

NFROM SCRATCH: BOOK TWO NEMESIS

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DEDICATION

To anyone who has ever struggled.
You are not alone and never have been.

PREFACE

Book One and *Book Two* of my *From Scratch* book series were written at the same time, with much of *Book Two* consisting of the unused portions of *Book One*. *Book Two* was all but done, but something prevented me from releasing it. It didn't have a strong enough message to me. It wasn't going to truly help anyone! *Book One* inspired readers by teaching them the power of positive thinking and I wanted to continue to help people through the art of the narrative.

If you are reading this book, you are called to me. No matter where you are spiritually, I ask that you read with an open mind and open heart for there is a reason why you are reading the very words on these pages. Think about that as you read the rest of this book and ask yourself:

Why was I called to read this book?

I am sure there is something in this book for everyone. I also hope that you will reflect on your experiences. I am not a minister nor am I a saint. I am just a man who is living and learning. Each day, I am working and striving to become a better person and become more spiritually mature. In the chapters of this book, I share my personal story of spiritual warfare, and point out the mistakes I made and the lies that I have believed. My hope is that you will become awakened to the deception that may be in your life and know how to fight back...the right way. You can win but you must know who your real enemy is!

Nemesis: 1. (noun) the inescapable agent of someone's or something's downfall

2. (noun) a long-standing rival; an archenemy

SOMETHING CHANGED

Something changed. Correction-*Everything* changed. The moment I said “I do” and promised to see the love of my life through GOD’s eyes...for the rest of my life. Marriage was serious business, much more serious than I had expected it to be. I knew it was serious, but as I stood there vowing not only to Travis, but to GOD, I knew I was signing up for something more important and substantial than anything else I would ever do in life.

It was a beautiful and absolutely frightening experience at the same time. All at once, my life was intertwined with someone else’s. I was not only responsible for myself, but for another human being. I was terrified. I could barely manage my own happiness. How was I supposed to make someone else happy?

It was probably the worst time possible to get married. My father died just five months earlier and his death was just the beginning of the worst months in my life. I didn’t really know how to process the entire experience I had gone through. Two days after he died, I was hit with a \$13,000 funeral bill and a string of life-changing discoveries about the people I called family. Things quickly escalated and got real ugly. Getting married only highlighted the strain on the relationships with my family and the estrangements.

I walked down the aisle in the midst of writing my first book, which meant I was rehashing pain and disappointment on a daily basis. I was in a bad place mentally and emotionally. But I pulled myself together and married the love of my life. I couldn’t stop living and I couldn’t fall to my knees and give up. I had to keep living and I had to keep striving for the happiness that I used to have. I was also hoping that my wedding just might be the remedy for the hurt that I couldn’t seem to escape.

Two years prior, I was the happiest I had ever been in my entire life and nothing seemed to be able to stop me and the positive momentum of my life. I had discovered the law of attraction, the power of positive thinking, and my own personal ability to harvest the power within me. I embraced myself and dedicated myself to growth, success, and happiness. I became a scholar of the laws of attraction, the laws of the universe, energy, and vibrations. I applied the knowledge I had obtained and I received all that I wanted and all that ever had eluded me, including love. I could remember the vision board I created just two years before with a glued picture of two handsome men dressed in suits, getting married. It was just one of the things that I wanted that had come to be my reality.

It wasn't the physical death of my father that sent me spiraling into a negative tailspin. Even after my father died, I wasn't grieving the loss of him, but the loss of an entire family. His death brought out the worst in everyone who I held close to my heart and exposed the deep seeded wickedness within a group of women who I used to refer to as being like mothers to me. I grew up revering my father's sisters as mother figures but upon his death, it was made clear that they were nothing like mothers to me. My own mother was nothing like a mother to me. I had no mother and no father. I had no one. The sad truth was that I never had anyone.

Unfortunately, this revelation came at a time when I had this wonderful man in my life who I trusted, loved, and would do anything for. He was my everything and supported me throughout the entire process. He should have been enough. He was and is more than enough. Instead, I found myself conflicted and scared about putting all of my love into him. I wondered if I could really trust anyone...including him.

It was a completely unfair thought process but it was the issue I had at the time. No matter how much I

loved him, I was petrified with the idea that he was *all* that I had. I had no other family and my friendships had already proven to be fleeting. The fact that he was the only person I felt that I had left made me uneasy and nervous. I was subconsciously rebuilding walls that took me years to let down.

I was smart enough to know better, but my mind had no power over my heart. As much as I knew that marrying Travis was the biggest blessing in my life, I was still terrified of getting my heart broken by another person. I just figured that if my whole family could break my heart, why wouldn't my husband? It was the story of my life...right?

