

Your *Life* Still Counts

How God Uses Your Past
to Create a Beautiful Future

Tracie Miles



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*I dedicate this book to Jesus Christ,
my Lord and Savior,
because if it weren't for Him,
there would be no story to tell.*





You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

Genesis 50:20

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

Ephesians 4:1

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered if something you did, something your parents did, or something someone did against you or to you, is the reason God is allowing hardship in your life? Have you ever entertained the thought that your pain and suffering are because God is punishing you for your sin, or because He doesn't see any value in you as a result of all that has happened, or possibly because of all the bad choices you have made? If your honest answer is yes to any of these questions, then I can relate. I entertained those thoughts for many years, confident that God was going to give me the punishment I deserved for my sin. But I'm here to tell you—He never did.

Jesus' disciples had this same mind-set with regard to the blind man in John 9:1–2: “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ‘Rabbi,’ his disciples asked him, ‘why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?’”

Jesus lovingly put their confusion to rest: “‘It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,’ Jesus answered. ‘This happened so the power of God could be seen in him’” (v. 3).

The blind man had endured a serious handicap, immense suffering, and undeserved physical and emotional challenges for decades—all so that Jesus could be glorified. He may have lived his entire life feeling inferior, unloved, rejected, excluded, and purposeless, completely unaware that Jesus had plans to use him as proof of the power of God in someone's life. But that all changed the day the blind man met Jesus.

In the next set of verses, we are encouraged to take a leap of faith and be willing to shine as an example of what Jesus can do in a person's life, as a light for Him to a dark and lost world. In John 9:4–5, Jesus goes on to say, “We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.” When we witness the power of Jesus in our life, or experience His healing (whether physical or spiritual), we are instructed here to quickly acknowledge His faithfulness, praise Him, trust in His ways, and willingly walk or run toward fulfilling our purpose. We are called to be living proof of the awesome and unmatched power of God.

God allows pain, struggles, and adversities to be a part of our lives, and maybe if necessary, He even causes them. But regardless of our circumstances, He not only promises healing and restoration, He also promises purpose from the pain if we are willing to trust Him enough to see it through.

Obey and Be Healed

John 9:6–7 continues, “Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. He told him, ‘Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam’ (Siloam means ‘sent’). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!”

The blind man was completely healed, but notice that his healing was not immediate. He wasn't healed when Jesus spat on the mud and smeared it on his eyes, but only after he had obeyed what

Jesus instructed him to do. He was healed when he chose to obey the command of Jesus to “go.”

Sometimes we may find ourselves questioning God’s ways rather than blindly trusting, and our doubts prevent us from experiencing healing, redemption, and purpose. Or we tell God we want to obey Him and share what He has done in our lives, but only when we are ready and feel completely healed of the pain, shame, regret, or hurt in our hearts.

Regrettably, when God first called me to “go” and tried to “send” me out to share about His goodness, I waited five years before taking that leap of faith. (I’ll tell you more about my story in the following chapters.) Instead of obeying, I did a lot of questioning, arguing, resenting, running, and avoiding God’s call on my life because I knew He was not only sending me to “go,” but to “go and share.” I thought I wasn’t ready to go and share—and I just absolutely didn’t want to. So I did the opposite of the blind man, refusing to move until it became impossible for me to stay in my comfort zone any longer.

Years later, I finally surrendered, committed to obey, and took a few steps toward where I felt God had called me to go. It was only then that true healing took place in my heart. Only *after* my willingness to “go” became stronger than my desire to stay in the safe zone—not before—did I begin to see my purpose taking shape and true healing penetrating the depths of my soul. Only after obeying God’s nudges to move did I feel cleansed and whole again.

Your Past for His Purpose

The day I hesitantly said yes to God’s plans was the day my life changed forever. Not just my spiritual life, but my physical, earthly, and everyday life. Through His grace, He showed me that not only did He have a purpose for me, but that He wanted to specifically use my past for that purpose, if I was willing. It was a path of purpose I would have never chosen on my own, yet one I have the

privilege to live out every day. I am constantly reminded that He uses all experiences, good and bad, to give us purpose, equip us to fulfill that purpose, and glorify Him.

Over time, as a result of seeing what God can do with our pain if we are willing to allow Him to, a passion developed in my heart to help other people discover that their lives have purpose too—not despite their past, but because of it.

This book is not about one particular mistake or one specific category of sin, struggle, hardship, or suffering. Although I do share my personal journey of walking with God as He lovingly turned my past into my purpose, the goal of this book is to empower you to discover the blessing of God's healing and purpose for your own life. It is about learning how God pulls us out of the deepest pits—regardless of how we got there—erases our shame, and replaces it with redemption and purpose. It's about learning to seek Him above all else and discovering that true obedience to God is not just trying to live by what the Bible says, but also recognizing how God has called each of us to minister and comfort others through the experiences we have survived. It is following what God puts in our hearts and the call He places on our lives.

