

# WRECK my life

Journeying from Broken to Bold

# MO ISOM



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For Big John

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# Introduction

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you *will* have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33, emphasis added

Scripture makes many promises.

This particular verse is one that was always difficult for me. It was hard to *really* believe. Who wants to wholeheartedly embrace a guarantee of life-altering pain and unexpected trials? A promise that if you haven't already been in a storm, or if you aren't standing in one right now, then there is certainly one on the horizon. A promise of *wreckage*, in some shape or form. Wreckage that could stand to disrupt everything. It's scary, right? To think that no matter how hard we hope we can move through this life unscathed, we're bound for trouble somewhere along the way.

I didn't want to hear it.

Somewhere along the way I bought into the lie that a blessed life was a life lived with as little hardship as possible. That I was entitled to comfort and ease and happiness. That God was most present and pleased in the lives of those with abundance and minimal adversity. Rather than wrapping my head around the truth that hardship was inevitable, I convinced myself that if I did the right things and said the right things then maybe I could play it safe enough. So I flipped through the pages of life-breathed Scripture looking for the nearest inspirational verse instead of digging into the ones that made me ache and confused me. A quick pick-me-up. As if I could pick and choose what I wanted to be applicable to my own story. I moved through my days under the impression that *I* was the author of my story and that the trajectory of my life solely depended on my control, my success, and my own personal strength.

Because of my skewed perception of reality, when the promised hardship did come my way it came close to ending me. When trouble came I desperately clung to my ability to cope with and mask and hold together all of the broken pieces. I lost myself trying to save myself and compromised so many things. I strove to be whole again—as if my own broken hands could ever fix my mangled heart. As if my ability to save my own story would somehow warrant me more personal glory when the world took its best look at me. And, in turn, I ended up wasting many of my younger years. Not listening. Not learning.

I don't want that for you.

Suffering, adversity, and discomfort often derail us and drag us into a downward spiral of depression, blame, and pity. We wander through our days drowned in social media, social pressure, and spiritual timidity. In a culture of “fake it till you make it,” we keep our struggles to ourselves and only put our best

foot forward for the world to reward. As a result, we're becoming broken, lonely people who feel isolated in our sin struggles and ashamed of our shattered pieces. In a culture that craves comfort, we blame God for our wreckage, we doubt His goodness and sovereignty, and oftentimes we turn our back on a God we don't believe could be truly loving and good if He allows such pain and suffering.

I didn't want to hear it either, but what if in our haste to feel good and avoid discomfort we're ignoring promises that aren't meant to *scare* us but rather *prepare* us? What if we're missing out on the resounding glory of a sovereign King who is stating the obvious? He knows His opponent. He knows life is challenging and invites us to armor up on His team. This King gently promises us that we will all walk through valleys but in Him we are offered a divine hope in the depths of defeat.

What if hearing and accepting the hardest things is exactly what sets us free? What if we began to recognize trouble and adversity as sacred rather than scarring? As promised rather than unforeseen? As guaranteed rather than game-changing? As purposeful rather than punishing? What if we truly believed there was purpose in our pain and a plan in our persecution? What would our world look like if we shifted our mentality and began to rejoice in our adversity, knowing adversity produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope (see Rom. 5:3–5)?

What if we began to lean in to the second portion of John 16:33 that clearly promises there is something more—*someone* more—who has already triumphed over our defeat? A promise that introduces Jesus and wrecks through religion and begins to mean something. A promise of victory that looks like an innocent Judge taking on a death sentence so we, the criminals,

can be set free. A promise that looks like a King who wrote the story of the cross, and all that it means, into the fingerprints of our genealogy. A promise that suddenly invites the holy words of Scripture to crawl off of the page, to breathe into our life—to wreck and redefine everything.

In a broken world, our adversity and suffering will not cease but our perspective can boldly shift. We can begin to embrace adversity in a new light. We can begin to surrender the pain and suffering of our past, accept the forgiveness and grace offered in the present, and invite a holy God to *wreck our lives*. To unhinge the lies we've believed, to shake our preconceived ideas and beliefs, to obliterate our bondage and our shame and our pride and our defeat. With radical, unshakable faith placed in a radical, unfailing King, we are able to appreciate the wreckage of our past and orchestrate the voluntary wreckage of our future for the glory of a King who was first wrecked on our behalf.

I want to share my story with you in hopes that it becomes your story too. I hope this testimony serves as a framework, one you can read through and transfuse your own story into. I hope these words find the pilgrim whose gasping breath cries out for life-saving truth and authenticity and peace. I hope these words find the nonbeliever in silent search of something more. I hope these words meet the scorned believer creeping back to a place of trust and that they also speak to the faithful believer, empowered and encouraged by the word of testimony.