I knew better than to engage in that thinking but I could no longer control my thoughts the way I used to. All of my abilities to control my thinking and redirect my emotions that I had developed over the previous two years were suddenly ineffective. Something changed. A negative, destructive, and powerful force was controlling me and my life.

I wasn't the person that Travis fell in love with. I was a broken down and weakened version of the person I was when I met him. I was fearless and full of love when we met. By the time we got married, I was full of resentment, vengeance, and hate. It was in me, even though I tried to present myself as the same person I had always been.

I felt like my husband deserved a better me, but I couldn't bring the better version of myself out of me to give to him. Knowing all of this just made me more resentful, bitter, and hateful. I was being sucked into dark hole.

Nevertheless, we were married in a small ceremony in Las Vegas. I had no mother or father present. I was surrounded by great friends, as I always have been. The wedding was beautiful and I felt lucky and blessed to be

loved. Inside of me, there was a war of emotions going on. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

So Travis and I started our new life together, with me being a complete mess. It would be a true testament to the love that we had for one another. He did his best to love me through it and I did my best to make myself easier to love. As hard as I tried to pull myself out of the dark place I was in, I only got so far. I could tell that my husband was wore down by all that I was going through. It was the downside of such a strong connection. The things that I went through, he went through as well. If I could've kept it all from him, I would have. But I couldn't.

Just days after we got home from our wedding in Las Vegas, I was already feeling guilt about him having to deal with all the issues that I was dealing with. Honestly, I don't know if I would've been able to deal with me as well as he dealt with me, if the roles were reversed. All the animosity that I was harboring towards my family was consuming me.

I was in way over my head. I was married to someone who I felt deserved better than me because I had so many issues. I didn't want to ruin his life the way mine had been ruined. After all that had taken place, I had regressed into thinking that I wasn't worthy of love, if I wasn't perfect. I was back in a place that I had worked so hard to get out of.

Not only did I regress to an old way of thinking. I regressed to my old ways of dealing with things. The same day that I got home from Vegas I started smoking marijuana for the first time in a long time. One of our wedding guests had purchased the marijuana and couldn't take it back on the airplane, so it was given to me.

I have never had a problem with drug addiction, but I have had problems with alcohol. Smoking marijuana was never a problem before, but I have had my fair share. The difference with smoking in the past and smoking after my

wedding was my reason for using it. It was the first time that I ever smoked marijuana to escape the anxiety and negative thoughts that were in my head. It was the first time that I had abused a drug.

As most people who smoke marijuana would tell you, it put me at complete ease. It gave me a high and took away all of the doubts and fears that were taking over my mind. Just for a moment. I spent my first day as a husband high off of marijuana. I smoked, cooked dinner, and took care of home. It was the first day in months that I didn't think about my father, my family, or any of the pain that I had struggled to heal from during the preceding months.

It didn't take much for me to get high either. Just a few puffs and I was good. My tolerance was low because I hadn't smoked very much in years. Plus, it was some of what smokers would call "good" from Vegas. A couple of puffs here and a couple of puffs there and I was "good." When the stash I had ran out, I was going to stop and I was going to deal with my anxiety on my own, in a natural way.

All I needed was a positive jumpstart to my marriage. I didn't plan to smoke marijuana forever. I just wanted to start things out on a positive note. I used to be a school teacher and it was always drilled into us that *how you start is how you finish*. I had to start my marriage out right, in order for it to be good. What I overlooked was that I was starting out my marriage abusing a drug.

The pressure for my marriage to succeed was heightened after all that occurred surrounding the death of my father. Years ago, I wouldn't have been as pressed about it because I had the confidence and self-esteem to survive a failed marriage, if that was to happen. At this point, I was more afraid of what a failed marriage would say about me than the actual thought of a failed marriage. I wasn't afraid of being alone, or losing the love of my life. I was afraid that everyone was right about me--I was afraid that I was, in fact, a terrible person and unworthy of love.

Throughout my entire life, love had eluded me. My mother was absent throughout most of my whole life and somehow *I* developed a guilt about our lack of a bond. My father was present but emotionally abusive. The rest of my family members treated me like a charity case or a burden. No one ever made me feel loved. No one ever made me feel that I deserved love and that I was worthy of love. I had no real idea of what love was until I fell in love myself.

When I fell in love with my husband, I immediately discovered that loving someone was just as much a benefit to me as it was to the other person. Everyone in my life before Travis made me feel like they were doing me a favor, which is not what love is or feels like. Their actions could be seen as commendable, but it definitely wasn't love. They may be good people who have done good deeds, but you can feel it when someone comes from a place of love.

