

# Survivors' diary



Ordinary young people  
saved in extraordinary ways!



# Survivors' diary

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*« I will send some of those who survive to  
the nations that have not heard of my fame  
or seen my glory. »*

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# Introduction

The book you are holding in your hands brings together the authentic testimonies of 24 ordinary young people who have agreed to tell the story of how they were saved in an extraordinary way!

These young people are survivors! Survivors of what? Of loss, depression, illness, death, abuse, incest, violence, addiction, prison, hatred, rejection, abandonment, the occult, fear, an inexpressible inner torment and so many other trials...

For many, suicide would have been a way out... But while they were at the bottom of the abyss, the same lifeline was thrown to them, and after grabbing it and holding on tight, their lives were turned upside down! From that day on, even if their new lives were still full of hurdles, these young people are no longer the same. They have been freed from their past, healed and restored to the depths of their souls. What was dead in them has come back to life!

Yes, there is hope! Yes, there is light in the midst of the darkness that surrounds us! And it's because these young people have regained hope, and a taste for life, that they have decided to come out of silence to tell the story of their incredible rescue!

Through these lines, the people of the ResQD (rescued) collective have agreed to open their hearts to you, to write with humility and honesty about their weaknesses, their failures and their struggles. In telling you their stories, these survivors have only one hope: that you too can grasp the lifeline that saved them, and be filled with love and rediscover the peace, joy and hope that everyone is called to.

Since 2015, the "survivors" of the collective have been travelling all through Europe to tell their moving stories from town to town with a unique and creative production. You can find all the dates of their performances on their website [www.reskp.fr](http://www.reskp.fr).

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# His departure broke my heart.

I was born in Haiti. Life isn't easy there. Every year, because of the storms, hurricanes and earthquakes through the seasons, everyone has to fight to live, or rather to survive!

So of course, with seeing your house destroyed every year, having nothing to eat or seeing delinquents knocking on your door, you can't help but to dream of a better life somewhere else. That was my father's dream, and that's why, when I was just a child, he left my mother, my brother and I to go to France... It was a heartbreaking experience for me!



But in the end, my father's dream also became mine. Because yes, in my childhood dream, France seemed like a wonderful country, just like in the fairy tales! So, to make this dream come true, I, who believed in God, prayed a simple prayer to God at the age of 8:

*«Lord, God! If you allow Mum, my brother and I to join Dad in France, I will serve you all my life.»*

At the time, when I simply prayed to God, I expected him to respond fast. Very fast... But it wasn't like that at all. The reality of life quickly caught up with me, especially when our mother also left us to join Dad in France. I was only 10 when she left and I felt totally abandoned.



When she left, my brother and I were placed with an aunt who abused us both physically and emotionally. I remember being deprived of food for three days... But we couldn't say anything! Fortunately, one day an uncle knocked on the door of this aunt's house and said: "I'm taking the children with me".

At that moment, it was like deliverance. Like a ray of sunlight after a storm... Life seemed to be smiling on us at last! The icing on the cake was that this uncle took us to the church where he was pastor. That's how, at a meeting, I was touched by God for the first time. Before this, I have to admit that I didn't really know God. But I believed in Him even with my parents not being Christians and never going to church. But back then, when I became a teenager and I saw no answer to the prayer that I'd prayed as a child, I decided to live my life without God.

After what I had personally experienced, I was convinced that God did not listen to the prayers of children! In fact, I had asked him to reunite my family and instead, he had separated us from our parents and placed us with a wicked woman. So I had put him aside for years, drifting further and further away from him and doing what was wrong in his eyes.

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*« But my life no longer had any meaning. I was missing  
the God I believed in! »*

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So I came back to Him, and one day I decided to be baptized.

Unfortunately, a year after I made that commitment, bad news hit me like an earthquake, shattering everything I had left. I dreamt of France, yes, but with all of my family. I was told that I had to leave for France, but I had to leave my brother, my companion in life's trials and tribulations. The man who had always been there for me. I had to leave him to join relatives I hadn't seen for 8 years! I'd almost forgotten their faces! This news was yet another heartbreak for me.

So I was 17 when I set foot on French soil. It wasn't easy at first, but as time went on I realised that God really does hear every prayer...

One evening, during a song at a Christian meeting, God revealed to me that he hadn't forgotten me; that he was thinking about me long before my first prayer! It was as if he was saying to me: "You see, you experienced your mother's departure as an abandonment, and the separation from your brother as a heartbreak, but I was just working for your good". At that moment, it was as if I was watching the movie of my life : my father's departure, then my mother's and then my own...



## After the rain, the good weather, really ?

Have you ever noticed that before you can say "I've progressed in such and such an area", or "I've understood a great life lesson", you have to go through a major setback? It's as if in order to grow and become better, you have to weather a storm.

Why is it suffering that makes us move forward?

Why does misfortune help us to understand?

Couldn't things be more fluid and simpler?

I don't know if we'll have the answer here on earth, but we can see the positive side: You don't come out of a trial the same way you went in.

THERE IS A RESULT. You learn and you grow.

Another positive: The situation can be resolved!

You can get through it. There is hope. It doesn't just happen to other people. Yes, it does, I promise. Great things can happen, despite our seemingly quiet little lives. As I write this, I think of someone who has given up alcohol after years of addiction, or someone else who has been freed from the grip of the occult, or that person who got married after a complicated life.

Yes, there is hope! Whatever your current downpour, clouds or hurricane, hang in there!

*Meg*

# I wanted to know who God was.

I've always believed in the existence of God, or rather a God who created the universe. Why did I believe this? To tell you the truth, at the time, my faith wasn't based on anything very solid. I just believed it, and that was that...

But you have to admit : life hadn't done me any favors! My parents divorced when I was little and my father never looked after me or my twin sister. In fact, we grew up without our father. Our mother brought us up on her own. I'd even say she did everything for us. She worked hard. She even sacrificed herself to the point of losing her life too early! But it would take too long to tell you all about it.

So it was around the age of 22 that something unusual happened to shake up my tranquil little life. To this day, I admit that I don't know why it happened to me; but what is true is that, all of a sudden, a thought popped into my head and wouldn't leave me!

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## *This thought was : Who is God?*

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Only one thing was clear in my head: I didn't want to join a religion or follow traditions! I wanted to know God. To do that, I decided to read the Bible, but since I didn't have one, I went on the internet. That's where I started reading the New Testament, the second part of the Bible. I read it for months! And finally, as someone who was looking to know God, I discovered Jesus by reading this book! As I flipped through the pages of the New Testament, I discovered that Jesus was a man who loved his neighbor deeply. I discovered that he loved even the most despised of men, or the most insignificant. I discovered that he died unjustly on a cross. And this Jesus, who I discovered page after page, touched me deeply. He made me want to follow his example...

From that moment on, I decided to become a "Good Samaritan", as they say. I went to church and tried to change the way I lived my life, always with Jesus in mind. Above all, I wanted to please God. But one day while reading the Bible, I came across a passage that said: the wages of sin is death (Romans 6.23).



That's when I realised that no matter how hard I tried to change my behavior or do good deeds, I was still a sinner. I also realized that if I died that day, I was going straight to hell because I had committed many evil deeds and had wicked thoughts in the past; - things that had most certainly displeased God.

So yes, it's true that we can try to change our language by stopping the use of swear words, for example, but we can't change our past! What's done is done: evil as well as good... So, faced with this stinging truth, in the midst of a crisis of self-doubt, I finally understood the central message of this book I'd been reading for months... All I had to do to be forgiven and to obtain a new life, was to ask God for forgiveness, with faith. So that's what I did: in a simple prayer, I asked him to forgive everything I'd ever done wrong; and then, it was as if a huge weight fell from my shoulders! No more guilt! No more fighting to get into heaven! I knew with confidence that I was forgiven and saved. And all that, thanks to a simple, but authentic prayer... Nothing more! No great works...

Yes, I asked for forgiveness, and God forgave me! Since then, my life has never been the same! I've never been happier. Even better than that, I finally got the answer to that famous question: Who is God? The answer is that God is my father, even if I didn't have one! Yes, He is MY FATHER, my creator, and I am His child, forgiven of my sins and saved by the sacrifice of Jesus, who died on the cross for me and for you! In reality, Jesus simply led me into the arms of the heavenly Father I so wanted to know. And you know what? If you ask him, Jesus will lead you there too, because God also wants to make you his child!

# I felt like I was living in the wrong body.

I was about 5 years old when I began to experience a real identity crisis or “gender” crisis, as we say today. The situation was so prevalent in my life that I even asked my parents to call me ‘Yannick’. For me it wasn’t a game: it was real suffering. I was really torn. I felt like I was living in the wrong body.

When I was a teenager, it got even worse! I literally rejected this body that was growing with femininity. By then I was doing everything I could to look like a boy. I’d even cut my hair...

When I went to university, I looked like a man: short hair, masculine look. People I met sometimes called me ‘sir’, at first sight. In fact, step by step, I had almost succeeded in erasing anything that might make people think I was a girl. On the outside, I was a boy but, on the inside, I was lost between my biological identity and the one I felt. I was undefined: neither male nor female.

Then I went out with a classmate I’d fallen in love with. That was a big step for me! Now I was completely open about my sexual orientation. But inside, I was living with immense anxiety. I was afraid, so afraid of the future, of me, of us...

So I looked for lots of solutions to silence all the thoughts that were terrorizing me. But nothing helped. My last resort was God! So I finally decided to turn to him. Because yes, despite the deep trouble in which I was living, I never doubted or questioned the existence of God. I was born into a Christian family and as a child I went to church with my parents.

But for all those years, I had clearly put him aside. I stopped talking to him because, in a way, I was angry with him! I didn’t understand why he’d put me in the ‘wrong’ body, why I was experiencing this identity crisis! But now I had no choice.

I was so desperate to find peace again. God was my last hope of calming my anxieties. So I decided to go back to church every Sunday, while leading the life I had chosen for myself.



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Then, one day, in his goodness and with so much love, God spoke to me. He said to me :

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*«Anne, I love you, but you can't do things your own way.»*

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Those words were life-changing!

It was then that I decided to listen to God and submit to his will. I realised that it wasn't up to me to choose my sex. And, without knowing how he was going to do it, I chose to believe that my creator could cure me of this psychological suffering. I began to believe that God had not made a mistake with me. From then on, little by little, I felt at peace... I was no longer Yannick, I was Anne again!

After that, I left everything behind; I quit university and cut myself off from my old life. I spent a year in a Christian center in Auvergne to reconnect with God, but also to reconcile with myself. I needed to discover the person I had buried and rejected all those years ago. There, I met the man who, 7 years later, became my husband... Incredible, isn't it ? And yet, it's true!

Of course, I'd be lying if I told you that I was reconciled with my body overnight and that my past had no impact on my married life. It took me a long time to make peace with my body and my sexual identity and to dare to share my story. My testimony today is that it is possible to reconcile with your assigned gender. Today, I am at peace with myself and with God. From now on, my identity is in Jesus, I am free from my past, and I am God's beloved daughter! God made no mistake in creating me in this female body, and he made no mistake either in creating you as you are...

## An empty void to fill!

My parents decided to divorce when I was in the throes of a teenage crisis... At the time, I felt bad about myself, and above all, I needed to be loved. However, up until now I can't say that I've ever lacked love. My parents always showed me that they loved me (each in their own way).

But when the time came to divorce, my parents had other problems to deal with. I was no longer at the center of their concerns... Except my need for love was still there, it was even becoming urgent! There was a void deep inside me that I absolutely had to fill. That's when the flirting started...

Flirting to be loved, to exist, to feel attractive and important! But I was soon disillusioned. The boys I dated weren't actually interested in who I was... They were waiting for what I could give them... These boys wanted to sleep with me. The problem was that, as I didn't want them to, they would dump me after a few weeks, a few months at best... The result was that I experienced rejection over and over again and I started to think that I was useless, ugly and worthless...

Looking back, I realise that I was looking to fill this void in the wrong way. I was looking in the wrong place...

There is a quote from Blaise Pascal : "There is in the heart of man an empty void in the shape of God"? There is a God-shaped void in the heart of man? Well yes, that's where I should have been looking: at God! And since I realised this, I throw myself into His arms every day to be filled. The good news is that He can fulfill you too! So don't hesitate to come to Him!

*Helen*

# I started cursing my father and swearing I'd kill him...

When I was a child, even though we lived in a rough place, in Guyana, I must say that my brothers and I never lacked the love of our mother. Mom is a woman who has always believed in God. She has always been devoted to serving God. At home, there was no question of sleeping on a Sunday morning; We had to go to church! Since we had no choice, I would go but I didn't understand anything of it.

Our mother raised us completely alone, like a real lioness ! She did everything she could to provide for us : even if it meant working as a maid mornings and evenings... When it comes to our father, we did not grow up with him and fortunately so, because he was a very violent man. I still remember his wickedness and the unfair punishments that he inflicted on us. Sometimes he had us kneel outside on the gravel, and with an outstretched arm, struck us until we bled.