This book is full of things that challenge me and make me ache—the things that I always find hard to believe—particularly when my soul and flesh yearn for very different things. At its core, it's about a messy *King* story that intervenes with a messy *me* story and somehow comes together for *His glory* in spite of everything. The heart of this testimony stares involuntary

wreckage in the eyes and declares, “This will not win my story.” It invites voluntary wreckage and kneels before a King and says, “I am Yours and You are mine. Will you humble my wandering heart and wreck me for Your glory?”

I hope this book invites you to crawl out of your grief and step into the excitement of how God plans to use you; not seeing your new journey as a reluctant Plan B but as the Master Plan tailored to your perfectly imperfect life. You may be feeling empty as you pick up this book. I pray it connects with you and helps you make some sense of the broken things. That it holds your hand and invites you to sit in the midst of a far greater story. That it encourages you to believe.

So let’s strip away the formality. Right now it’s just you and me. In this world, we *will* face trouble. And usually, that’s the start of our story.

# 1

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## The Breaking Point

I was as wounded and scabbed and scarred as they come. All I wanted to do was forget. But I couldn't just forget. I couldn't forget the image of his body on a morgue table. I couldn't forget the feeling that his love for me hadn't been strong enough to change the outcome of that day.

And I couldn't sit still long enough to let my wounds heal because all I wanted to do was run.

Thanksgiving break couldn't come soon enough. I needed out. Out of the college town that sung my praises, even when my depression drowned out their cheers. I needed home. The arms of my mom and the safety of a place where I could take off my mask and stop acting like I was strong. I needed rest. I was tired and empty and so sick of faking "fine."

My last day before break had been filled with distraction after distraction, task after task that popped up and *had* to be finished before I could head home to Georgia—an eight-hour

drive from Louisiana's capitol. A drive I had made so many times before. But something about this time was different. The year had taken more of a toll on me than I even realized. I was anxious and restless and found it hard to shake the resentment that tightened my tired muscles. I was eager to leave the day and to abandon the moment, to drive in hopes that I would forget all the moments that came before it. Even just for a little while.

By the time I finally finished everything I had to do and hit the road, it was nearing five p.m. When I pulled onto the interstate, it quickly became apparent I wasn't the only one eager to head home for the holidays. In fact, the entire population of Baton Rouge seemed to be parked on the freeway. After about two hours I had only moved about two miles. When the traffic finally broke, my eight-hour drive had become a ten-hour drive and I had the road rage to prove it.

But I drove. And drove. And drove.

For a while I let my mind be hypnotized by the passing street lines. *Zip. Zip. Zip. Zip.* They flew past like fireflies as dusk settled and my restless day turned into my anxious night. A part of me felt reckless—never fully present in a moment or concerned with anything more than the pain of my past and the hopelessness of the “now.” My whole year had felt that way.

I texted a few guys on my phone as I sat, stuck, dragging through stop-and-go traffic. One in particular was bad for me. Or should I say, I was bad for him. I was bad for all of them. But that had never stopped me from getting my fix before. The year had left a gaping hole in my heart, and the brokenness that riddled my bones was only ever temporarily fixed by the encouraging words of friends and family. My loss hadn't just left me broken, it had left me desperate. And desperate girls do desperate things when they don't feel loved.

This guy was no different from every other one before him, and my intentions were no more pure than they had been with those others. It felt good to know that I could make a man desire me with just a few words. It felt good to know I'd have a hookup waiting at home. As I gave myself away to the imagination of a man who wouldn't matter, a part of me felt powerful again. A part of me felt like I was in control.

Another part of me knew it was wrong. It was all wrong. It had all been wrong for the longest time. I wasn't ignorant of the spiritual warfare that was ripping me at the seams, I was just too numb to fight it anymore. The tension was unceasing—it had been for a while. And rather than fight to seek hope and find a solution, I just absorbed it. I absorbed that tension into the DNA of my character and came to a halfhearted peace that things were as good as they were going to get. This unsettled angst was my new norm, and if I wanted to feel okay I just needed to accept that and move forward.

It's hard to describe what the tension of warfare feels like. For me it was a constant tugging in my chest, a tightness that was only eased by sitting through a church service and hoping that counted for something—or by drinking myself numb or distracting myself with men or drowning myself in my work and my athletics. So I did all of these things well—anything to pretend everything was all right. Anything to be affirmed and to feel wanted. But the tension hadn't ceased through the year. If anything, it had only grown stronger and tighter, clenching me like the grip of a father who refused to let go of a thrashing child.

Like the grip of *the Father* who refused to let go of my wandering soul.