After spending years trying to find love and understand love, I had figured it out only to end up even more confused than ever before. I knew that I wasn't loved by my family but I still wanted to believe that we could be a family without love. I was willing to let the fact that they never loved me slide. It wasn't a problem for me that they didn't love me because I had to admit that I didn't love them either.

I didn't feel that it was my fault that I didn't love them, so I couldn't fault them for not loving me. None of us knew how to love because none of us were taught. That's one of the commonalities that made us a family. Not to say that they were incapable of love, I was just never on the receiving end. I'm sure that there is love between many of them and I'm sure they believe they are loving people.

Again, I was okay with that because I didn't believe that you had to love people in order to be family. There were levels to love as well. When my father died, I quickly learned that a lack of love was a more serious issue than I

had anticipated. A lack of love is not an innocent lack. It really means that love is not present. The absence of love made it easy for them and people in general to do horrible things to someone. Just because we didn't love one another didn't mean that we had to do each other wrong.

I was living the saying *No Love Lost*. And even though I was aware that I didn't love them, I was still hurt. I was hurt by what they did to me and what I felt I had allowed to be done to me. I hurt so bad that I began to question if I was wrong about whether I loved them or not. How could I be so hurt by people who I didn't love?

I had so many questions and so much confusion that I was nothing but a ball of anxiety. All I wanted was to know the truth...my truth. But I didn't want my truth to be what all of them said it was: That it was me. That I was the problem. All my life I was trained to believe that I was the problem, whenever I had a problem, and I subscribed to that thinking for most of my life. I had to get to know myself and love myself before I finally stopped blaming myself for everything. One day I realized just how good I was as a person and I was not *always* the one to blame.

I was bothered the most by my estrangement from Angela, even though she had done things that were horrible, I felt bad for being mad at her. She had done a lot for me growing up, and it was her first line of defense if I had ever approached her about her wrongdoing. It was her first line of defense, if *anyone* approached her about her wrongdoing. It was as if she did things for people just so she could build up her defense for when she did things that were bad. She felt as though she was exempt from accountability for what she said and did to people because she did good deeds for them in the past.

Yes, I do believe that the good in a person should outweigh the bad. But that doesn't mean that we are let off the hook when we do harm to others. I also believe that not all good deeds are done for the recipient. Sometimes,

people will help you to help themselves feel better about who they are. That's what Angela was all about to me. She did a lot for my father, and made sure that she took the credit for all the good deeds that she did for him. But, the moment he got out of line with her she revoked all of her help and support, which she had every right to do I guess. However, when you move like that it negates all the good that you did and it shows that your deeds were not truly done out of love, but more out of duty, or some other reason.

All of my issues were seeping into my marriage without any of my control. I couldn't help but wonder how my husband was looking at me as I vowed to never deal with people who I had just introduced to him as my foundation months prior. He would've had every right to be afraid to put his heart into me. I was showing him that I was capable of turning love on and off at any given indiscretion.

My life was headed toward destruction and it was only just the beginning. I was using marijuana to ease my mind but when my high came down, I was always worse than before. It was worse because it didn't seem like I would ever find a cure for my anxiety and heartache.

The marijuana stash didn't last very long and while I was tempted to get another stash, I resisted. I knew that I didn't need a drug addiction to make things worse. Plus, I was smart enough to know that it wasn't the drug that I was addicted to, it was the high and if I could get the high without the drug, I would be fine.

I took inventory about the things that made me high in the past. Success gave me the best high. That high is what pushed me to further my education, be the best at everything that I did. Success validated me. Instead of getting high off of marijuana, I decided to get high off of success.

I released my first book, *Inheritance*, just two months after I got married and I was convinced that it was going to be a life-changing event. I had endured all that I had endured for the reason of creating an amazing work of art. It couldn't have all been in vain. I could feel that I was on the verge of success and I wanted it all to happen so quickly. I needed it to happen so quickly. I needed to feel that high.

Not only did I need to validate that I was doing what was right, my success was going to be my revenge. There's a saying that success is the sweetest revenge and I wanted nothing more than the best revenge. My life had to be better than theirs and my success was going to be an example of what happens when you mess over the wrong people.

In a sense, there was nothing wrong with my intention. Instead of doing something nasty or vengeful, I would exact my vengeance through the betterment of myself. I would show my family and anyone else who cared to pay attention that I was not only going to not be defeated but I would only come out stronger.