Each time this happened, mom ended up getting in the way to come to our defense, and she paid the consequences ... I will never forget the day I saw my father hit her when she was pregnant with my little brother and ready to give birth. At the time, I felt so helpless. Little by little, I started to feel a deep hatred for him. Fortunately, after yet another complaint, our father was ordered to stay away from our home. It was a real relief.

As our father was a Freemason and follower of the occult sciences and fetishism, he would curse us. My big brother and I were the victims of all his occult practices ... I don't want to scare you, but I'll just tell you that, from a very young age, I saw satanic and dark, supernatural manifestations take place before my eyes.

As time went on seeing our misery and our mother who was crying and praying to her invisible God every day, without any results, I started to curse my father by swearing to kill him and take revenge. But above all, I started to blame God. I did not understand why he let us suffer so much.

Finally, I chose to forget God and lead the life that I had always dreamed of.

I then looked for respect, money, luxury, women, and glory. To get there, I ended up in fights, robberies, burglaries, armed robberies and police custody... At first, since I was a minor, I squeezed through the meshes of the net of justice. I became addicted to alcohol and other junk. I started drug trafficking and becoming more and more violent. As I also practiced witchcraft, I felt completely invincible. But one day, I was arrested and put into prison ...

At first, I thought that once again, the spirits that had helped me so far, were going to help me this time. But nothing! No answer. nothing worked...It was at this moment that I remembered my mother's God; This Jesus who she was talking about constantly ... So, with my simple words, I told God that if he really existed and if he made me get out of prison, I promised to give him my heart and my life. And God heard me! He got me out!

I left prison earlier than expected; To be exact, it was 3 days before Easter! Even my lawyer couldn't believe it! But despite this, despite the miracle that I had just lived, caught up in my old nature, I failed to keep my promise to God. Failure after failure, I fell back into my vices...

But as I truly wanted to get out of it and couldn't keep up with this life and all the trafficking, I made the decision to go to France.

I arrived in Saint-Etienne and was invited to come to a church. Even today, I have no words good enough to explain what I felt when I entered this place. All mom's words were confirmed in what I experienced in the midst of other believers. It's as if Jesus said to me:

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*«Finally, here you are! I do not condemn you, on the contrary I forgive you ...»*

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A supernatural peace came upon me, and as I let go of the things of the occult,, I started to recover and see my life transform...

Since that day, Jesus has completely turned my life around and he continues to move in my daily life. Today, I am free from my past. I am a child of God!

The Bible says that there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus (Romans 8.1). And it's true. Jesus forgave me! Much more, the Bible says that he is my lawyer with God and that he prays for me.

I am really a new Guibens; Hatred and thirst for revenge have given way to love and forgiveness.

Finally, I would like to tell you that God can also make you a free and forgiven man or woman. So open your heart! Even if you don't see him, God is there and he can change your life!

## Drowning in debt!

After the separation of my parents we moved to start over again... Besides, the expression «starting from zero» sticks well to our history because we did not have much to rebuild our life on... We were truly crushed under the weight of debt.

Debt is a wretched beast.  
To reimburse a loan, you have to borrow from another place, and so on. A vicious cycle... The only way to make it disappear is to pay it off at once!  
But how? With whose help?

By reading the Bible I discovered several stories like mine.  
One of them touched my heart ; That of a good, perfect man, who had never done anything wrong and who agreed to be sentenced to death in place of thieves, liars, no good men (like us) so that they could all be pardoned and forgiven. This man is called Jesus (Savior, God) and He alone can erase your debt. Jesus is the one who can give you not only peace but also a new life! Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you may be made new, with a clean slate. Do you want this clean slate?

It's really worth the "cost" to go receive him, believe me!

The only thing you have to do is ask him for help, believe that Jesus died and resurrected to save you... because the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for us. Matthew 20:28

*Helen*

## I was healed overnight, but...

I've always believed in God, so much so that when I entered my final year of middle school I decided to ask to be baptized. I really wanted to commit myself to God. But that's when the difficulties started for me.

I'd been having minor health problems for some time, but things just got worse. I felt like an old person in a child's body. I was aching all over, I couldn't exercise without swelling up everywhere. I was exhausted and constantly falling sick. At the time, I'd been to various doctors, but none had been able to find out what was going on inside my body. I was totally discouraged! I wondered why I wasn't like the others, why no one could find out what was wrong with me. Despite everything, I kept praying and believing in God.

But one evening, when I was at my lowest, a word resonated deep inside me. It said: "Before your baptism, it'll all be over". It was incredible... I was convinced that it was God speaking to me and telling me that all this suffering would soon come to an end! So I clung to that promise, firmly believing that God would not fail me. And then the day of my baptism came. You know, even if going through the waters of baptism isn't magic, that day I can assure you that I went into the water wounded and weak, but I came out transformed, renewed and healed! God had not lied! I experienced a real miracle! I experienced divine healing; from one day to the next, I had no sickness! So my story could have ended there...

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*I experienced a real miracle! I experienced divine healing;  
from one day to the next, I had nothing!*

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I was ill and God healed me, yes, but...

A year later, despite the miraculous healing I had experienced, a hormonal dysfunction, which hadn't really bothered me until then, was still present. And as I was about to go in for another medical consultation on the matter, I literally lost my nerve. It was as if I'd gone back in time...



What's worse, on the eve of my 20th birthday, and with this illness, one question haunted me: «Will I ever become a mother? It was this question and the uncertainty of its answer that began to gnaw at me... The more I worried, the more I distanced myself from God. And the more I distanced myself from him, the more my worry grew. It was a really vicious cycle! I could no longer bring my fears to God. I was thinking too much, instead of simply trusting him. Doubt and fear are so devastating... Everything went very fast after that.

Little by little, I began to hate myself. I blamed myself for my irritability, I hated my reactions and the distance I had created with my family. To make matters worse, I fell into an eating disorder- a sort of anorexia/bulimia... It was unbearable. My heart became cold, empty and lifeless... Far from God, my life had lost all meaning. I had sunk so low that I didn't even dare to approach God any more. I was so ashamed... I knew he was saddened by my behavior, but I couldn't help it! I couldn't resist... I wanted to disappear! And yet, all this time, God was beside me, his arms wide open. The problem was that I couldn't see him.

What I can say is that God really orchestrated everything so that I could rediscover His peace and joy. God led me to discover, on YouTube, the testimony of a woman who spoke about eating disorders and whose prayer totally moved me. I saw so much of myself in her story. Through this testimony, I realised that it was possible for me to return to God and be forgiven...

I wanted so much to thank this woman but, despite all my research, I couldn't find her. The only thing I knew was that her name was Meg.

A few weeks later, a friend of mine, to whom I had shared what I was going through, offered to give me a small booklet of testimonies that she had found the day before, by chance, while sorting out her bookshelf. In it she had read the testimony of a young woman who had also suffered from eating disorders... The booklet was, in fact, volume 1 of the "survivors' diary"! That evening, out of curiosity, I went to check out the ResKP website and suddenly I thought I was going to have a heart attack when I saw Meg's first name in the group's presentation. The Meg I'd been looking for all this time was part of the ResKP collective! It's totally crazy when I think about it...

God used my friend to put me in touch with the person I'd been wanting to thank. Filled with emotion I clicked on the link "I'm contacting a member of ResQD", and today I can say that through this click I was finally able to grab the lifeline that God so wanted me to grasp. It wasn't easy, that's true! I had to fight! But in the end I was freed from my eating disorders and the thoughts that were polluting my mind. Since then, my life has totally changed!

Now I know I've been forgiven! I can proclaim without hesitating that I'm a survivor. That I'm a wonderful creation who has value in God's eyes. Now I want to be the person who helps others to catch the lifeline that God is holding out to them. Finally, I'd like to tell you that God will never refuse to welcome a wounded heart into his arms of love. Don't let guilt and shame blind you or keep you from Him. Whatever you do, you will never deserve God's grace and forgiveness; but whatever you do, God offers it to you, because He loves you with infinite love!

## Personal notes

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# From the age of 7, I started watching porn...

From around the age of 7, I started watching pornographic films, and did so for years. I was introduced to it by the children of my parents' Christian friends... At the time, I wasn't aware of the danger it presented. So I grew up with this addiction, without anyone noticing.



When I was a teenager, I started wanting to do what most young people my age were doing: girls, going out, and you can probably imagine the rest... In high school, I met a pretty, young woman. Everything became amazing in my world.. But my happiness didn't last... the happiness turned into a tragedy the day we discovered that my mother was seriously ill. In just one month, she died. The day before she died, when we were in her hospital room, I remember crying out to God , "Save her, please save her!" The next day, we even prayed as a family. But an hour later, we were told that she had died.

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*My world came crashing down. I was only 17...*

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Ever since I was little, I'd always been taught that God was able to heal the sick. And now, nothing! I didn't understand anything any more... In my heart it was decided, God and I were finished! From then on, I chose to do everything that seemed good to me, but above all everything that was contrary to the Bible. I ventured further into doing things my own way - I dabbled in witchcraft. I led my life far, very far, from God... To make matters worse, my relationship with my girlfriend came to an abrupt end. The break-up was so painful... On top of that, I missed my mother so much; I fell into a depression. I'd become a total wreck. I didn't want to do anything any more, I didn't know what to do.

The death of my mother was a terrible ordeal for my father too. But while he was also suffering from severe depression, my father decided to turn to God. Little by little, I saw him resurface. God's actions in his life were so obvious that even his eyes changed. I was sincerely happy for him, even though on my side nothing had changed. Nothing could fill the immense emptiness in my heart; not even alcohol, not even girls... Until the day I had to leave Martinique to study and move to mainland France, to a town I didn't know at all. I had no friends or family there... As I was totally alone, I thought it might be a good idea to find a church to pray for the success of my studies. Of course, in my head, there was no question of making a serious commitment; I wanted to live my life as I had before- how I wanted to... So I found the address of a church and went to the youth service. And wow! I discovered young people who were happy and fulfilled. I'd never felt anything like that. But what touched me the most was the love they showed me! So I started going to this church more and more often. But every time I went there, deep down something saddened me. I felt dirty because I knew I was a slave to my past and to the pornography that was always present in my life... But one evening, at a youth meeting, God, who knew what I was going through, instantly freed me from this addiction. It's difficult to explain, but know that it's really true! After that service, I was finally free of pornography. The problem was that deep in my heart I was still suffering... So it was during yet another service that I totally collapsed. I remember praying with all my heart and saying: Lord, today either you take all this suffering away, or I'll leave the Church and never come back". That same day, a visiting pastor began to pray for me, saying "Lord, restore this broken heart", and then he went on to say something that really came from God:

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*«The love of your mother that you have missed for all these years, today Jesus gives it to you».*

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It was incredible! This man knew nothing about my story! At that very moment, I bursted into tears for a long moment. Something had changed in me; I was healed, at peace, filled with incomparable joy! My mind was made up: my past life was finally over! I'd like to end with this quote from Blaise Pascal who said: "There is a God-shaped void in the heart of man, which nothing created can fill, but only the Creator who has made himself known through Jesus". So, if you too feel an emptiness in your heart, if you've lost someone dear to you, don't reject God. But on the contrary, come to him and let him fill your heart with his love and his joy. Today he says to you: "As a man is comforted by his mother, so I will comfort you" so let him comfort you.



# When I was just 17, I found out I was pregnant!

Being a mom is the dream of most little girls, isn't it? When we're children, we play with dolls and put cushions under our clothes to pretend we're pregnant. But they say there's an age for being a mother! Speaking of age, I appear easily 8 years younger than I am. You might be thinking "that's a good thing"... and it's true that for some people it can be an advantage to look younger. But for me it hasn't always been easy to live with. Actually because of it, people found it hard to take me seriously...

So I had to fight to be accepted, even if it meant not being myself; leading a double life, putting aside the values of my parents and those of God. Yet I've never doubted the existence of God. Nor have I ever been angry with him. I just wanted to live my life and feel accepted by others.

So when I was in the first year of high school, I agreed to go out with a boy. I have to admit that this relationship changed a lot of things. From that moment on, I was seen differently. In other people's eyes, I just looked cooler. And that's all I wanted... However, despite several negative signs about the relationship, I continued to go out with my boyfriend. But when I was just 17 and entering my senior year of high school, my life was turned upside down the day I found out I was pregnant. I was in shock !

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*I never imagined that this could happen to me. Not to me! In my head I was thinking: "He's my first boyfriend, everything's falling apart, what's going to happen to me?"*

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These thoughts went round and round in my head, it felt like drowning. When my boyfriend found out I was pregnant, he took me to the school clinic. As soon as I realised what was happening, I was assured that there was nothing to

worry about. I was told that there was only one solution to my "problem". To reassure me, I was told that abortion is common when you're of high school age, and that it's a quick and effective procedure. At the time, I was totally lost. I couldn't imagine breaking the news to my parents... I was only 17! So for 15 days I carried this heavy secret around with me, crying every day in the shower, without seeing any way out of the situation.