Most important, it is a book to help you understand, possibly for the first time, that despite the experiences of the past, your life still matters to God. You matter to God because He loves you, and He has had a plan to use you and your past all along. When we let go of our shame, regret, and fear, and fully begin to embrace that truth, lives are transformed—our own, and the lives of those we touch.

The past is not meant just to be survived and forgotten, but to help us become overcomers who can use our experiences to glorify God. You may not know it yet, but this invitation to a new adventure of discovering your purpose is the answer that your soul has been desperately searching for. When our souls find divine purpose, our hearts find true healing. Abundant joy and peace become by-products of our obedience and trust. And purpose makes life worth living.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’” Will you claim your promise for a future, a hope, and a purpose today? Will you join me in this journey of healing, redemption, and self-discovery, which ends at a destination God specifically designed for you?

Sweet friend, the time has come for you to embrace the vision God has had for your life all along, which you may have been unable to see through the blinders of your past. You may have spent a lifetime wondering if your life still matters, or believing that your past prevents you from being loved by God or from making a difference in this world. But the truth is that your past has made you who you are and equipped you for a unique, glorious, joy-filled, and God-designed purpose that you would have never thought was possible.

I pray as you read the story God has written in my life, and the stories of other women who were willing to allow God to turn their pain into purpose, that your heart will be moved in an amazing way, your relationship with Christ will deepen, and you will get excited about what God wants to do in you and through you.

The first few chapters will give you a glimpse into my own personal journey, and I hope the remaining chapters will compel you to begin a new faith adventure of your own.

Your journey toward the meaningful and purpose-filled life you have always longed for just may be about to begin.

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1



The Face in the Mirror

*I*t all started the day I stood in my bathroom, staring into the mirror, wondering who was looking back at me.

I did not recognize this girl, even though she looked exactly like me. She had the same eighties hairdo I sported each day, with protruding bangs and lots of layers.

She had the same bright blue eyes as me, the same curve of the nose as my dad, and the same dimple in her chin as my mother.

She even wore the same trendy outfit I had put on that very morning. Yet, she couldn't be me. She was surely someone else. Someone I didn't really like anymore, although we inhabited the same body.

Someone who had allowed herself to walk away from her faith and put God on the back burner of her life.

Someone who had let her guard down and made a mistake, and now was faced with a decision that would impact the rest of her life in more ways than she could ever fathom.

But I was that someone. The very girl who stood staring into the mirror, engulfed by fear, weak in the knees, and wondering how she was going to face the reality of a positive pregnancy test at the immature age of nineteen, with only one year of college under her belt.

Overwhelmed by Questions

As I stared at my reflection in the mirror, my face became hot and flushed as a numbing feeling of dread crept slowly from my heart into my cheeks. I had so many anxieties, fears, and questions coursing through my mind, a tsunami of uncontrollable emotions and mental chaos washing over my heart with violent force, making me feel dizzy and light-headed. Questions swirled in my mind until it became impossible to focus on any particular one.

Why did I allow myself to get into this situation? Why did I not save myself for marriage, as I was taught all those years in church growing up? Why did I not use protection? Should I tell my parents? How will they react? What will my boyfriend think? Does he really love me? Will he support me? Will he marry me? Should I get an abortion? Will he want me to get an abortion? How will I pay for it? Where should I go? What will everyone think? What does this mean for my future? How can I provide for a child? Why am I so stupid?

What am I going to do?

Sheer panic seeped into every cell of my body as I fixated on the girl in the mirror, quietly watching her crumble into a puddle of tears and hopelessness right before my very eyes. This girl thought she had things all figured out until that life-altering moment in time.

I was drowning in regret, panic, and uncertainty, the weight of emotion so heavy that I could scarcely draw a breath.

As I allowed the reality of this situation to sink into my heart, the questions kept coming. But two in particular forced their way to the forefront of my thoughts, taking precedence over all the

others. They were questions I now know God longed to answer and would have willingly done, had I sought out His presence in my greatest time of need. But because I had never developed a personal, intimate relationship with Him, His voice could not be heard, only my own self-condemnation.

My first question was *Why did God let this happen to me?*

Immersed in confusion and anxiety, I wanted someone to blame, and God seemed like the best choice since He holds power over everything. But as much as I wanted to figure out where or how He had let me down (not how I had let Him down), I just didn't have the strength to play the blame game. Plus, I knew in my heart that I was the one who had made the mistakes; it really wasn't God's fault. This situation was nothing more than a blatant example of my exercising my own free will—free will that did not line up with God's principles.

My second question was *Will God ever forgive me for the choice I am about to make, which I know is the wrong one?*

As my mind pushed the first question to the back burner, the second question burned a hole in my soul. It became one that would haunt me for many years, because I was confident I already knew the answer. I convinced myself in that very moment that God would not, and should not, ever forgive me or love me, and that my life would never count for anything.