In the book, I likened myself to a phoenix, when I moved to the city with the same name. I truly felt that I had been blessed with the gift of rebirth after a struggle. I still subscribe to the concept of rebirth after a struggle, but I was incorrect at the time about what my struggle truly was. Dealing with a family who did not serve my best interest was not my struggle. It was an obstacle, a mess, an issue, or a host of all other negative terms, but it was not my struggle. My struggle was a lot deeper than dealing with the feelings of hatred and anger towards them that were burning in my heart. What I was going through was much bigger than any family rift. My struggle was a spiritual one and it was only just beginning. In order to be the phoenix this time, I was going to have to go through a spiritual fire to be reborn.

While pursuing my career as a writer, I told myself that my success would come and *that* would be the evidence that my rebirth had occurred. Success was all that mattered to me. I had something to prove and I had no patience in waiting to prove it. I didn't want to go through a long, drawn out process, I wanted success to come quickly and easy.

I believed that success was a blessing from GOD that came to us just as quickly and easy. At any given moment, GOD was going to open every door, clear every path, and just like that I was going to be giving him the glory. I wanted that too. I wanted to attribute all my success to GOD and his blessings. But they were not coming! I asked myself why and I continued to question whether I had made a mistake in pursuing this goal of mine.

I had made a mistake, but it wasn't that I had stepped out on faith that was a mistake. In fact, even questioning that step was another mistake. I was making many mistakes but all of them were basically different versions of one crucial mistake. By seeking vengeance in any form, even through success, I was taking myself out of alignment with GOD.

I wrote hundreds of pages in my first book about being in alignment with the universe, but I was unaware at the time about being in alignment with GOD. I think I had even started to confuse the universe and GOD as being the same thing. There are plenty of prominent people who have basically equated the two, and intellectually I understood why. But spiritually, there is a big difference. Being in alignment in the universe was not enough to fulfill my spirit.

That's why trying to control my thoughts and think positively was futile at this point in my life. This was not about my thoughts or my feelings, this was an issue within my spirit. Yes, your spirit is connected to your mind, but they are not one in the same. No matter how much I knew

about the power of positive thinking, it didn't matter because my spirit needed attention. Smoking marijuana eased my mind, but it did nothing to ease my spirit.

I had miscalculated where my problem was. I wasn't trapped in a cycle or loop of negative energy or thoughts. I was under spiritual attack and that was directly affecting what I was thinking and feeling. No matter how much I tried to redirect my mind and regroup, it didn't matter until I addressed the spiritual issue I was facing.

I thought I had figured out the world when I became a scholar of the law of attraction, but it was only the beginning of the journey. I see now that my learning only leads me back to the same place it always does—to GOD. No matter how much I have learned, discovered, achieved, or uncovered in my life, I always find myself going back to GOD for real discovery.

Initially, I thought it was the worst time to get married, but it was actually the best time. Vowing to GOD to love someone through his eyes and being reminded of it everyday was just what I needed at the time. I needed to be reminded that regardless of how much power I thought I had from the law of attraction, I still needed GOD. That's why they call HIM a *higher power*. We all have the power to attract what we want into our lives and live the best life we want. But...there is a higher power out there and when your power doesn't seem to work or you feel powerless, you don't have to look very far or be plagued with confusion, as I was, to get your life back on track.

Something changed. I was beginning a spiritual journey, one that would connect *my* power with a *higher* power. Just as I had studied the laws of the universe, I began to study the laws of the spiritual realm. The first and most important thing that I learned was that things weren't just happening to me by circumstance or coincidence. I had an enemy out there, a nemesis in the spiritual realm, who has always been there and always will be, whose most

effective weapon against me was my own ignorance of its existence.

LIFE HAPPENS

So much life happened and it happened so quickly, that I didn't even have the time to process most of it, let alone deal with any issues that arose. Just shy of four months after my father was buried, I was married in Las Vegas. Two months after that, I had fulfilled a lifelong dream of writing a book and I started my own company to do it. Even with all that had taken place, on paper my life looked pretty good, way better than it had ever been. My first book was published and I was getting great feedback from people. Not everyone was a fan, but that was never my goal. I don't need everyone to be a fan of my writing. I only need *my fans* to be fans of my writing.

In the midst of it all, I hadn't warned anyone in my family that I was writing a book, let alone a book that they wouldn't be too fond of. The release of my book would be the ultimate burning of a bridge, but I felt compelled to share my story. I knew that I would get plenty of pushback about my book, because I got pushback about any and everything from my family. However, I didn't expect for the pushback to be so vengeful and so vulgar. I mean, everything in the book was true, except for their names. I thought I would get a little bit of credit for changing their names.

Since my father's funeral, and the silence between us all, I convinced myself that I didn't need my family or anyone for that matter. I did my best to devalue them. That has always been one of my coping mechanisms. If I could convince myself that they didn't mean anything to me, then I could go on with life not needing a relationship with them. Being dead to me wasn't enough, it had to be like they never existed at all.