I was apathetic on the outside but screaming on the inside. Screaming that this wasn't the life I had planned. Screaming

to a God whom I proclaimed to love but in the depths of my heart doubted was even good. Screaming in frustration that I even cared so much! How weak I must be—what a pathetic, soft woman, that my emotions and my pain could rule my days.

I felt captive to the world's perception of me. A slave to pretending that I was healing, giving prepackaged glory to a God I didn't know. My lips stayed sealed with my practiced smile but my mind was shouting for freedom. I was at the breaking point, ravaged by my internal battle. It had been a year of anguish, preceded by several years of feeling lost, then found, then lost again. It seemed like I was on a roller-coaster ride and my heart wanted off. I was done!

My car continued to speed down the interstate as night crept into morning. Even though the mile markers assured me I was headed home, I felt like I was crawling. The hours dragged by and my eyes hung heavy and my phone kept buzzing and all of it was just annoying.

Then it was one in the morning and I realized that, for the most part, I was the only car on the road. I spotted a few glowing deer eyes in the woods as I passed, but they were hard to catch amid the fog. The fog began to thicken, until it was so dense it blanketed the street and swirled up from the median. My car split through it at eighty miles per hour as I slumped, mentally numb, in the driver's seat.

It would almost be easier not to care. Easier to crawl between the sheets of a "friend" and keep secrets of what happened in the dark, to talk the talk and rest in the lies and accept the praise. After all, I knew all the right things to say—whether they were truthful or not. I could just take the depression meds and convince myself they'd work one day. I could just laugh along with the world's sense of humor and be entertained by the

newest craze. It would be easier to fall back into my pity when the tension was too tight. To blame my behavior on the scars of my circumstances and to rationalize that it would someday all be fine.

It would almost be easier to exalt my wreckage than to seek the seemingly fleeting God who had wrecked Himself on my behalf. If the year had convinced me of anything, it was that *this* God, the God everyone shoved down my throat, the Healer and Redeemer and Restorer, was far, far away from me. Sure, I was good at regurgitating memorized praises, but in my broken, burned-out state, my calloused heart prayed not for salvation or for strength but for proof. For months I'd pleaded for proof.

*Prove it. If You're so real, if You love me the way everyone says You do, reveal Yourself to me. I want what everyone else seems to have and if somehow that's from You, give it to me! Prove it!*

In desperation I'd spent months petitioning a God whom I demanded cater to my need for proof. I'd tried fighting the tension by demanding God fix my circumstances and bless me out of my mess. I half-believed He might—and half-believed my prayers were a last-ditch effort I could pretend I hadn't been desperate enough to pray, if anyone asked, when still nothing had changed.

I'd tried challenging God into restoring my brokenness, never realizing that He heard my cries and knew my brokenness better than I knew myself. Never realizing that my pleas for revelation were about to be answered by a Father who wasn't trying to preserve me but rather was willing to wreck me for His glory.

A Father who'd been waiting for such a time as this—to wreck my life.

I glanced over to see a sign glowing green in the night. *Atlanta—100 miles.* Thank goodness. I was nearing the state line and home was almost in sight.

When I caught the road again, the fog was dense and spinning. Before I could make sense of the moment, my steering wheel began to jolt and jerk. Cranking side to side, I realized my wheels were twisting through mud and grass. I had been speeding down the left lane and was now dropping off the side of the road. My mind snapped out of its haze and, in desperation, I clenched the cold leather wheel and pulled it hard to the right.

*Get back on the road! Get back on the road!*

My heart pounded and my muscles tensed in fear as I tried desperately to regain control. The fog split and I saw the front of my Jeep speeding forward almost completely perpendicular to the lines on the asphalt.

*No! No! This can't happen! Get back on the road!*

My Jeep lunged back onto the pavement and charged straight over it toward a wooded embankment. I desperately pulled back to the left as my wheel caught a deep divot—and in the deepest parts of me I knew it was over.

My body gave way to the force that was overwhelming my car. Fear paralyzed me. A piercing, screaming, indescribable type of fear. A fear that flooded me as fast as a rushing waterfall but forced time to slow to a drip. My stomach felt as though it might bulge up into my throat as I realized my equilibrium was way off. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath in, and let out a gut-wrenching groan as metal screeched and glass shattered.

My body slapped and ripped against itself, the window, the side of the car, the steering wheel. My ears rung as the sounds of destruction roared and my neck whipped with the rolling, wrenching force.

My eyes tore open in time to see a steel signpost speeding closer. Then muddy ground. The empty street. The freezing, dark sky.

My head burned and my eyes stung and debris pounded against my face. The noise only grew louder and I realized, as I choked back some unknown heat, that half of that noise was roaring out of me. My body thrashed and whipped and coiled and—

*Slam!*

Everything went black.