My sister, who finally found out that I was pregnant, encouraged me to tell our parents before having an abortion. The day before the abortion appointment, my mom finally found out. That day, even though my parents had assured me of their support, whatever my choice would be, there was still an immense feeling of sadness and pain in the house. But my parents didn't judge me; they gave me the afternoon to think things over and decide what I wanted to do.

So for several hours I was alone with myself... But as I spent that painful afternoon listing the pros and cons, and looking back now, seeing that God carried me through, I didn't realise it that day. Kind of like the baby growing inside me, God was there too, even if I couldn't see him.

So, after thinking about it for a long time, I finally made the choice to keep my child, no matter how people would look at me, no matter the gossip and rumors that came my way, no matter the different future I would have that I didn't anticipate. And God really did turn that choice into a blessing!

From that moment on, as I accepted that I couldn't handle the situation on my own, and as I let go and trusted God completely, I felt a great peace within me. The certainty that I wouldn't be alone, that God would be there; and He was!

In the years that followed, I drew closer to God, asking his forgiveness for my mistakes. I began to really want to know him, to have a real relationship with him. So I started praying again, reading the Bible and decided to go back to the church I'd left to be baptized.

My daughter is my own little miracle!

So, yes, it's true that the years following her birth weren't always easy, but from the day I made the decision to keep her, God stayed by my side. As far as Rose's father is concerned, I had decided to end my relationship with him. Despite this, he still recognized Rose and we came to an amicable agreement about custody. Since then, and through the ups and downs, a balance has finally been established in our relationship, for Rose's sake.



# In the blink of an eye, my life turned into a nightmare!

In life, the slightest mistake can tip us, in an instant, to one side or the other... In just a moment, you can become famous by creating a buzz with a simple video on the internet. You can become a millionaire just by scratching off a lottery ticket. But you can also die suddenly in a car accident, or end up in prison after an unfortunate choice... In an instant, with a simple misstep, our dreams of happiness can vanish and turn into a nightmare! That's exactly what happened to me...

I could have become rich! Actually, that's what I wanted... The problem was that, to achieve this goal, the means I found were not always very "christian", so to speak. For a while, for example, I turned to all kinds of cons and scams. But fortunately for me, I quickly realised that this was not the world for me... So I was attracted to another world: poker! Not only was I attracted to this world, but it was an environment where I excelled; not because I was a good player, no. It was because I was a great cheat! My cheating technique was such that I couldn't lose.

Then there was soccer! Soccer was my passion! I wanted to become a professional Soccer player. That's why I left Cameroon for France.

When I arrived in France, the success I'd been waiting for seemed so close at last! The path to soccer seemed to be slowly clearing up... Everything seemed to be going well in my life. Until that famous mistake, when my whole life came crashing down!

It happened in the evening, as I was leaving a bar in Lille. Caught in the middle of a brawl, I threw a punch that mortally wounded a man. That misstep not only cost that man his life, but also landed me in prison for 12 years for manslaughter.

When I learned that the man had died, I couldn't believe it... I broke down in tears, praying in my heart: «God, please give this man back his life!» But one thought kept coming back to me: «Bertin, you're a criminal!»



So I was incarcerated in a high-security prison. Just looking at the prison walls, you know you're stepping into another world.

Two or three days after my incarceration, a warden came to ask me if I'd like to meet a chaplain. Without hesitation, I said yes! I've always believed more or less in God! I'd even been to a Catholic church a few times, an Evangelical church a few times and even a mosque once. In fact, I'd always wondered about God and salvation...

At our first meeting, the chaplain asked me just one question :

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*« Do you believe that God can forgive you? »*

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I told him "Yes!" So he prayed for me, very simply, and gave me a Bible (which I still have today). After that, I never saw him again because, a month later, I was transferred to another prison. In this new prison, I was the victim of numerous attacks of all kinds in the exercise yard... Despite everything, I continued to faithfully attend Mass held by a new chaplain. In fact, it was during a meeting organized by the chaplaincy that another prisoner started talking to me about God. He even lent me this Jesus DVD. I didn't like reading or watching films of that kind, but I think I watched it about ten times.

On the other hand, I continued to experience persecution after persecution. One day, I was even beaten up by several prisoners. But at no time did I raise my hand to defend myself, because each time I heard God say to me: "Bertin, don't raise your hand against anyone and you will see your deliverance".

But it was the day I heard the story of Jacob in the Bible, that my life changed! When I heard it, it was as if I'd seen my life flash before my eyes. It was at that exact moment that I realized my sin and who I really was. I recognized and accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior of my life and, from that moment on, a supernatural peace came over me. I felt, deep down, God's full forgiveness for me. After that, God worked many miracles in my life, including a cure for hepatitis B; that's a long story too!

Today, I'm experiencing extraordinary things with God!  
In the past, when someone spoke to me about God, I'd say: "Leave me alone, I've got too many problems".

Today, I tell my problems that I have a great God!  
I'm not the same person. I'm free, and what brings me the most joy is the assurance that God will forgive me.

There's a proverb in the Bible that says, " He who hides his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy"(Proverbs 28.13). God has forgiven my mistakes and he can also forgive yours, whatever they may be! If you want to, all you have to do is come to him, confess your sins, ask his forgiveness and open your heart to him!

### Personal notes

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# To live or to die?

Life is made up of happy and unhappy days... From one moment to the next, everything can change, and very often our bad choices, or those of others, are not to blame. It's true, we all make mistakes and some missteps are more costly than others...

Some time ago, I made mistakes that left me feeling deeply guilty and ashamed. Once I became aware of the wounds I had caused around me, it was impossible for me to forgive myself, impossible for me to deal with the situation. I hated myself. I wanted to erase myself. To disappear so I wouldn't cause any more harm to anyone... That's when I thought of ending my life like Pierre, Romain and Stéphane had done; three stolen lives that I knew. Three stories that ended when they should have continued... But shame and guilt got the better of them...

As for me, when I was at the bottom of that abyss, I realized that I didn't want to die at all. I wanted to live! And that's what God wanted too...

God wants me to live, for you to live, for us to live, no matter what mistakes we make or missteps we make...

There's nothing God can't forgive, no sin he can't erase. Listen to this: The life God wants to offer you is eternal, without shame, without guilt, and without condemnation. And you can receive this life by faith, because Jesus took your guilt upon himself. He agreed to die on the cross so that you might live! So live in Him, I beg of you!

*Helen*

# My life was hanging by a thread...

Have you heard the expression "My life is hanging by a thread" ?

Well, let's just say that for me, the thread of my life was so badly damaged that one day it almost broke. Yet my story had started out rather well. I grew up in a loving family; my childhood was gentle and full of joy. At home, I remember reading the Bible, praying, and going to church on Sunday mornings. And I believed in God! But from the age of 12-13, problems started to arise...

My first problem started after we moved houses, and I had to find a way to be accepted at my new school. To do this, I had to "be like everyone else", or worse, like the troublemakers. So that's what I did, to the point of denying God and my faith. I was too ashamed to say that I went to church and that I believed in God. What's worse, is at the time, faith was synonymous with problems and legalism! So I decided to rebel to look "cool". I started smoking cigarettes and pretending to be a bad student, when actually I was quite good. And then, very quickly, weed and cigarettes became my constant companions. Alcohol became my escape... I'd even get drunk in class in the morning. Then coke and crack came into my life, and they remained for about 18 years ...

When it came to love, it just seemed crazy to me that anyone could be interested in me. I was ready to fall into the arms of the first person who came along. I had no real limits; no real self-esteem... It has to be said that the wandering hands of two adults on me when I was a teenager had left its mark, particularly on my expectations of others.

Let's talk about trust! In reality, I no longer trusted anyone in society, which I wanted to escape at all costs... I wanted to get out of the system; to make my own choices far from all societal influences. So I left! And where better to go than... to a paradise island in the West Indies where everything seems to be free of constraints? To live a light hearted, eco-friendly, natural, organic life? I wanted to have fun! And I did... It was there that I met a tall, handsome young man.

He was a musician, living half the time in his recording studio and half the time lost in nature... He was a dream come true for me! But my dream soon turned into a nightmare as my companion became violent with me for the first time, then a second time, a third time, a fourth... But I couldn't leave him!

Eventually I got pregnant. For my friends at the time, who saw me falling apart because of drugs and alcohol, there was only one option: I had to have an abortion. I hesitated... The father wanted me to keep the baby (even if he hit me in the stomach in his moments of anger), but in the end I decided to have an abortion.

It was a violent shipwreck! But that was just the beginning... Then the three years of depression that followed, but that's too long to tell you about. Really, it was as if something was dying inside me. As time went by, I couldn't be near children, especially babies; I couldn't even see them in movies any more.

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*At that point, I could say that my life was hanging by a thread...*

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But throughout all this, my parents, who were Christians, never stopped praying for me. Yet they could have given up and been discouraged to see my heart hardened. In fact, one of my mother's friends told her: "Your daughter will go to the end of the rope and then come back..." and she was right!

I returned to France for the birth of my first niece... At that moment, in my heart, part of me was delighted to be reunited with my family, while the other part was apprehensive because I didn't want to spoil my brother's happiness or that of my parents. Until then, my mother was the only one in the family who knew about the abortion. So, given the situation and my apprehension, my mother decided to tell my father. After taking the news in, my father simply suggested that we pray about it. Honestly, I accepted out of politeness. But the most incredible thing is that it was that simple moment of prayer that changed my whole life. My parents started praying, one after the other, and without realizing it, they were praying for a lot of things I'd thought to myself before. It was totally crazy! I felt like they had read my mind. So, not really understanding what was going on, I started praying out loud myself, saying: "Jesus, if it's you who's doing this, I want to know you, I want to give you my life".





# You don't become violent without a cause !

So it's true that I was violent. But you know, you don't become violent without a cause ... I was 10 when my parents decided to divorce. Even though I'd heard them arguing for years, it was the separation that fractured my heart. From that moment on, I was never the same! I no longer respected my mother, I argued with my family, and at school, I was the disruptive kid. I fought whenever I could. My mother cried a lot, but she also prayed a lot for me; I heard her more than once! She also took me to see a psychologist and the two of them decided to send me to a re-education center because they were afraid I would become dangerous.

So I was 12 years old when I was placed in this center and I stayed there for 4 years. Four years of hitting people to make them respect me! Four years of harassing others and making fun of teachers! Four years during which I tried weed and alcohol... But also four years of shoplifting. My last chase with the security guards landed me in the police station and in front of the juvenile court! From then on, I was grounded, and to make matters worse, I kept hearing my "friends" tell me: "You're pathetic, you're useless...".

I couldn't take it any more!

One evening, I used my fists again; I got into a fight with a guy from the center. An educator had to intervene to separate us and ordered us to go to our rooms, but I rebelled. The teacher slapped me and things got out of hand. I'll spare you the details of that moment, but to sum it up, I can tell you that the teacher ended up unconscious on the floor. When he woke up, he told me several times "I'm going to file a complaint...". But to be honest, his threat didn't have any effect on me! Over all these years, my heart had become as hard as stone. I couldn't stand the center any more. I felt like I was going insane! I wanted to destroy everything, but the only way I could leave the center was to find a school. Fortunately one day after several months of searching, my mother called to tell me that she'd found a school. I thought things would get better! But over there it was the same, if not worse.

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*I was despised and laughed at!*

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As I couldn't defend myself with words, I continued to defend myself with my fists. Unfortunately, these violent outbursts, alcohol and drugs never left me, because when I drank or smoked, I felt like I was in another world. I stopped thinking about my worries. I even felt confident! But in reality, it was all an illusion... My heart was filled with anger, hatred and sadness. That's when I started having thoughts of suicide. I was fed up with life. I was so depressed that I didn't even have the strength to fight any more. What's worse, alcohol and weed weren't helping me feel good any more.



But fortunately, one evening my brother, who had become a Christian, asked me to go with him to a church service for young people. As I'd already been to church before my parents divorced, I agreed to go. The young people there were really nice to me. They didn't shut me out despite my shyness. They seemed so cheerful and happy... I wanted to be like them too...

One day, at another service in that church, when the singing began, I felt a presence come over me, and an indescribable joy and peace filled my heart. At that moment, I realized that Jesus was the only solution for my life! When I got home that evening, before going to bed, I turned to God. I asked him for forgiveness for everything I'd done wrong and I laid all my problems before him. That night, I can say that I made peace with God.

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*At that moment, I realised that Jesus was the only solution  
for my life!*

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The next morning, something had changed in me. I was no longer thinking about my problems, or about alcohol or smoking, but about Jesus. I went to ask forgiveness from my parents and other people I'd hurt, and miraculously, I was totally free from alcohol and weed! I didn't want to fly any more...