I wrote *Inheritance* with all the good intentions that I could possibly have had. I admit that I had to come to terms with a spirit of revenge while I was writing but that

was honestly not my motivation behind the book. I worked very hard to write something that was factually based and not based in emotion, even as I wrote while struggling with the greatest pain I had ever faced. I could've easily wrote something as nasty and vindictive as they were, but I wasn't seeking revenge, I truly just wanted to share my experience. It seemed like GOD had placed me in the experience for a reason and it wasn't all in vain.

I'm sure that many members of my family will never accept that and they don't have to. As much as I tried to be positive when writing, I can't make their behavior better than what it was in a book, because it wasn't in real life. The things that many of them did were reprehensible and just plain mean. That's just the facts. Even after reading the book, some of them still continue to carry on exactly the way that they always have. Their approach has been to slander and bash me for writing a book about *my* experience of them.

When I released the book, I didn't really think much about how people close to me or family would respond to me basically airing out all of our dirty laundry. I was looking forward to such bigger things in my mind that I didn't really anticipate a reaction from anyone that I knew personally. In my mind, I was writing to reach someone who was hurting, just like me. I wrote my book with a stranger in mind, not a family member.

Within weeks of the book's release, people were reading and sending me responses via text or through social media. Etta's oldest daughter was one of the first to reach out. She was actually very complimentary, which came as a surprise. I got word from some friends of the family who said they were completely surprised by the whole story. I also heard from people who were moved by the story but were never going to share that publicly. The only people who actually seemed to get the premise of the book were strangers or people who didn't know the family. Strangers

who read the book were able to take away that this book was written to inspire.

I was truly disappointed that there were some people who were missing the point and I questioned whether I had done something wrong. It was my first book and it was supposed to be a momentous occasion for me. But it wasn't. I also thought it was going to be healing. But it wasn't. Instead, I felt even worse after the book was released. I re-traumatized myself.

To make matters worse, I had to deal with something that people in the public eye have to deal with everyday: criticism, hate, and slander. Before I found any success or any positive feedback, I was forced to defend my motives and my character. Although I had seen many artists and celebrities go through it before, nothing can prepare you for the backlash that you face when you put a piece of your work and soul into the world for consumption.

My own sister was the most vulgar critic of them all. She took to Facebook and made a post about my sexuality and how unnatural it was for two men to be together, telling us that we would never be fruitful and multiply. But the worst of it all was when she posted the following:

“how many dicks has bust ya asshole open before u married the man wit.”

Apparently, she felt that I was judging her in my book for bringing a date to my father's funeral. It wasn't my intention to judge, I was just stating facts. If I wanted to judge her, I would have had quite a few more chapters in my book and they would've been quite juicy. For all her homophobic and gay-bashing comments online, she has been sexually involved with many women and there's no telling how many men she's been with. It has never been a

secret to anyone that my sister has been very sexually active.

I have never judged my sister for any of the mistakes that she has made in her life and she has made enough for me to write an entire book series just about her escapades. Nor have I divulged the truth about who she really is and how she really lives her life. I took it very easy on her and kept the content simply about the relationship between the two of us. I was so caught off guard when she became so upset about an accurate and very downplayed portrayal of her.

I was genuinely shocked at how angry *everyone* was. What blew my mind was how upset they were about a book, when so many of them have said they were going to write a book for years! Were they really mad about what's in the book or the fact that they didn't come up with it first? Furthermore, if you're mad about what took place in the book, then why did you act that way in real life?

I've even heard that some of them claim that the details in *From Scratch: Book One, Inheritance* are not true. Well, if the book is made up, then you definitely shouldn't be taking it personally. The names were changed, so how can someone make a connection with a character in a false story? If the story is made up, and the names are made up, how are you claiming that I'm lying on you?

The truth is, everyone knows who they are as people and what they did. And they know that the book would expose them for it, and that's not what they were looking forward to. I wrote the first book with a lot of restraint, hoping to avoid hurting anyone's feelings. No matter how much restraint I used, it doesn't change the fact that I was a part of family that treats one another horribly and they will never admit it or self-reflect on their behavior.

It took me a lot of self-reflection on my own part to come to that conclusion. I battled with myself about what

was truthful, logical, and right, and what I felt inside. I felt guilty about writing my book and questioned if I had burned a bridge that shouldn't have been burned. I always did that. I always doubted myself and I always assumed that I was the one who did wrong.

The seeds of always blaming myself were sown into my psychology as a child. Each and everyday of my life, I was told I was wrong, different, or strange for something I said or did. I was trained to believe that whatever happened to me was a result of something I had done wrong. I grew up being verbally and emotionally abused, but was told it was because I was wrong.

