for the relationship of a father and child here on Earth. We crave His presence. We need it.

As we near Valentine's Day, I become filled with anticipation of a day that brims with candy, heartfelt cards, romance, scrumptious meals, and decadent desserts, I become more aware of a love that surpasses all other loves.

This love, triumphs over the times when our hearts are tempted to fill with ugliness. It is the model for unconditional love. This love forgives, is patient, and is blind to faults. This is the love of our Heavenly Father.

We may not know the hairs on our child's head, his/her voice, the shape of his/her face, or the softness of our baby's skin. But God does. I find comfort in His love for us and our child.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children,

Instead, bring them up in the training

And instruction of the Lord

-Ephesians 6:4

About Lacy:

Lacy and T.J. have been married for almost 4 years. They are currently in the process of bringing home their first child from Uganda, Africa. You can follow their journey at www.lovefortheLOT.blogspot.com

I saw God in the Face of an old Man

I never realized what the *Bible* meant when it said we were created in the image of God until I saw God's light shining in the face of an old African American man.

We were traveling out of state, and my husband pulled into a rest area.

As I walked away from the rest area and headed back to our Chevy Blazer, I spied a tree. "That looks like a dogwood tree," I exclaimed to my young daughter. "Dogwoods are my favorite trees. I love the beautiful white flowers. Legend has it that Jesus was nailed to a dogwood tree, and the middle of the flower is a symbol for the blood He shed on the cross."

I'm a nature lover, so I love trees and birds singing. It was a beautiful sunny day, and I enjoyed it so much I failed to watch where I was going; I glanced back at the tree to make sure it was a dogwood and studied the texture of the fine, delicate leaves. I failed to watch my step and suddenly, the pavement dropped. Instead of stepping down, I stepped off and fell flat on my face onto the concrete parking lot.

I was visibly shaken and bleeding and thought I had broken my teeth at first, but God spared them. I wasn't sure if I had broken bones, and I had trouble getting to my feet. My daughter ran to find her father.

I felt the hands of someone lifting me and looked into the kind face of an elderly man. He exclaimed, "Oh, God," and he helped me to my feet. I could see the concern and pity in his eyes, but I also saw the love for another human being shine from his face.

An African-American lady working at the rest area escorted me to the ladies restroom so I could clean up. I had scratches and sidewalk burn on my face, and my mouth was busted and bleeding. The blood reminded me of how Jesus shed His blood on the cross to pay the debt for our sins.

The loving kindness of complete strangers on both their parts hit me.

I could see the concern in their faces, but the face of the man was like looking into the face of God, lit with caring, compassion, concern, and love, showing me how much a complete stranger could care for another human being he didn't even know. God truly is everywhere. All we have to do is look for Him and invite Him into our lives, pray, and He is a constant help in our times of need.

As Valentine Day approaches, let love shine from within for your fellowman.

I remember one lonely Valentine's Day. As I shopped and noticed all the men buying flowers for their loved ones, I became even lonelier engulfed in self-pity because I had no one who'd buy flowers for me. Now, I realize my heavenly Father has given us the beauty of nature, and He's given me many flowers throughout my life. His love for us is showcased in each petal, and He displays His love in many creative ways. We have only to open our eyes and our hearts and invite Him in to see the wonders of His love.

Though I felt alone and lonely that Valentine's Day, I now know we are never alone and store-bought flowers aren't everything. God and His love is everywhere. Natural flowers given by our heavenly Father last lots longer than those delivered in a vase. They have but a short life, wilt, and die, but fresh growing flowers raise their heads and announce God's love with each gentle caress. Yes, it's nice to receive flowers for Valentine's Day and know you're loved by

another, but there's no greater love than from the One who gave His only son so we could have eternal life with Him in heaven one glorious day.

So if you don't receive roses this Valentine's Day, think about the variety and amount of flowers God has sent you over the years.

There's no greater love than God's.

About B. J.:

B. J. Robinson writes Christian fiction from her home in Florida, where she lives with her husband and pets. She had 12 devotionals published in a year's time. She says, "There is no one in life as capable of encouraging and motivating one's soul as the blessed feel of the Holy Spirit, like a hand on my shoulder reassuring me. I have never felt closer to God than when I feel the touch of the Holy Spirit in times of need. That slight touch lets me know that I do not walk through this world alone. I have a heavenly Father who meets my every need. That heavenly touch makes all the difference in my life." Visit her at <http://barbarajrobinson.blogspot.com>. She's the author of two novels *Last Resort* and *Southern Superstitions*.