A new Johnaël was born that day! I had a new heart, a new life! I was no longer a prisoner of my past or of my sin; I was free!

Since that day, my hands have no longer caused harm! Whenever I can, I serve God. Jesus is my reason for living! He saved me! He transformed me and is still transforming me! He gave me a new taste for life! He changed my heart of stone into a heart of flesh! Nothing is impossible for God, believe it!

# I love her, and you ?

One evening, as I was meditating on a passage from the Bible (and yes, I do read the Bible...) I began to think about different situations I've experienced and people with whom I sometimes have difficulty. You know the kind of people who make you feel uncomfortable, who irritate you without knowing why...

So, after trying to understand what was wrong with me and what was dysfunctional about these people, and finding no answer to my 'meditation', I had the good idea of asking God what he thought of one of these people.

A quick aside just in case: it is indeed possible to talk to God and ask him questions, just like a friend. So if you have any questions, don't hesitate!

So, after questioning God, I waited for his answer and, deep inside me, his gentle voice rang out, saying: 'I love him, do you?'

You can imagine the silence that followed!

I was forced to admit that I didn't really love this person; that I lacked love and mercy towards them. Since then, I've understood how harshly we judge others, but also how much God loves everyone.

What's more, since God's love covers a multitude of faults, I'm sure that if someone asked God what he thought of me, imperfect as I am, God would reply 'I love him, do you?'

So... whatever others think or say about you, even if they don't like you, I'd like you to remember that God loves you! And that's no mean feat!

*Helen*

# I had a thirst for paranormal experiences...

If I had to sum up my story with a song, I'd probably choose the famous "Highway to hell", because a few years ago I experienced a real descent into hell.

When I was very young, I was attracted to all things supernatural. I had a thirst for spiritual and paranormal experiences. In the end, I had just one goal: to find the one who had created me. I wanted to understand why I existed, the origin of mankind and the purpose of life. I've always believed in God. When I was little, I used to pray every night in front of statues or crosses, but as I got older, I felt like I was talking to a wall. I thought that if I wanted to meet God, I had to go to the afterlife. By the age of 12, I was already using a pendulum to communicate with the dead. As the years went by, my practices intensified and diversified. I moved on to self-hypnosis and hypnosis, intensive personal development, meditation and astral travel.



From the moment I started all these paranormal experiences, I very quickly began to experience extremely strange things. For example, I felt like I was being followed all the time (even in the school playground). I had visions of murder and suicidal thoughts mixed with real attacks of madness. One summer, I even suffered from insomnia; I heard noises and felt a presence in my room.

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### *I was living a waking nightmare.*

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Despite all that, my search for God never stopped! So I continued my search, but each time I ended up resorting to occult practices. I also became addicted to electro-gothic music. It had really become a drug for me. The problem was that the more I listened to it, the more bizarre my thoughts became. I'd have bad dreams, like demons talking to me and wanting to kill me. Frankly, I felt like I was going mad. Seeing my condition, my parents took me to a number of doctors. But no medical professional was able to help me. None of them could find a solution to ease my pain and suffering. Why couldn't they? Quite simply because the root of the problem was spiritual. But I didn't know that at the time. So I began to rebel and to plunge even deeper into the occult, until I came to Satanism. I won't give you the details of my practices, so as not to frighten you and above all so as not to glorify the devil, but you should know one thing: all these practices have a real spiritual impact. I didn't know that before. But now I can tell you that the devil exists and that he only comes to lie, steal and destroy. At first, he makes us believe that everything will be great with him, but never forget this: when he gives, it's never free! The consequences are terrible. And I personally did not escape the consequences to the rule. I felt like I was bound by a force that was pushing me towards self-destruction and I was heading straight for it...

But one evening, when I couldn't take it any more, I cried out to God like I never had before, asking him to reveal himself to me. And after that simple prayer, the heavy atmosphere in my room changed completely. I felt a tenderhearted presence, and some time later, as I was listening to a song on the internet called "Sorry Lord Sorry", I felt as if scales were falling from my eyes. It was a real revelation. At that moment, I understood the meaning of the cross, my sin and who Jesus was. I couldn't stop crying. Asking for forgiveness, I surrendered my life to God. That day I was born again!





# I had just one goal : to become a professional goalkeeper!

I was born into a family of 8 boys where Christian values were ingrained in our daily lives. With my family, Sunday was a consecrated day when we all had to go to church.

Very early on, I discovered a great love for soccer. Soccer became a shelter for me, but also a source of fulfillment. I had only one goal: to become a professional soccer player!

I wanted to make my dream come true, so I gave it my all! I did training after training, joined the main club in the town where I lived in Benin and quickly moved up through the age categories. But all those hours on the field meant I couldn't study properly at school, so my grades plummeted. My parents were furious, especially since my brothers were all highly educated. So tensions began to build between us. Sometimes it got so bad that I did everything I could not to go home... I was asking myself so many questions! I did not understand why the parents of my friends admired me so much when I played soccer, while my parents were criticizing me for it... For my father, who was a minister in Benin, being a professional soccer player was not a real job!

I felt totally misunderstood and under-valued. I wanted to know why God couldn't convince my parents to let me live my dream, despite my prayers. As time went on, the family situation and my passion for football therefore distanced me from God. I became rebellious, I went less and less to church and I was almost never praying... well only for a few seconds before the matches so that God would give us victory. My efforts and my perseverance allowed me to join the training center in Côte d'Ivoire! My dream was finally about to become reality. Everything was good in my life! I even had a girlfriend... The ball was finally in my court! I was about to score the goal!

But during a match, I was kicked on my head. The blow was so violent that it caused a head trauma and hearing loss of 90% of my left ear. The following days were so difficult that I could neither eat nor walk. I spent all of my days in bed because it was impossible for me to keep my balance; I had extreme tinnitus and a lot of dizziness.

A few days later, after exams and care, I was declared unfit to continue playing soccer in the training center, because the risks of relapse were too high. In addition to that, I had just learned that my girlfriend had cheated on me...

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*The world I had taken so many years to build was collapsing.*

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From there, the isolation in which I found myself and my rebellion against God opened the door to sin. I became addicted to pornography and video games, especially FIFA. I wanted to create a character who could achieve the dream that I was not going to be able to. I was spending my days in my room to avoid the mocking and hurtful words of those who had always asked me to stop soccer. I completely lost the esteem I had for myself. One day, I watched the film «War Room», which is about a woman who fought in prayer to save her marriage. I told myself that if it were really possible to find a prayer life and a meaning in my life, then I had to try. So that's what I did!

I took a bible in my parents' car and started reading it verse by verse. It was the first time I really read it carefully. I also started listening to Christian music that helped me fall asleep without crying, and not wanting to wake up.

Little by little, even though some tensions calmed in me, I continued to feel completely useless! Everyone around me was succeeding as I spent my days doing nothing. I had no goal in life... So, to move past this and heal, I made the decision to go to France to continue my studies. When I arrived, because of my hearing disabilities, the beginning was very complicated. But, thanks to the love that I was able to feel in a church that immediately welcomed me, and through my commitment to the Survivor collective called ResKP, God pursued me, freed me from addiction and healed my wounds.

So no, I'm not a professional soccer player and I will never be. But today I can tell you that I am at peace with myself. But especially with God who forgave my sins and brought reconciliation within my family.

Today, my life goal is no longer to become a professional goalkeeper to prevent others from scoring goals! On the contrary, my life now, is to do my best so that those who surround me do not miss the goal that God has for their eternal life!

Now, because I know that my life has value for God and that he has a perfect plan for me, every day that passes, I learn to let God be the first coach of my life.

So, if you too, feel misunderstood and if you are disappointed not to have achieved your dream, I simply ask you to abandon this disappointment in the hands of God in order to enter into the purpose that God has for your life. Believe me, even if you don't see it today, God's projects are much better than our dreams. And lastly, never forget this:

*No job, no dream, no relationship can fill the void in you and give you peace. The only one who can is God! !*

So I invite you to run towards him as fast as you can!

## Personal notes

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## Faced with a test !

A few years ago, I went through a season of great discouragement. People who know me personally will certainly find it difficult to believe. In general, I am seen as a fighter determined to succeed ... But that strong woman no longer had the desire or the strength to fight. On the contrary, I was ready to give up. But, during a discussion with my husband, after having expressed my feeling of loneliness and describing my mountain of disappointments and misunderstandings, he said to me: «In fact, you prefer to flee the test than to face it!». His answer felt like an electric shock!

He was right! This wasn't a new concept though ... I had often fled hardships in the past. I fled reality by lying. I fled conflicts by avoiding people. I fled challenges for fear of failure ... Fled to avoid suffering or being tested.

How about you? How do you react to difficulty? Do you, too, tend to turn the other way when you see adversity?

If so, I would like to tell you that you are not the only one. The Bible is full of stories of famous men who also fled! This is the case of Moses, King David or Abraham for example. And do you know what allowed them not to quit completely in the face of adversity? It's God! Whatever the reason for their flight, God caught up with them on the way and helped them make it to the end! Because yes, God wants you to get to the end of the race! God wants you to go after your trial! So don't run away! Do as these men did. Take the hand of God and count on Him! God alone can make a way when there is no way humanly possible.

*Helen*

## If I had known how much this relationship was going to destroy me...

God has always been part of my life and the lives of my family for generations. I grew up in a loving and very united Christian family. But despite this, like all teenagers in the world, when I was in college, difficulties started to arise. It was really a complicated phase of my life, where I was trying to figure out not who God was, but who I was!

So, during my four years of high school, I tried a lot of things. This was also the time in my life where I was discovering guy/girl relationships. I really started falling for a boy to the point that he even became a refuge for me. At that time, I really lacked self confidence, and this boy made me feel valued. He was also there to change my mindset when I wasn't doing so well. For 4 years, we were the best friends in the world ... But, at the end of the 3rd, the fateful moment has arrived. This boy wanted to really be together but deep down, I knew that it was a bad idea. I knew that I should not go further and that this relationship would not appeal to God. And I had really started to live my own experiences with the Lord. My faith was no longer linked to my parents and my family. My faith had grown because I developed my own personal walk with God. During this time, in my heart, I was torn between my hunger to get closer to God and the pressure I could feel from my high school friends who encouraged me to go out with this boy. But, deep down, I knew that, if I did not give up this relationship, I could give myself fully to God. And one evening, during a young adult gathering, I really made the decision to say no to this relationship for good and to really advance in my walk with God. And this decision was the first step towards a new season!

Following this gathering, I made the decision to be baptized and follow Jesus for all my life, never to abandon him, regardless of the circumstances to come. But the period following my baptism was even more complicated.

We must not believe that baptism is the goal of our walk with God. Actually, it is just the beginning of a marathon ... and this path is often filled with pitfalls. As far as I'm concerned, the difficulties did not end after the commitment I had made with God. I had the desire to never give up Jesus, but I failed to keep my promise and I started to give up spiritually. I even put God aside for a while ... and from there, came the bad choices. The first was to get involved with a boy who played the violin in an orchestra with me, which led to a game of pursuit ...

I became more and more interested in him and I made sure he noticed me. And he sure did! Honestly, if I had known how much this relationship was going to destroy me, I would never have let this boy enter my life. However, I knew from the bottom of my heart that this relationship was not in the will of God. But, every time I was trying to stop it from going further, this boy managed to convince me. I can't tell you everything, but know that this relationship has become totally toxic.

I was lost every day, unhappy and, as I was far from Jesus, I couldn't get out of this dead end. On top of all this, I hadn't even told anybody about this relationship... But one day, God helped me! God had compassion for me!