It took the release of the book and witnessing my family members attack me through Amazon reviews to finally understand that they had always been verbally and emotionally abusive. I was also able to finally see that I wasn't always wrong. I have every right to share my feelings and my pain with the world. I hadn't told a lie on anyone. I told the truth. If someone will denigrate you for telling your truth, that is the highest level of abuse.

They may never understand or come to terms with what was written in my book because it will require a lot of soul searching that I don't believe most of them are capable of doing at this time. Of course, there is always hope for them, but then there is also reality. They missed the entire point and message embedded in the book because they were triggered by the idea that I had written something negative about them.

It took me 33 years to be brave enough to speak out against them. I was 33 years old and I was just learning how to truly be OK with myself. I got the courage to write about them because I had finally realized that I was entitled to have feelings and no one had the right to judge me for them. I should've learned these things when I was five years old, but instead I was learning that I was always wrong and everything was always my fault. As a result, I

grew up frustrated that no one ever heard me out and my emotional development stagnated. I spent my entire life with the emotional capacity of a five year-old. I didn't behave like a five year-old, but emotionally I was stuck there.

So, what happens to a person who has the emotions of a five year-old? They feel like a five-year-old inside. They feel helpless, become selfish, or maybe even pout when they don't get their way. My five-year-old self took the blame for everything, so that's what I always did. I found some way to blame myself, but then I also became selfish and pouted when I didn't get my way.

Of course personal growth never happens when it's convenient for you. I was newly married and scared to death at failing in my marriage, and there I was on the brink of a huge shift in my life. I immediately went into overdrive trying to ensure that my marriage was perfect and I was blameless. Besides, I had no one else in my life at this point. The only person left was my husband. I didn't want him to abandon me like everyone else had.

I've always had abandonment issues, mainly because I was separated from my mother when I was just three years old. I didn't bond with any other caregivers because they weren't nice people. Children know spirits better than anyone, and until they are trained to do otherwise they will see right through people.

When we are born we are the closest to GOD. Therefore, we have all the discernment and spiritual knowledge that we need at birth. That's why babies come out screaming and hollering because they immediately perceive the cruelty of this world that they have entered. As children grow, they are taught the ways of the world and the ways of GOD are slowly removed.

I always knew that there was something off about the people in my family but I was taught to think differently. I was taught that there was something wrong

with me. Whenever I noticed the difference in treatment that I received and felt bad about it, I was told I was miserable or ungrateful. Speaking up for myself meant that I had a bad attitude or I was hard to deal with. I was taught that feeling any way that I felt meant that something had to be wrong with me. My feelings were always WRONG.

If my marriage were to fail, it would surely be because of something that I did wrong. Deep down inside, I feared that it was going to fail because things always seemed to go wrong for me. There was something that I was going to do to mess it up. I messed up everything in my life, no matter how good it was. This was the thinking pattern that I was engulfed in. It was a far cry from the positive thinking processes that I wrote about it in my first book.

I anticipated that somehow things were going to fall apart and even if I wasn't to blame, I was going to take the blame. In my mind, I thought of how I would heal myself after the marriage ended. I found myself numb to it all. Thinking about my marriage ending didn't even scare me or make me feel anything. I felt like it was just going to be another failure in my life and another painful experience for me to push through.

Between the funeral, the wedding, and all that took place, I was in an emotional funk. What I didn't know at the time was that I was opening myself up to things that I was not prepared for. I hadn't taken the time to stop and think about what all had happened or process any of it. Nor did I know that I possessed none of the tools that I needed to overcome an amazing period of darkness that was ahead of me.

My mindset had completely regressed into the survival mindset I had many years before. I told myself that I was strong, that nothing could break me, and I was ready for whatever life threw at me. I felt like fighting and pushing through and overcoming. It sounds good, doesn't

it? This mentality can be good when it comes from a place of positivity. If this is your attitude about doing something good or accomplishing a goal, then you have the right idea. However, I wasn't in a place of positivity, I was in a place of negativity and ready to resist anything that came at me. By expecting a struggle, I attracted a struggle.

As messed up as I was on the inside, I wouldn't show that to anyone on the outside, not even my husband. I faced the world with my best face and projected an image of strength and resilience. I wanted everyone to think that nothing got to me for too long and that I would always bounce back quicker and better.

The more pushback I received from my book, the more I put into promoting it and making it a success. I was not going to be stopped and I was going to show them that I wasn't hurt by any one them. Success was going to be the best revenge.