Acknowledgments

Like most things in life, this book would not have come to life without the assistance of my husband. Thank you for your ideas, enthusiasm, and hard work dedicated toward making this book. Your vision and design skills continue to amaze me daily.

I would also like to thank the readers of The Uncontainable Truth. For wanting more and seeking out God's truth for your lives. Without your enthusiasm for our website, I would have never believed that this idea could become a reality. But, you made me believe and for that I say thank you.

Finally, I want to again thank each person that contributed to the making of this book. Your stories have been combined in a way that showcases the extravagance of God's love for each of us. Thank you for sharing your hearts, your experiences, and your voice with the readers of this book.

On this Valentine's Day, my prayer for each person that downloads this book is that you are reminded how much God loves you. How his love is expanded through our life experiences, seasons of change, trials, and the people around us. May these stories give you hope that his love never quits.

God remembered us when we were down,

His love never quits.

Rescued us from the trampling boot,

His love never quits.

Takes care of everyone in time of need.

His love never quits.

Thank God, who did it all!

His love never quits!

Psalm 136:23-26

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the uncontainable truth

As Christen blew out twenty-five birthday candles, she wished for change. Bravely whispering, *Use Me God*, she began a year that she will never forget. She started blogging, quit her job, and delivered her twin girls three months before their due date. As a self-proclaimed Type-A personality, Christen chronicled her journey as a new mom that was not in control of her life.

The Uncontainable Truth was developed as a resource for truth-seekers to gather together and be encouraged. The Uncontainable Truth is based from scripture found in Matthew 5:17: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

In this place, Christen authentically shares about life with God at the steering wheel. She daily encourages readers through stories about her family and the daily struggles of living life dependent on Christ. Readers will also find fun articles about entertaining, crafts, and fashion.

Join this community of truth-seekers by signing up to receive e-mails every now and then that just might make your day shine a little brighter.

Tweet with Christen: @uncontain_truth and like The Uncontainable Truth on Facebook

www.theuncontainabletruth.com

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If you are interested in advertising on The Uncontainable Truth please contact us at christen@theuncontainabletruth.com



You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something -Psalms 139: 13-16

nothing{2}something

Looking for custom printable paper goods for your next party? Check out our full selection of invitations/announcements, thank you cards, gift enclosure cards, favor tags/cupcake toppers, and seasonal/holiday items; all are fully customizable for your order. Our range of digital items are perfect as gifts, or simply checking off those much needed items from your personal wish list! Contact us if you don't see a particular design you're looking for; we can help create the right design for you!

Invite Christen to Speak at Your Next Event

Christen is a southern gal with a huge heart for spreading the truth of Jesus Christ to the world. She encourages her audience to learn how to let their light shine by discovering their God-given gifts and not being afraid to share God's truth with others. This joyful, passionate speaker will share God's love while teaching her audience how we are all called to be Christ's disciples here on earth. Christen Price is the author of the popular blog entitled *The Uncontainable Truth*. She holds a B.A. in communications from Auburn University and lives with her husband and twin daughters in Montgomery, Alabama. Christen has been named a member of *The List: RSVP's Top Young Professionals* in Montgomery and is also very active in her community as a volunteer for March of Dimes, Footprints Ministries, and a member of the Jr. League. She is a small group leader for couples and youth, and has written articles for *St. James Magazine*, *River Region Living*, *League Logs*, and has been a guest blogger for *Faithful Bloggers*.

Christen Price



For a full list of Christen's available speaking topics visit

www.theuncontainabletruth.com/events

Please email christen@theuncontainabletruth.com to book her for your event.



Christen Price was 27 weeks pregnant with her twin daughters, Adeline and Maralee, when she was unexpectedly rushed into surgery; delivering her girls three months premature. Faced with the challenges of their premature birth, Christen and her husband begin an emotional rollercoaster of life in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). After walking blindly in the dark, Christen learns over an 83 day journey how to see God's light by holding on to the truths learned over her life.

You Hold Me Now

A Mother's Story about Letting Go of Satan's Strongholds and Holding On to God's Truth

The audience will:

- Relate to the strength one mother found in her children's moment of medical need
- Learn how to hold on to God's truth while letting go of Satan's strongholds
- Discover how to let their light shine over the darkness of this world

Because Christen will:

- Share with the reader the struggles that parents of premature children face
- Provide biblically-inspired chapters on Satan's manipulation during spiritual warfare and how to overcome it
- Teach the lessons of Jesus Christ as He revealed Himself as the light through the darkness

His love never quits