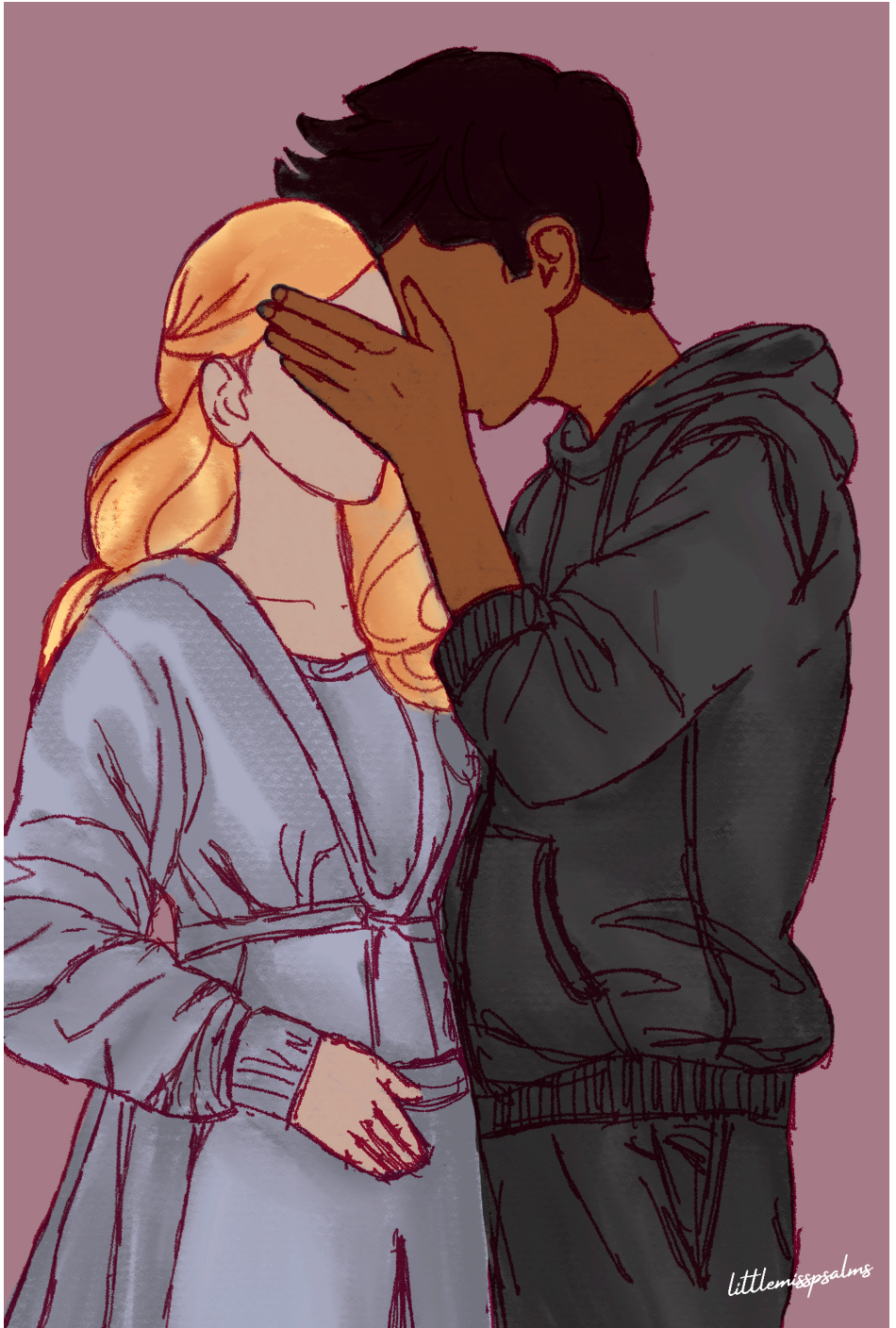
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*Although I turned my back on him, and although I let go of his hand for a while, he did not abandon me.*

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Quite the opposite. He placed in my path a friend who helped me end this relationship and who helped me to come back to Him. God did not leave me on the side of the road, despite my unfaithfulness towards him. His love for me actually had never stopped. And, from the moment I came back to him, he transformed and changed my life.

Finally I would like to encourage you to abandon your life in the hands of God as I did. And if you made mistakes, if you have turned away from him, I invite you to come back to him. Do not let guilt and shame separate you from God. God awaits you with his arms wide open and can change your life like he did for me!



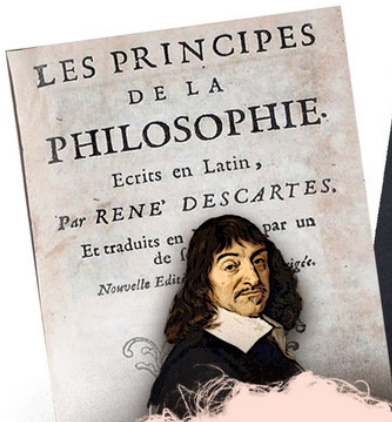
# I no longer knew who I was, nothing made me happy.....

Do you know the famous story of the prodigal son? Well I would say that I was the modern version.

It is true that everything predestined me to become this super Christian that my family was waiting for since my birth, because yes, I had everything! I grew up with parents who love God. I had been showered with love and I succeeded in everything I did. I saw God respond to my prayers and those of my loved ones. Even my birth, in itself, is a miracle, because my mother and I miraculously survived the ordeal.

So I grew up in this great environment. I even remember once when I was 15 years old, my father had written a letter telling me that I was the son he had always dreamed of having. Beautiful life, right? However, just like my father had told me many times: It's not about starting the race, but what counts is finishing it. And for me, this race almost stopped definitively.

The reason? Probably the «teenage crisis» as some say, but also, the fact that my college schedule had more than 8 hours of philosophy per week. I always loved to think, but through these classes, I started to experience a real brain washing. Little by little, by hearing all these concepts, I chose to follow the thought of the famous philosopher Descartes. This thought is to deconstruct everything you knew once and for all, and to put, little by little, everything back in order in your head. That's what I did; Until I doubted everything that my parents had taught me. Everything I could see and know, and even the existence of God. It was therefore in this dangerous mindset that I tried to rationalize everything myself and ended up getting lost. I no longer knew who I was. I couldn't even believe in God despite my desire. My heart then hardened. Even if, until then, I had always preserved myself for my future wife and hung on to the values of the Bible, now, I had no reason to want to please God. I then gave way to a double-faced Brice, continuing for several months to go to church with my parents, while hiding from them, as much as possible, who I was becoming. I wanted to live my life without feeling like it was my family who imposed it on me. And that's what I did!



So I started flirting around, going to nightclubs and looking for happiness as I saw fit. But, after several months this is how it all played out. My parents discovered what I had become. That day marked the start of a great crisis and a painful season when everything was destroyed between us. My parents were continuing their way with God despite the great sadness that I had provoked in them, while I lived my life, my way, in my apartment!

Except that, little by little, I started to feel an immense sorrow and loneliness which became more and more heavy. Nothing made me happy! Until the weekend I returned to my parents. I found myself alone with my mother, in my room. That day I remember clearly expressing my despair. She then replied that she understood what I felt but that she could not offer me anything other than the help of God. She had added that I had already seen everything in my childhood and already heard everything. So I replied: Mom, can you pray for me?

My mom then asked me this question: You're asking me to pray for you when you pretend not to believe in God?

I no longer knew what to say, but I replied this to her: Mom, I so badly want to believe it, but I can't do it! Pray for me! We then simply kneeled in front of my bed, asking God to reveal himself to me. It was at this precise moment that, in my room, my limited thoughts were broken. I started to cry and joined my mother in her prayer asking for forgiveness from God with all my heart.

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*At that time, I received the assurance of the existence of  
God but also the assurance of his forgiveness!*

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I can say that I was really born again that day! I was able to put my life in good standing and discover, little by little, true happiness. A happiness that I have not found anywhere else, except, in peace and joy that my relationship with Jesus gives me. While I was looking for knowledge in complicated areas, it was in simplicity that God reached out to me...

Today, what matters to me is that all my thoughts are held captive to the obedience of Jesus. I no longer want to do my will but God's will! So, if you too doubt the existence of God, I invite you to put him to the test. Ask him to reveal himself! You have nothing to lose and everything to gain! Likewise, if you got lost like me, I would like to tell you that it is not too late to come back! God is waiting for you and waiting to say «My son, my daughter, my child, was dead and came back to life. My child was lost but now he is found!»

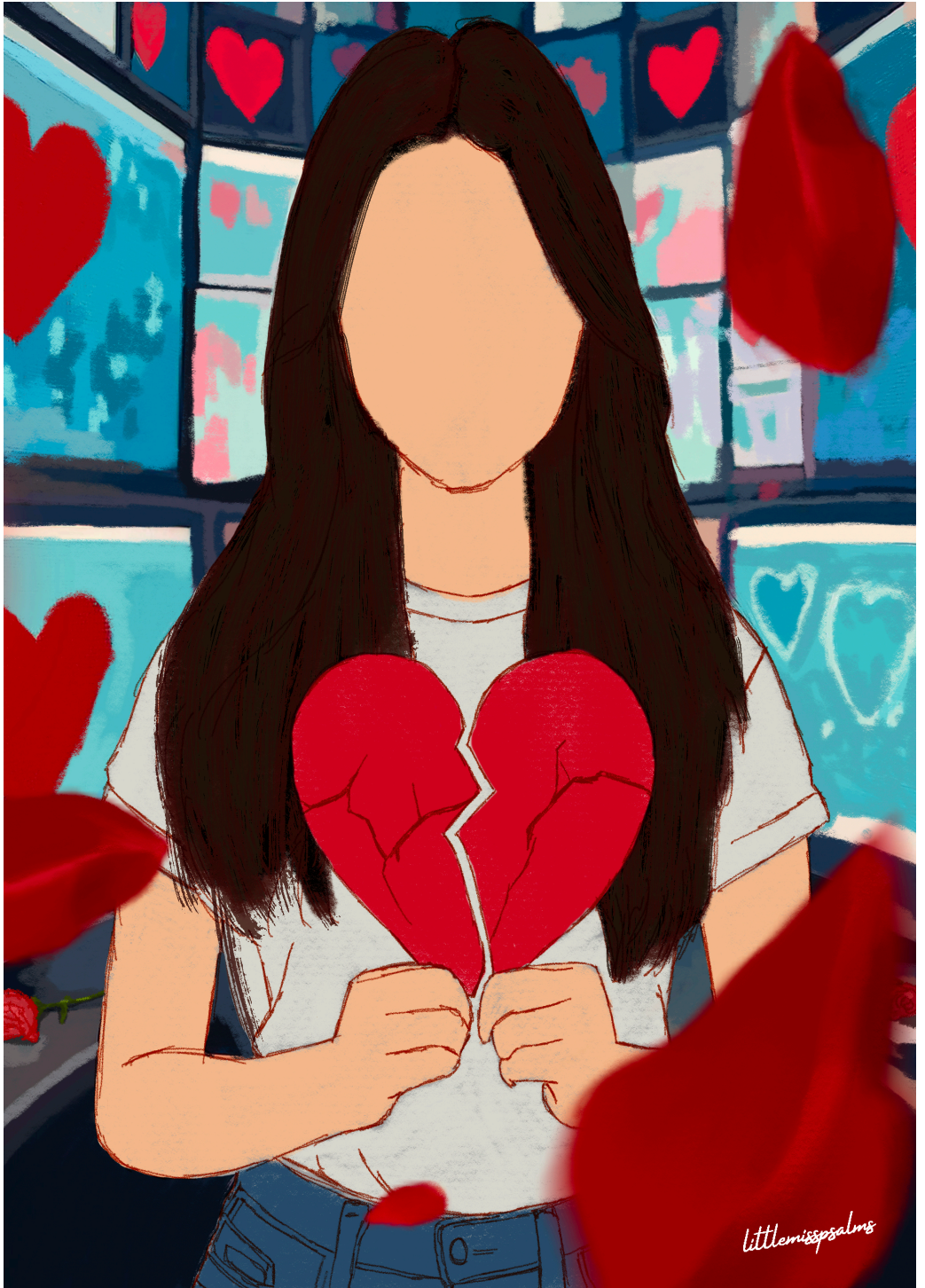
# If I had to summarize my life with a word, it would be the word Betrayal...

We do not always imagine the level of pain we can truly inflict on people when we treat them without consideration, or take advantage of them... betrayal is what I felt

If I had to summarize my life with a word, that would be the word betrayal! And it started very early! At the time of the college, I became the «doormat» of a girl who called herself my friend. To summarize the situation, I can say that in our relationship, there was a form of harassment or emotional blackmail...If I didn't do what she wanted, she would threaten to stop being my friend. Without realizing it, and because I was looking for a real friendship, I rushed into a toxic one that destroyed me little by little and caused me to grow in fear of rejection and abandonment.

After that, I was sexually assaulted in front of those who said they were my friends. No one came to my defense. No one helped me. I can say that this was the day that the esteem of myself and the confidence that I had in others were completely destroyed. So, for a while, to prevent me from thinking about everything I had suffered, to avoid replaying the scene in my head again, I distracted myself and became addicted to all kinds of shows/media ... it was the only way I had found to occupy my thoughts and forget what had happened. But, in reality, it didn't help me to heal... on the contrary, little by little, my heart hardened and I became angry.

And then, shortly after, during my high school years, I was again betrayed within my own family... I had so much admiration and thought so highly of the people that I loved that when they made mistakes, I was extremely disappointed and could not forgive them. Besides, I even had trouble understanding that God could forgive them... My heart was hard and filled with anger and bitterness. However, I cannot say that I lacked love... I grew up in a loving family that made me know the love of God and the values of the Bible. I always believed in God and got baptized at the age of 13! But, despite this, because of all these wounds and all these disappointments, I could no longer believe that I could be loved for who I was, or that God really loved me...



*littlemisspsalms*

Honestly, it took me a long time before fully realizing God's love for me... sometimes again, when I fall, I fight with the feeling that I am not worthy of his love. But, each time, God gives me grace and reassures me by reminding me that, in His love and because of Jesus, he forgives me.