Success soon came, but not enough success for me. I was still hurt on the inside. My book became a bestseller on Amazon in multiple categories. I hadn't even thought about publishing it as a paperback book, but I was so excited about the idea that I had written a bestseller that I immediately began looking into the costs for printing the book.

I was so tickled to see my book on a top ten list in multiple categories that I stalked the Amazon bestsellers page all day for days. It was my book, with my name, on a real-life bestsellers list. I took screenshots and shared my excitement on social media each time there was an update to the charts. Then, I realized that everyone was not going to be happy for me!

As excited as I was about my accomplishment, a lot of people didn't really seem to care. I was genuinely shocked. In my mind, everyone would be excited for me and excited that someone they knew had achieved something as cool as writing a book and it being labeled a

bestseller. But they weren't. There were a lot of people who were, but there were many more who weren't.

A lot of my friends were silent on the matter which said more than any words that they could have said. As much as I wanted to be successful, it became very clear that success was not going to solve any of my problems.

Success was not going to ease my pain, fill a void, or even make people celebrate me. If anything, success was going to make things worse. People will tend to those who appear weak, but those who appear strong tend to intimidate them.

I remained bothered and disappointed by the lack of excitement for my success. However, my book was being read by more and more readers everyday. I couldn't see who was reading my book, but I could see how many pages were being read and how many times it was being downloaded. The data was promising and showed that people were picking up the book and couldn't put it down.

Some of my readers started to reveal themselves. I was receiving messages on Facebook from members of the family and close friends of the family who read the book and wanted me to know how they felt. There were mixed reactions for the most part. I was commended for my writing ability but they don't recall my childhood experiences the way that I did. Of course they wouldn't, the experiences were mine.

As usual, after hearing their opinions, I doubted myself a little bit and questioned whether I had been oversensitive or too hard on the family. Maybe I could've been a little more restrained. Maybe I should have talked to them first. I was worried. I was worried that I had made a huge mistake that I couldn't take back.

I received a critique from one of my cousins who felt compelled to point out that I had typos in my book. I was so embarrassed and frustrated. The goal was to show everyone how successful I was and I couldn't accomplish that goal with a bunch of typos in my book. She even

offered to edit the next one for me. I laughed it off and immediately went back and re-edited the book.

I figured it came with the territory. People are going to critique your work as a writer and the public has the right to have an opinion. There was something about it that bothered me though. After she offered to edit the book, she basically downplayed a lot of what I had revealed in my book. She didn't remember my life the way that I did. She also offered prayers that the family could talk out our differences in the future. It was a very nice message, but it reminded me not to expect people to be on my side or to go to bat for me. If anyone had done either before, I wouldn't have lived in the hell that I did.

A month after the book came out, I received a Christmas gift from Etta. I hadn't spoken to her since the prior summer or since the book had come out. I assumed she hadn't read it, or she did read it and didn't care. That would've been awesome. When I called her to thank her for the gift, she let me know that she hadn't read the book. She already knew what it was about.

Etta said that she wasn't going to read the book because she had been warned by her daughter not to read it. The same daughter who had told me that she thought the book was written very well. I told Etta that she was more than welcome to read the book and talk to me about whatever she wanted to as she read. I wasn't afraid of confronting what was written in the book, because I know that it's all facts. Etta declined and said that she just wasn't going to read the book.

A few days later, I received a text message from Etta that she had started reading the book and that she was amazed at how well written the book was. She was only on the first chapter. Etta pledged that she wasn't going to keep reading because she knew it was going to get bad. She kept reading. By the time she made it to the fourth chapter, Etta started sending scathing and vengeful messages about how

horrible the book was and how horrible I was. It couldn't have been that bad because she kept reading.

I was forced to block Etta's number so that I wouldn't receive any more text messages from her. I offered again to talk to her about anything she wanted to in the book, but there was no getting through to her. All she wanted to do was rage, hurt, and destroy me for what I had written. In a perfect world, I imagined that this book would be a success and possibly get some of my family members to look within and self-reflect. That didn't happen though.

I knew in my heart of hearts that I hadn't done anything wrong or that I hadn't intended to hurt anyone. Still, I felt very bad for what had become of the relationships in my life. These relationships were harmful to me, yet I still felt that I was going to regret letting them go. I knew that I was better off without them, but it still bothered me.

As all my relationships fell apart, I found myself mourning not just my father but an entire family. As hard as I tried to pretend that they had never existed, the truth was that they did exist, and they had always been there. I did all I could do to convince myself that they meant nothing to me, but they did mean something, I just couldn't pinpoint what they meant.