In that moment of indecision and fear, I heard a voice speaking to my heart loud and clear, but it was a whisper of the enemy of this world, not the King of all kings. This voice hoped I would latch on to his lie and accept my fate as a shamed and useless sinner, and that is exactly what I did.

After what seemed like eternity, I looked away from the girl in the mirror, dried my tears, and tried to regain my composure so my family wouldn't suspect anything was wrong. I unlocked the bathroom door and walked out into the world where reality awaited. I felt ashamed of my past and the mistakes I had made thus far in my young life, yet more ashamed of the mistakes I knew lay ahead.

A Life-Changing Decision

Soon after, with knots in my stomach, I finally got the courage to break the news to my boyfriend. I watched as his heart struggled with the weight of the questions, turmoil, and emotional burden that I had been carrying alone. His questions mirrored mine, and just like one-third of teenage girls who find themselves pregnant, we decided that ending the pregnancy was the only option. The easiest option. The option that would make it all go away. The option that would keep our sin a secret.

We surrendered to the diabolically wrong notion that abortion was the only logical choice. We were afraid, young, and ignorant—and both without a real relationship with God—and thus felt there was no other alternative. If only I had known then the choke hold that suffocating shame would soon have over my life. The shame I was experiencing in that moment of indecision was merely the first tear in what would become an ocean of regret.

The dreaded day of the appointment arrived. Drowning in a flood of emotions, I hesitantly believed the lies of the enemy now spoken through the voices of those employed at the clinic—women who said I would never think about this problem again and doctors who claimed to have the power to fix it. The women seemed nice, and the doctors so intelligent in their white coats, telling me I was making the right choice. Men and women who were so broken and lost in their own lives of deception, apart from God, that they were blinded to the lifetime of scars they were inflicting daily on desperate young girls and women. Men and women who, like me, had been deceived by the devil.

Unfortunately, I surrendered to my fears instead of surrendering to God, and went through with the procedure. When I weakly walked out of the clinic on that gloomy, muggy July day in 1986, I looked exactly the same on the outside as when I had walked in. But inside, I was completely changed. My heart was mangled, scarred, and marred forevermore. As I stepped out of the dark clinic and back into the daylight, the realization of what I had

done slapped me across the face with such force it caused me to physically stumble. Instantly, I latched tightly on to Satan's lie that God would never forgive me nor love me, ever again. I would just have to accept the fact that my life would no longer matter to God, and that separation from Him was my deserved fate. I knew I had no right to argue, so I didn't. I tried to move forward and never wanted to look back.

Although I have no doubt God wept over my decision as He welcomed my precious unborn baby into His arms and ushered him or her into the glory of heaven, I now know He never left my side. I thought I was alone on that dreadful day, but He was there. As I look back at the circumstances of that day, the people I encountered, the emotions I struggled with, I know God tried to caution me. I thought He had turned His back on me, but it turns out He was carrying me instead. I thought my tears went unnoticed by anyone, but now I know through His Word that He caught every one.

If only I had understood His love sooner, so many years of shame could have been avoided. But instead I spent years hating myself and believing I was unforgivable, despicable, and disgusting in God's eyes. As a result, I trudged through everyday life perfectly fine on the outside but exceedingly hollow on the inside, assuming I was too sinful to ever be valuable to God, or anyone for that matter. Year after year, I continued to be deceived by the voice of the enemy, who convinced me that my past sin had stolen my worth in God's eyes and that I could never be redeemed, much less given a purpose in life by a holy God. And as for my own opinion of myself, it wasn't very good either.

At that time, in the aftermath of tragedy and heartache, I had no idea God had sovereign plans to use that horrific mistake for a divine purpose—His purpose for my life.

A Child of God

Praise God for the extraordinary day when His presence burst into my life so powerfully that all the lies of the enemy were crushed

beneath His sovereignty. The day when I knew once and for all that God didn't see the same reflection of the girl in the mirror that I saw. Instead He saw His beloved child. A child who had sinned, yet was so precious to Him. A child whom He had forgiven years ago, just as she had asked, although she wasn't listening for His voice. A child whom He had loved dearly all along, although she felt unlovable. A child who had purpose, although she felt maimed beyond worth. A child whom He was pursuing while patiently waiting for her to accept His forgiveness and direction. A child whose life still mattered.

Today when I look in the mirror, I see someone completely different from who I once saw, simply because I now believe God's forgiveness and mercy are meant for all of His children—including me. When I finally let go of the shame I had kept bottled up for fourteen years, I allowed God's forgiveness to fill me instead, and peace came into my heart like never before. The mud was washed away from my eyes, and I caught a tiny glimpse of purpose for the future for the very first time.