Forgiveness....

In my story, it did not come like the snap of a finger. God led me to forgive, step by step. And the first step towards forgiveness started the day I told my parents about the sexual assault I had experienced in school. From there, I made the choice to forgive my attacker and all those who had hurt me. I also asked God to change my heart and free me from the anger and bitterness that had settled in me. And God did exactly that: He changed my heart and continues to transform me. Today, when I am hurt, I know forgiveness is the way!

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*Forgiveness is a choice that frees us!*

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Today, I am no longer the same Flora. God has changed my character so much. God freed me from addictions to the media I used to cope with; He freed me from anger and hatred, and continues to restore my life. The tests, abuse and betrayal that I have experienced do not define me. I know that I am loved by God as I am, no matter what I have experienced or what I will live...

Finally, I would like to tell you that your identity is not defined by what you do or what you go through. You have value! Your life has a price! No matter what others say or think of you. I can assure you: God is a shelter when everything is hard and he takes care of those who trust in him. So I invite you to trust in God alone because he is the only one who will never disappoint you!

# Pardoned once and for all!

One of my favorite books is called «Madness». Its author, a missionary named Jossy Chacko, tells a story about a father and a son he met. The father, Rao, and his oldest son shared that they were both harming themselves with leather straps in front of an idol. The father would then collect their blood in a small bowl and offer it to a goddess they worshipped. Rao then explained his ritual to Jossy saying: «Without bloodshed, there is no forgiveness of sins».

I know, this story sounds shocking, but is very real and isn't even from the Middle Ages... It was just in 1998! Unfortunately, even today, thousands of people continue to shed their own blood in an effort to receive their salvation. They do not know that the Bible affirms that the blood of Jesus was shed on the cross, once and for all, so that we do not have to do it ourselves.

This is THE good news! It's true: «without bloodshed, there is no forgiveness of sins», but, because the blood of Jesus was shed for us, we have nothing to pay to be forgiven for our sins. It is an undeserved gift, by the grace of God!

Besides, the Bible also tells us that there is no more condemnation for those whom Jesus bought by his blood! Even if others judge or condemn us, Jesus has the final say!

So if you haven't received this grace and salvation yet, I urge you to go to Jesus now, without delay. If you don't know how to do it, you can find a prayer at the end of this book. And if you want, do not hesitate to contact us, we would be so happy to know that you have received His Gift of eternal life!

*Helen*

## My fight started in high school...

When a child grows up in a Christian family, when he goes to the bible school every Sunday since he was 3 years old, and he follows all the activities of the church with his parents, everything leads to believe that he will become a perfect Christian, right? And yet, the more time passes, the more I am convinced that faith is neither hereditary nor the result of a Christian recipe to follow! As the Bible says, faith is a gift that comes from God!

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*Following Jesus is a choice that everyone must make! !*

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At the age of 13 (I don't really know for what reason), one day I announced to my parents that I did not believe in God like them, that their God was not mine and I wanted them to leave me alone with all of it. From that moment on, whether Christians, Muslim or other, I despised the life of those who dared to say that they were believers. The only one I respected was my cousin. He too was born into a Christian family, but he never expressed his faith. The two of us were like brothers. One day, Bastien invited me to his house for his sister's birthday meal. That day, when I saw my cousin and all his friends lower their heads as a sign of respect to pray for the meal, I was touched. I decided in my heart to respect people again and to participate in a weekend for young Christians with my cousin. It was there, during a service, that Jesus came to meet me and that all my life had changed!

After this weekend, I was a new Timothee, the change was immediate. My parents were so happy. A year later, at the age of 15, I made the decision to be baptized and follow Jesus! But following Jesus is not only a choice but also a fight! And, in my story, the fight intensified just after my baptism ...

Suffering from a lack of affection, my first fight started in high school, when I tried to fill this need for love in girls' arms. Unfortunately, after a painful breakup, for a year, my daily life was made of late nights and alcohol ... My best friend at the time was so upset about my attitude that she ended up turning her back on me.



I imagine that Jesus had to be sad too, to see me in this state, but I know deep down that at no time did he turn his back on me! Despite my mistakes and my bad choices, Jesus had always been part of my life. I had never stopped praying, reading the Bible and believing in him since my baptism. Besides, because I loved the Lord, I made the choice to fight and move on with my life!

As I wanted to know Jesus better, I went to a bible school! There, everything went much better until my best friend resurfaced. I thought naively that she would become my wife. Unfortunately, this girl broke my heart and almost put me in a knock out. Once again I was on the ground! Honestly, I had to fight, in order not to fall back into alcohol.

But, because Jesus remained faithfully by my side, determined to win this fight and mourn this toxic relationship, I got involved in my young adult group. Everything seemed to be better! But you know, the Bible says that the devil lurks like a roaring lion looking to devour. The devil always sought to make me fall. To separate me from the perfect plan that God had for my life. So, in order to sink even lower, he led me to betray a girl, and fall into a deep depression. But I had a moment where everything came into focus. In hindsight, I am convinced that it was God who opened my eyes and gave me the desire to fight, once again! The Bible affirms that Jesus intercedes for us and that he fights by our side!

As I needed to find esteem for myself, to find my identity and that I wanted to get my life on track again, I decided to get up at 5:30 even if I worked at 9AM to take time with God. At the same time, I started playing sports every day and writing a book. From that moment, it's as if my faith was strengthening day by day and as if the temptations of the enemy lost their power. Since that day, I haven't gone back down! Jesus picked me up!

Today, even if my life has completely changed, I am well aware that the fight is not over and that I have to stay on my guard! Yes, I am determined to fight the good fight of faith to the end, with the help of Jesus. But also, with the help of the extraordinary woman that God put in my life!

I would also like to say that during my fights, I was judged and criticized by people. But I never felt rejected by Jesus. Even if I am sure that Jesus was saddened to see me on the ground because of my sins, I made it through by His grace, and I felt His mercy every time. I know that Jesus has always been by my side in the ring and that he is the one who gives me the victory every day!

Finally, I would like to tell you that, even if you don't see it, Jesus is reaching out to you and wants to help you win your fight!

## I hid behind others to erase myself.

My life started rather well. I grew up in a good family, which God was fully part of. In hindsight, I can really say that he has always been there for me! When I was little, my mom used to call me "smile baby" because it seemed that I always had a smile on my face... Unfortunately, that smile gradually became a facade. In school, my nickname was «the intellectual». Nothing bad about that, you might say but, little by little other remarks were added, like: «not pretty», «too thin», «too nice», «uptight», etc. Slowly, I started to believe everything that was said about me. I grew up thinking that I was «too much» or «not enough» for others. I felt worse and worse about myself, till eventually, I hid behind others to not be seen...

In high school, I wanted to have a new image, to start over. I just wanted to be loved. In the beginning, at the boarding school, everything was going well: I was surrounded by nice people and I was studying what I liked. But, this nice moment of



time didn't last long... To be able to continue my studies as a speech therapist, I had no choice but to change schools. and, there, In this new high school, things were complicated. I was surrounded by people whose values were completely opposite of mine. I have always been rather open, but there, if I wanted to be accepted, I had to change completely... But I didn't want to abandon my faith... I spent two years under this pressure... I felt like who I was, was fading. Life in boarding school also had a negative impact in terms of my relationship with God. I had trouble praying and reading the Bible. I did not question the existence of God, but I asked myself questions, many questions... So I started my first year of my higher studies with a very weakened faith, and Eventually I found myself on the ground.

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## *I no longer saw what I was good for...*

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And God in all of this? For months I called him to help and in my eyes nothing was happening. Until the day I came across a verse that spoke to me: «Look for me with all your heart, and I will be found». So I made the decision to really look for Him... Very gradually, God showed me why I felt crushed and what invisible burdens had prevented me from moving forward in the past years.

My first invisible burden was emotional dependence. I was constantly afraid of disappointing others and I was constantly disappointed. My value was only found in the eyes of others. Then, as soon as I was alone, I would dwell on the degrading words spoken over me, and the moments of my past that had wounded me. This is what we call self-destruction. My third burden, which I had been very secretly carrying for several years, with so much shame and guilt that I could not overcome it myself. Like many, I was caught in the destructive trap of pornography. These are the invisible channels that held me back ... until the day where, after watching a «Survivors Production», I was able to talk about all of this to a friend (who is also in the Survivors Collective ) And I asked her to pray for me. That day, I experienced a real deliverance, a real miracle and, what do you know? Since then, I have not fallen back into these traps. I can testify to this: God is the only one who can free us from our burdens. He freed me from the weight of guilt, despair, feeling of abandonment and jealousy... He is really the only one that can really meet our expectations, our emotional needs, or our longing for peace and of joy. Nobody else can. Today I know that just because I don't "feel" God doesn't mean He's not here. Actually He remains, regardless of our feelings.

To be honest, I am sometimes still tempted to dwell on scary thoughts/lies... To let myself be overcome by all my emotions. I believe that weaknesses and emotional battles can last a lifetime. What makes the difference is that now I know that God loves me, just as I am. I have nothing to prove to Him. This is true freedom and it is also this freedom that he wants to give you!

# I was part of a gang, I hated people.

Have you ever been to Northern Ireland? Maybe you've just had a good Irish beer... When we talk about Ireland, in general, we immediately think of Irish music, Saint Patrick, etc., but we often forget to talk about the violent conflicts that have existed there since 1960, between Protestants and Catholics. For me, someone who is North Irish, it's impossible for me to forget.. I myself was part of a gang that advocated hatred towards Catholics.



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*As a teenager, my daily life was full of fighting...*

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I even pushed drugs from Protestant dealers. I hated people and especially Catholics. I didn't trust anyone.

But in April 2008, on a cold morning around 4 a.m., I decided to take my car, leave a friend's house and go home. It was dark, so I didn't have much visibility on the roads. As I started to drive faster, I didn't see the black ice on the road in front of me. My car slid completely in the opposite direction, and I found myself face to face with another car. I turned the steering wheel and...

I slid off the shoulder!

I barely avoided the car but I found myself moving towards an electrical breaker. I realized there was no way to avoid it and that I was going to die. I closed my eyes and said a single word: "Sorry!". My car went through the breaker and stopped a few meters further, right before a huge ravine. After that, everything was calm around me and I felt an abnormal peace. I opened my eyes, not knowing if I was alive or if I was a ghost.

When my father arrived at the scene, he was in shock and said to me, « This is impossible, you should be dead.» Then the police arrived, I had to explain what



had happened. The officer interrupted me asking me to confirm that I had hit the electrical breaker, and after my statement, he said to me : «Hmmm it looks like God sent an angel to save your life».

This sentence was stuck in my head. From that moment I started to ask myself «Is God real?» “Why would God want to save someone like me?”.

Two months later, a Christian friend invited me to a birthday party on the beach. There were both Christians and non-Christians at the party. At one point, I found myself in the middle of these 2 groups. I observed them carefully and I realized that the group of young Christians were «bright»; They were happy and it showed on their face. I decided to get to know them to see what was so different about them. And finally, I agreed to come to one of their worship services on Sunday evening.

I went to it several times... But, during the 3rd service, something happened that I will never forget. A man had been invited to give his testimony. This man had become a Christian in prison; He had been put in prison for stabbing a person. His testimony really touched me. He had been in gangs like me, he had stabbed someone but he had been “found”, in God's mercy  
There was no denying: God was after the heart of this man!

I was so surprised and amazed that God could forgive this kind of mistake. At the time, I did not know that God saw all sin the same... I thought there were big and small sins...

Then the man finished his testimony with this question: «Who wants to accept Jesus in their heart and start a new life?”. The man let the audience think for 5 minutes then he said, «If you feel like your heart is beating fast, it's Jesus who is there, knocking on the door of your heart. You can accept it or ignore it. Then he started to count down... 50, 49, 48.... I felt my heart beating like crazy. I didn't know what to do: keep my old life or start over? With only 5 seconds left, I decided to raise my hand to accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord over my life.

Since that night, I have not been the same person. I discovered that there is a God who forgives all my sins,unconditionally. I learned to love my neighbor, and the hatred that was in me has given way to love.

What about you, reading this book? Do you feel your heart beating too? Do you want to accept this Jesus who knocks at the door of your heart? Do not think that God will not be able to forgive you. God wants all men to be saved no matter what their past looks like. God loves you and wants to save you ... What if you opened your heart to him now?

## Help, can anyone hear me?

A few years ago, we wanted to do a photo shoot, as a family, at the top of one of the passes in the Vercors. As we wanted to look good for our photos, none of us had the right clothes for walking in the mountains. As for me, I didn't bring a handbag or a mobile phone...

As soon as the photos were taken, and our daughter (who was a teenager at the time) was determined to go home, my husband and son started to climb a little higher, wanting to reach a big cross at the top! As I didn't want to leave my daughter on her own, I suggested to my husband that we go back down, just the girls, to the car park. According to my husband, the way back was very simple. You couldn't go wrong listening to him! And yet... we got lost!

After several long minutes walking through the forest, with no water and no GPS, when we realised we were totally lost, I started shouting at the top of my voice 'Help! But nobody answered me! I had the impression of not being heard...

Have you ever felt lost, with no hope of finding a way out of your life? Do you feel that no one sees your suffering? If so, I'd like to tell you that even if those around you are unaware of your distress, God is not indifferent. He has heard your cries and seen your tears.

The day we got lost, I cried out and prayed too! And you know what, by some miracle my husband and son found us!

So why not try asking God for help?

*Helen*



*littlemisspsalms*

## At the age of 10, I felt like it was my responsibility to save my mom...

Pearl! This is the first name that my mom has chosen to give me at birth. Beautiful first name you will say... However, although a pearl is considered an object of value and admiration, all the way from age 6 to 16, I believed that my life had no value.

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*I was a rejected pearl, mistreated and abandoned...*

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I was 6 years old when my mom met my stepfather. Very quickly, their relationship turned into a nightmare, and very quickly, the evidence of this showed up in my home through insults and other verbal abuse. My mother suffered a lot because of my stepfather's lack of love and consideration. And I was doing everything my best to be the girl my mother wanted! I wanted to be a pearl for her, especially since my older sister went her own way!

I remember that at the age of 10, I tried to save my mother more than once. I tried to speak to her and to get into her arguments with my stepfather, but a 10 year old girl had no place in these types of altercations... It was then that the insults and verbal abuse was directed to me too... Unable to deal with her own suffering, my mom started to insult me and hit me for the slightest reason. A room not being clean enough, a towel not well folded enough, a household task not well done, a noise that annoyed her, an expectation I didn't meet. No matter how hard I tried, she would insult me over and over, as well as hitting me...

For years, I was like this pearl, imprisoned in a jar, under the insults, under the hurtful blows, when I made unimaginable efforts to be loved. I wanted to do everything I could to make my mother proud! So I learned to cook so that she does not have to take care of meals; I worked hard in school to have the best grades; At 11 I was even taking care of taxes! But since I still couldn't meet the expectations placed on me... I ended up thinking that the abuse I experienced was justified and I decided to end my life. So one day, I took drugs, thinking it was the best thing I could do... I thought I wasn't worth anything... I felt invisible... nobody had seen traces on my body.

After this suicide attempt, my life buoy became alcohol...

From there, it was alcohol that kept my life afloat, but I was drowning in it every day, but also in the arms of the boys who found me mature for my age... At 15, my life revolved around sex, nightclubs, anxiety disorders, school, and my family... I was truly suffering!

But, as small and insignificant as I felt, Jesus looked at my life. Jesus saw me when nobody else did...

One day, a friend started talking to me about God, and her church. She even invited me to come. At that moment, I thought "never in my life". I was Catholic, I believed in God and I loved God. But there was no question of joining some "evangelical cult" ...

But little by little, when she would talk about the Bible, I could tell that she really wanted me to come, so one day I ended up accepting her invitation, thinking that she would leave me alone afterwards. But the day I set foot there, God totally read my mail!!! Through a woman who was sitting behind me, God answered the questions I secretly asked myself. It was incredible ... supernatural. At that time, I realized that God had seen me ... that he saw the value in my life. Since that day, my life has completely changed.

God came to deliver me, he extended his hand from above and grabbed me. He rescued me from troubled waters!!!

From that moment, I was hungry to know God! The more I learned about him, the more I loved him! I'd be lying if I told you my life was perfect from then on. I still endured some hard things afterwards.... My mom didn't want me to go to this church and no one thought my life was going to change. But everything has changed! No one believed that my life had a price, but Jesus proved it to me by giving his life for me on the cross and becoming my Savior and my Lord!

Today, I know that I am a perfectly imperfect pearl but I know that God loves me and that is enough for me!



## I ran away several times !

If my life was a movie, I would say that from the age of 14, and shortly after my baptism, my story went from a romance to a psychological drama. The day of my baptism, coming out of the water, this thought suddenly crossed my mind: «Your parents will divorce»! At the time I told myself that it was impossible... Everything was fine in my family. But when I started high school, things with my mother got weird.

One evening, when my brother and I were in front of the TV and our dad was sleeping, our mom got up suddenly, went to get all the knives from the kitchen and said to us "We are not safe here, but say nothing to your father, he won't understand". At that moment, my brother and I were so confused. We were afraid and had no idea what was going on. After a few minutes of talking to our mom, we got her to calm down and convinced her to put away the knives... But this episode was just the beginning of a real psychological drama. had to intervene and she was committed to a psychiatric hospital. We were all pretty shook up.

This event changed our family life. Our emotional and psychological state was really impacted, and little by little, tensions began to break out. Not only between my brother and I, but also between my mother and father who ended up divorcing.

Even though everyone was suffering through this, I wanted to remain positive. I was trying to trust my mother. At first, I was going to visit her regularly in the hospital,

even if it was very difficult because she would say false and horrible things about my father. I was totally torn... And despite all the conflicts between my parents, and the measures taken because of the divorce, I still wanted to believe for the best. This is where mediation started. These meetings took place every 15 days and were monitored by educators that I did not know, in an equally unknown place ... anxiety! At first it was pretty good, but as you go, it turned into a nightmare. After our meetings, throughout the week, I thought about the whole situation, to my family broken into a thousand pieces ... I was not aware of it but, in the end, these meetings had become toxic to me. In a very short time, all my bearings had disappeared so that one day I ended up completely lost and decided to stop seeing my mother and communicating with her ... at home, the atmosphere went from worse to worse too. Tensions became so bad that I ran away two or three times that year.

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*I wouldn't have a spectator look at this horror film that took place in my family!*

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A new season and a new episode started far from my family, far from all these problems. I was going to start my audiovisual studies and write the rest of my story myself. There I thought things would get better. But that was not the case ... The lack of my mother's presence in my life had had consequences that I was not aware of. It was from there that I started to suffer from loneliness and I developed a strong need and desire for relationships with women. I started flirting around and making accounts on dating sites... until the day I made an appointment with an escort...

That evening, I wasn't in a good place and I agreed to pay her to see her. But on the way there, I started to feel bad, very bad. In my heart, there was an inner struggle and I knew it was the Spirit of God that spoke to me ... Because yes, despite all the trials that I lived with my family since the day of my baptism, and even though I have not always done great in life, God had always been part of my life. And that evening, I can really say that it was Him who prevented me from falling deeper.

After a few minutes of this inner struggle, I ended up making a U-turn and ditching this meeting. When I got back home, I burst into tears. I was so ashamed of myself; I felt so unworthy... It was then that I made the decision to call my best friend to confess my sin. I also reached out to someone from my church who prayed for me and encouraged me. That day, something really changed in me! I became aware of this deep lack that was hiding in my heart, and I was able to release this problem with God in prayer, so that He could fill my heart with his presence.

After this episode, I also made the decision to pray for my family, for my brother who was going through a really hard time, and for my relationship with my mother.

Since that day, I have seen my mother again and have been able to call her «mom». I mourned who she was, accepted who she is now, and I can say that she is my mother again. Today I am healed of this lack of affection and now treat my relationships with women, with care.. My relationships are healthy and pure. I now have balance. God restored my heart and my mind from all these wounds and amazes me day after day with His loyalty and his kindness in my life.

If you don't know him yet, I would like to tell you that God is the best author and director. He is the only one who already knows the end of history, the only one who forgives us of our sins, and guides us through the storms of in our lives.



# How could God love someone like me?

My journey with God started long before I could remember. According to my mother, when I was only a baby, God had already kept me from death. My mother had to do something without me and needed somebody to watch me, so she had entrusted me to my grandmother and my aunt. During this short time, my grandmother, who followed a New Age religion, used me in some kind of ritual, in the presence of my aunt. When my mother came back, I started to have a very strong fever. Seeing that the situation escalated and that I was going from bad to worse, my aunt finally admitted what happened to my mother. My mother, being Christian, then called her pastor and other brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for me, and the fever fell. God had already looked after me that day. Growing up, I realized how real God is and how much he is able to do miracles. So I can definitely say that I grew up in a Christian household and that we have really seen several miracles in our family.

Our mother taught us, from a very young age, who was God and taught us the stories of the Bible. So I went to the church every Sunday with my family, and little by little, I learned to read the Bible by myself. But, despite what I lived in church and all the intellectual knowledge that I had accumulated about God, I hadn't really understood that I was a sinner who needed a Savior. My heart was, in fact, still far from God. Through my childhood, because of toxic friendships and bad influences at school, I started to have suicidal thoughts

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*I hated myself and I thought everyone hated me too.*

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I was often alone and I was also often bullied. But, when I was 15, I was invited to participate in a Christian youth conference in London. There, I remember a huge crowd of young people of all ages. While we were all gathered to worship God, my heart was touched by the words of the song «You alone can save my soul». In that moment, the Spirit of God revealed to me the love of Jesus, and I was completely drawn to him. I finally understood what Jesus did for me on the cross.

Tears started to stream down my face. I was completely amazed by the fact that a holy God, like him, could love someone like me.

After this event, God began to draw me away from all the bad and hurtful influences that caused me to suffer in school, and new friends in my life. I would still like to point out that, a few years after all this, my mother told me that she had prayed fervently for me when I was going through this dark phase of my childhood. My mother knew that only Jesus could truly help me. And she was right to believe it because he did it!

At the age of 16, I decided to be baptized. But, before the baptism itself, several traumatic events happened. I was sexually harassed by a guy at school, by a doctor and by a family member. So I was afraid of men. Whenever a man was approaching me, I was filled with anxiety. At the time of these events, I didn't tell anybody, out of shame and fear that the situation would get worse for speaking up. I didn't want any more drama because I thought I was already traumatized enough, and I didn't need any more hardships.. Then came my university years. For me, they were blessed years, because God really brought me closer and closer to Him.

I would have so many experiences to share about those years, but since I chose to follow Jesus, my life became like a quiet, peaceful stream. I have experienced great blessings through life, but also times of great difficulty (too long to share here). And what is really surprising, is that during the times of distress, God taught me to depend entirely on Him. By allowing me to go through trials and tribulations, he transformed my relationship with Him. He became the center of my heart. He sanctified me, he renewed my mind, taught me to count completely on him as well as the power of prayer. He showed me that he loves to speak to me. During these difficult years, I learned to let go of my life, to stop trying to take control. I really can say that God taught me to let go, rest in him and put everything in His hands. He taught me and always tells me to really love him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and all my strength, no matter circumstance, good or bad.

Today, I'm changed for the better. But, even though I have chosen to forgive these men who have sexually assaulted me, this fear of men has not yet completely disappeared. I sometimes still find myself starting to feel fear in their company. However, I have the assurance that God can completely restore my soul and that he will do it in one way or another.





## I was a fitness addict!

In life, some are addicted to alcohol, to all kinds of drugs, social media, gambling or video games... Well for me, it was fitness and more particularly running and cycling ... I always wanted to go faster, further, always wanted to lose more weight ... or avoid gaining any...

Staying small ... to not get bigger ... Keeping a small body all my life is what I wanted more than anything. At 10, I already understood that little food and a lot of sports would allow me to get there. However, playing sports intensively was not necessarily recommended since I suffer from fairly severe asthma ... I didn't care! I had to achieve my goal, even if it meant harming myself... the most important thing was to stay small and stay fit!

In 6th grade, I was registered in private, all girls boarding school that I really didn't like...It was from there that sports took up more and more space in my life. It became vital for me to purge the food I ate. At night, I remember waiting for the other students to fall asleep so I could work out more. It was in high school that I became bulimic, depriving myself of food and making myself vomit after eating.

During this time in high school, I made bad choices and had experiences that left lasting marks on me... ..

Little by little, my path became darker... from the deep discomfort that I felt within myself, to the betrayal of a very close friend... it felt like everything was collapsing around me... I had no will to live, and no confidence in who I was.

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## *I felt empty and totally lost.*

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But sometimes, to fill this void I had, I would go to a church to recite a prayer that I had memorized when I was little... Because yes, my mom is a Christian and we would go to mass on Sunday. I had always believed in the existence of God. I knew He existed, but I did not really know Him... At that time, I would say that I was going to church by tradition, by religion...

But one day, seeing me totally desperate, an atheist friend that I had since childhood suggested that I come back to spirituality... from that moment on, it was like God was giving me little whispers to come to Him...

The first whisper was in high school; There was someone who knew a guy from church that happened to be in the same club as me...

So I went to meet him and it turns out that he knew the Survivors Collective very well. After explaining to him what I was going through, he gave me the contact info of a woman from the association. So I made an appointment with her.