In the many years that have passed since my spiritual eyes were opened and God turned my life around, I have had time to process God's forgiveness and allow it to change and transform me and my life. As my love for Jesus has increased and my relationship with Him has grown, I have also found the strength in God to forgive myself. I have been spiritually and emotionally healed, while stumbling down an imperfect road of obedience and seeing God's promise of a hope and a future—uniquely ordained for me—become a reality.

Healing and purpose did not happen overnight, but they did happen. And they can happen for you too. And trust me, it is worth the wait.

Maybe when you look in the mirror today, you still see a reflection of someone who is emotionally scarred and marred because of mistakes made in the past, or someone who is living in shame due to a past or current pattern of sin, or someone who is harboring deep, unspeakable pain and anger that someone else caused in your

life. Maybe you see someone defined by harsh criticism, rejection, or exclusion. Maybe the face staring back at you is someone you don't really like, or even someone you truly believe has no purpose.

Maybe you are unable to see the reflection of a beloved child of God because you are still looking through your own eyes instead of His. Perhaps your eyes are covered in mud, much like the blind man, preventing you from seeing your real value, the real you—the you that God sees, loves, cherishes, and has great plans for.

Maybe today is the day when that reflection begins to change as you embrace the truth that God forgives you no matter what you have done. He adores you, no matter what hardships you have suffered. He values you, no matter how many people or circumstances have tried to make you think you have no value. He loves you, no matter how long you have not loved Him. And most important, He is pursuing you right now, as you wade through the pages of this book, hoping you will embrace His promises for your life once and for all and begin to understand the depth of His unconditional and overwhelming love for you.

Your life still counts to God. Will you let yourself begin to believe it?

Her Story

I grew up in an extremely toxic environment where fear and shame were my daily companions. My father was a raging alcoholic and my mother was emotionally vacant. I was abused sexually, emotionally, and verbally and became paralyzed by feelings of unworthiness. At age eight, a friend invited me to Bible school and I prayed to accept Jesus, but three years later, other friends introduced me to drugs and alcohol, and life went downhill.

Unable to see past the pain, I ran down a dark road of destruction for years and often found myself in dangerous situations. At age seventeen, I fell in love and quickly thereafter was pregnant and married. After my son was born, I was an emotional wreck, consuming large amounts of alcohol and drugs daily and blacking out nightly. Nine years later my husband left me with two kids, and my devastation drove me to church.

Jesus showed up strong in my life, and although learning to trust Him was not easy, He faithfully walked me through healing and restoration. Today I am remarried, a mother to five beautiful children, and blessed to see God using my past for a purpose that I would have never imagined. The Lord has given me a purpose of reaching women in the adult sex industry in the hopes that they too will find healing and purpose in God. I want to offer them the same amazing love that I have found in Jesus because He truly has turned my ashes into beauty.

Kelly Master lives in Collingswood, New Jersey, and is a dynamic public speaker who has a heart for the sexually broken. Her ministry, Dining for Dignity, reaches out to women in the adult sex industry and advocates on behalf of sex-trafficking

The Face in the Mirror

victims. She trains and leads teams to minister in strip clubs, porn conventions, and adult bookstores with the goal of bringing God's light and His message of hope into these very dark places. Her past paved the way for her to deeply love women who are lost and hurting, many of whom grew up in toxic, sexually abusive households like hers.

Purpose Ponderings

1. When you look in the mirror today, what do you see? Write the first three to five adjectives of yourself that come to mind. Look at your answers, and ask yourself if it's possible you have been listening to the enemy's lies about your value and your self-worth. Are these descriptive words ones that God would say about you based on the truths in His Word about those whom He loves? Jot down your thoughts.

2. Take each of the adjectives you wrote above and write them in the table below. Beside each word, write the opposite of that word next to it. (For example, beside *worthless* write *worthy*.) Look up a Scripture verse that reinforces each positive word and write it beside it. Google possible verses, or consider ones like Psalm 139:13–16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 31:10; and 1 Peter 4:10.

Your Negative Adjective	Opposite of That Adjective	Application Scripture

Your Life Still Counts

Your Negative Adjective	Opposite of That Adjective	Application Scripture

3. Have you ever questioned why God allowed a difficult experience in your life or been tempted to blame Him? Record your thoughts below, while remembering it's okay to be honest with God because He already knows your thoughts and feelings (Psalm 139:2).

4. In your Bible, look up the following verses about God's forgiveness, then ask yourself if God's definition of forgiveness lines up with your own. Jot down any differences you see.

Psalm 130:4	Psalm 32:5	Matthew 26:28
1 John 1:9	Acts 3:19	Isaiah 1:18

5. Write out a prayer of commitment to begin believing how valuable you are to God, accepting His promise of unconditional forgiveness, and acknowledging that He has a beautiful plan for your life.