At that time in my life, I was a girl who was quiet, and to herself. But that day, during my meeting with the woman, I realized who God was and what he had done to save me. I realized that he loved me and that He saw value in me. After a good 2 hour discussion, I invited God into my life and I was convinced that Jesus was my Savior. For the very first time, I broke down into tears in the arms of the person who had walked me through this. I remember leaving the meeting with so much peace. That day, it was as if I was born again, as if another path was set before me, a path that leads to healing, forgiveness and life! A year and a day later, I got baptized and since then my life has changed.

Now, I am married and I became a mom! Regarding fitness, it is still part of my life, but now for the right reasons. So, if you too feel lost, if you no longer have a will to live, if you are exhausted trying to find meaning in your life, I invite you to ask God to help you... and he will do it as he did for me.

Finally, I would like to end with this verse that sums up my story pretty well: "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do : forgetting what lies behind and straining for what lies ahead." Philippians 3:12-13 (NSRV)

## I was looking for notoriety...



When I was a teenager, my room was such a crazy mess all the time! I'm sure you can imagine what I'm talking about...

Because of this, my parents often said that I was «a messy boy». Yet strangely, I paid a lot of attention to my image. For me, the most important thing was that I was perceived as handsome, and having it all together... I was looking for validation and sympathy. I wanted to be appreciated by everyone, but I was rather the shy and reserved type; So to achieve this validation, I took on a different personality.

At that time, I was part of a rap group and my rap name was «John Black». Everyone called me that. But much more than a nickname, «John Black» became my personality ... Through him, I thought I could assert myself and find self-confidence;

But in fact it was like a mask that I wore and, by trying so hard to be «John Back», I no longer really knew who I was. There wasn't just a mess in my room, but worse, in my head and in my heart!

So I started to seek the meaning of my existence on earth, to reflect on what my future would be. I questioned my identity and, little by little, I started to feel uneasy on the inside. I felt a deep solitude, as well as a deep insecurity about my future, and felt truly misunderstood. My mask was slowly starting to crack.

You may be wondering how I got to this place? Where did this identity crisis come from? Well, I wouldn't say that it was because of family problems ... I grew up in a loving family. My dad is a pastor. However, growing up being a pastor's child was difficult, because my smallest actions were constantly observed.

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### *This identity crisis led me on a downward spiral in high school...*

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I no longer had any motivation for my classes and I was absent from almost everything. But one of the days that I decided to skip school, my father came to my room and asked me why I wasn't in class. I didn't have the strength to lie to him and sadly, I told him that I just didn't want go anymore. Like any parent, my dad started to lecture me, and before leaving my room, he said to me: «John, look at your life, wake up! You're asleep!»

As I heard the door shut, it felt like a rude awakening. I realized that my life took a bad turn. So, I started to pray, asking God to help me, to save myself from the deep abyss that I had fallen into. From this moment, I started to seek God. And you know, when you start looking for Him, you find Him!

A few weeks later, one evening, when I was lying on my bed and began to fall asleep, an image began to appear in my mind, at a distance. Gradually, this image was getting closer to me. The more it approached, the more it echoed me and echoed in my mind. At some point, the image was so close that I managed to read what was written: «Ephesians 5.14». I told myself that it must have been a verse from the Bible, but I didn't know it; Maybe my imagination may have played tricks on me and I was just really tired. So I fell asleep. The next evening, again before falling asleep, I remembered what had happened the day before. So I decided to take a Bible to find this verse, and when I found it, it was written: «Wake up, you who sleep, get up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you ».

The first thing I thought of by reading this verse was what my father told me a month earlier: «John, look at your life, wake up! You're asleep!».

Suddenly, I understood what was going on... I realized that I was living like a dead person, pretending to be good and fine, but on the inside, I was empty, evil and sorrowful. So I broke down into tears. It's as if a sword had pierced my heart. I was weeping over my life, realizing my mistakes, my sins and the way I had rejected the love of God. The mask had fallen off completely.

However, what touched me the most in this verse was that God showed me the state of my heart, yes, but he showed me the solution to get me out of this mess. He showed me that Jesus was the one who could reignite and give meaning to my life. When I realized this, I prayed to God and made him this promise: my whole life I will follow him everywhere and will serve him, with all my heart.

Jesus cleansed my heart of all the mess and dirt, he purified it. He gave order to my life and my mind. Today, I know who I am and why I exist. He gave meaning to my life, gave me an identity and a heart filled with the love of God. Now there is no mask, and no false appearance. You too, God speaks to you, he wants you to come out of your sleep, your living state of death; Hear his voice, he has an abundant life for you.

And just to let you know: Since that day, I've kept a very organized and clean room!

## Personal notes

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# I was only 14 years old, I wasn't strong enough to resist him....

Our lives are made up of encounters. Good or bad! But whatever they are, these encounters leave traces on us... and my life is a good example. I was one of those children who grew up alongside a so called «single» mother. My dad was married to another woman. My mom did what she could, even if I was often alone, left to take care of myself.

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*But one day, when I was about 8 years old, my mom decided to place me in a Catholic, all girls boarding school.*

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It seems that it became too difficult to care for me alone.

This boarding school became a refuge for me! I really was fascinated by the cross and by this Jesus who I fell in love with... but these 2 years of peace were interrupted by the death of Laurent, my oldest brother. He died of an overdose, and he was only 20 years old. After his death, I ended up returning to my family. But this time, I was left in the hands of my other big brother. He was the one who introduced me to all kinds of things: weed, alcohol, and clubs...

Because of this, my mother, again exhausted, chose to place me with another side of the family. Specifically with my uncle whom I considered my father.

I was not even 14 years old when he started to find his way into my room during the nights. I wasn't strong enough to resist him... For years, I carried so much guilt trying to somehow forget what had happened to me.

So, to disassociate from this pain, I got into romantic relationships and situations. Even my body suffered- I was obese for 10 years. But I then had beautiful encounters, encounters that brought me back to Jesus. This Jesus I always believed in, but that I had put aside because I felt dirty, unworthy. But he hadn't forgotten me, he saw me.



The first way he reached out to me was through an incredible miracle!

I was 7 and a half months pregnant when the doctors told me that I had to undergo a very intense C-section because the baby was badly positioned. At the same time, I had met a Christian, who I was able to tell about my situation. After listening to me for a long time, my friend replied, «You know, God can do something about this, do you believe he can?»

Of course I believed it... I replied: «Yeah why not, what do I have to lose?». It was then that she began to pray for me! Just like that...

Some time later, closer to the day of the C-section, I had an appointment with a gynecologist who I'd never seen before, for a final examination and ultrasound. After a few minutes, the doctor looked at me with astonishment saying to me, «What are you doing here?». I replied «I'm here about a C-section!». Totally surprised, he said to me: «The baby is well positioned. You don't need to have a C-section!».

There was no denying! For the first time in my life I encountered a miracle and the glory of God. So I was able to give birth normally ...

After this, God then placed other Christians in my path... It would be too long of a story to tell, in 2015, one of them invited me to attend a service during the «Corsica Jesus Loves You » conference. It was there that I was totally bowled-over by the love of God and that He found my heart. As soon as I walked into the room, and heard the worship songs, I felt a wave of love and peace! I remember crying for 2 hours straight. In my heart I heard this voice that said to me: «I love you and no one will love you like me». I realized that day the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross, I understood that he had taken on himself my shame, my guilt, my sins, and came into the truth that he loved me. He was the one who took on rejection, mistreatment, humiliation, and abuse.

Today, I am even more in love with Jesus. He has transformed my entire life!

Finally, I would like to tell you that God really speaks through the people we meet ... If you have this book in your hands today, I think it is no coincidence! And if you are willing, you too have a chance to encounter Jesus. By a simple prayer, God has turned around my whole life and, what he did for me, he also wants to do for you! He alone can save you!

# You have to grab the buoy to be saved!

When I was ten years old, I drowned. That day, the flag at the beach was orange, the Mediterranean sea was quite rough, but I had fun jumping over the waves. Unfortunately, a short moment where I wasn't attentive was enough to put my head underwater. I thought I wasn't going to come back up, but, thank God, I managed to make it safely back to the shore.

Have you ever drowned? Have you ever felt like your life was like raging, uncontrollable waters? I have! Many times even ... When it happens, the worries fall on us like waves and we wonder when it will stop. In these moments, we can only hope that someone would see us and throw a buoy out to us... And you know what? God is there to throw the buoy and save us.

Like someone coming to our rescue in deep waters, God commissioned Jesus to join you in the middle of the storm and rescue you. I can assure you that, if I am alive today, it is because of God. It was he who saved me from a deadly drowning when I was 10 years old. It was God who stopped me from committing suicide when I was 13 years old. It was also HE who kept me during the childbirth of our eldest son... God rescued me so many times!

Honestly, I can tell you that I know what it is like to sink, believe me! But I also know that God is neither blind, deaf, nor incapable of saving you. He is not unaware of what you are living. Let me tell you that you are not a lost cause!

A Savior has been given to us, and his name is Jesus! He reaches out to you today and if you want to be saved, your only responsibility now is to take hold of the buoy without hesitation, and don't let go!

*Helen*

# You too need to get to know Jesus. Why do you need to know him? For at least 3 good reasons!

## 1 You're a prisoner of your past!

You can't go back, but Jesus can change everything for you! Jesus can erase your faults and grant you forgiveness. Jesus gave His life for you on the cross so that you could be reconciled with God. Now he can give you a new chance!

## 2 You need a faithful and reliable friend!

Jesus knows everything about you. He knows the worst moments of your past. But He wants to believe the best in you. And why is that? Quite simply because He sees in you, not what you are at the moment, but what you will become if you let Him take care of your future.

## 3 He alone controls your future!

Who else could you trust? With Him you will be safe today, tomorrow and for eternity. The Bible says: 'I know the plans I have for you, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.' (Jeremiah 29/11-13)

If you want to get to know Him today and become a survivor yourself, pray this simple prayer to Him:

'Lord Jesus Christ, I know that You died on the cross for my sins, and I would like You to become the Lord of my life. I ask your forgiveness for the selfish way in which I have lived until now, and I regret the sins I have committed. Please forgive me. I accept you as my Saviour.

Come and take away my sins. Fill me with your Spirit. Be the master of my life. Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for reconciling me with God. Amen!

Believe that God has forgiven your sins and that you have become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5/17). Ask Jesus to guide you to a living church where you can strengthen your faith by praying with other Christians, studying the Bible and putting it into practice every day.



**Legal information :**

This brochure was produced by Trésorsmédia  
Head office: 14 rond point de l'écureuil, Romans-sur-Isère  
Address : BP1-26101 Romans-sur-Isère Cédex - FRANCE  
Association law 1901 declared on 23/05/2017  
Non-profit-making association

**ISBN :** 978-2-488269-01-8

**Publisher :** TRESORSMEDIA

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**Acknowledgements :** Impact France - WEC all the donors - all the young people who agreed to tell their stories.

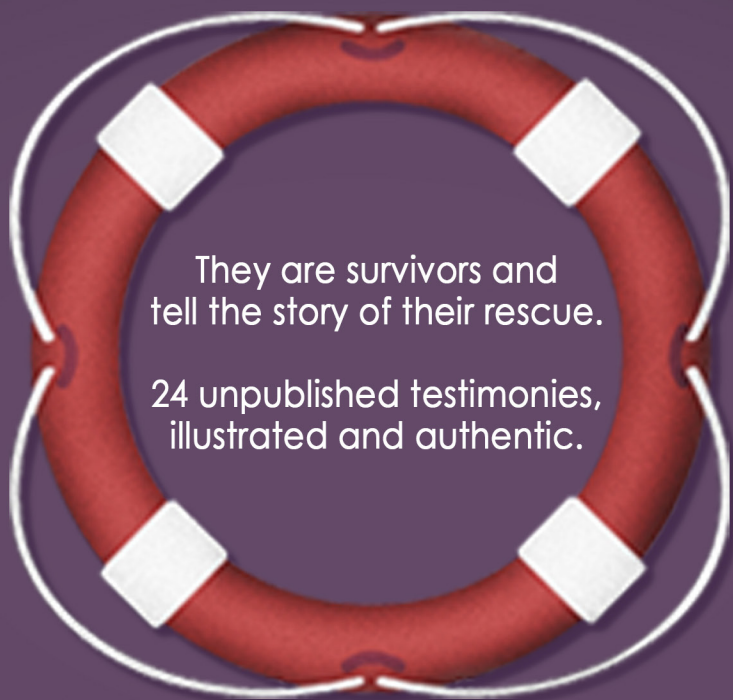
**Proofreading:** Stephanie Saltzmann and Dawn Currie

**Layout and graphics:** Hélène Saltzmann

**Illustrations:** IA, Dawn Currie, Anne Labrosse, Littelmisspsalms

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# Survivors' diary



They are survivors and  
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ISBN : 978-2-488269-01-8  
Free booklet forbidden to sell