I did my best to let go of them to avoid having to figure out what to do, but I had recurring nightmares about being surrounded by them. The nightmares weren't about them but about the feelings that they gave me. Each and every time they appeared in my sleep, I felt inferior, attacked, and afraid. I would always wake up when I couldn't figure out a way to escape them. I asked GOD to take them out of my sleep and let me rest, but they must have been buried deep down in my subconscious.

After a few months of being out, the book buzz died down and people stopped reaching out about it. Every now and then I would hear from someone who had just finished

the book or had been meaning to get in touch with me. I figured that I was in the clear for now, or at least until I released another book.

I had planned to release the unreleased chapters from the first book on the anniversary of my father's passing, as a tribute of sorts. By the time that the year came up, I decided to hold off on releasing the second book. Something felt off and my intuition told me to wait. I had been doing a lot more talking to GOD than I had in months, and during our conversations, he told me to wait.

The longer that I waited, I felt compelled to share something more meaningful in my second book than just the unreleased chapters from my original writing sessions. Eventually it came to me to share exactly what I was experiencing at the time, just as I did in my first book. I was experiencing GOD, and that was what I needed to share the second time around. This time around things weren't as uplifting as they were before. There was a lot of work that I had to do spiritually and it wasn't going to be pretty.

SPIRITUALITY

From early on in life, I was always connected with the spiritual realm. I wasn't a perfect child. No one is, but I had a good spirit and a good heart. I remember how I used to get so sad when I saw someone hurting or struggling. One instance stands out in my memory. A woman at a bus stop was handicapped and I remember feeling so much for her and her struggle. At the same time, I could be cold and seemingly heartless to people who did me wrong. My father was physically handicapped but because he was so mean to me, I felt nothing for him.

GOD and the promise of going to heaven played a very important role in my early life. I didn't want to displease GOD and I would pray every night. Most of my prayers were for my mother or a completely new family. I wanted to grow up and run away from it all. I would also pray for material things which I attribute to my childish inclinations. Nevertheless, each night before I went to bed, I got down on my knees, folded my hands and prayed. I always ended with "In Jesus name, I pray. Amen."

I understood GOD in the most basic of ways, the way that we were taught. If you were bad, you went to hell and if you were good, you went to heaven. Going to heaven when I died was the most important goal I had as a kid. I believed that GOD, Jesus, Santa Claus, and my deceased Pop-Pop were watching everything that I did. Some nights, I had dreams about the gates of heaven and purgatory. I would also have dreams that I could fly. My favorite dreams were when I dreamed it was Christmas. Christmas was my favorite time of year because I felt there was at least an effort to spread love throughout the world during that time. People actually tried to be kind and live right during that time of year. More often though, I dreamed about my mother and that I lived with her.

When I was five years old, I was awoken out of my sleep for many nights in a row but not by a dream. I slept with my bedroom door open. My room was directly adjacent to the bathroom and I could see directly from my room through the hallway into the bathroom. I usually slept through the night and always had dreams. I would sleep so deep that it would be hard for me to wake up in the morning. I would sleep through any commotion, noise, or alarms.

The first of those sleepless nights I was greeted by a demon. It stood in the bathroom doorway suspended in what looked like stop motion. It was blacker than the darkness of the night. There were no eyes, just holes where the eyes would've been. There were no feet, just a black cape-like shape suspended in motion from the floor. It was the most terrifying thing I have ever seen.

Real spirits do not look the way that renderings represent them. There are no words in my vocabulary to accurately describe what they look like. I'm just doing the best that I can. We see them with our spirits and not our physical eyes. When I saw the demon, I had no point of reference to know that it was a demon. You just know what it is immediately. My spirit told me. The energy was so heavy, oppressing, and evil that I knew it could only have been a demon.

I knew I wasn't dreaming because I had dreams every night. I knew what dreams felt like and while I wished it was a dream, it was not. The demon stood and looked at me but it did not move from where it stood. It was almost as if it could only get so close to me. I pulled my covers up close to my face and buried myself under my pillows.

When I woke up the next morning, I tried to convince myself that it was only a dream. Rather than be scared to go to sleep at night, I would just tell myself that the demon was not real but rather a figment of my

imagination. I would make that approach a survival tactic of mine. Instead of accepting reality or following my instincts, I dismissed things as figments of my imagination. I began talking myself out of seeing a lot of things that were obvious because I couldn't accept the malice or ill-intent attached.

The next night, the same exact thing happened. I just woke up out of my sleep to see a demon peering at me. He was stuck in the same exact spot and still couldn't get to me. I knew it wasn't a dream the first time but now I couldn't deny it if I tried. This time, I sat up in the bed and stared at him. I mustered up some courage and ran past him into my grandmother's room across the hall. I slept at the foot of my grandmother's bed that night.

The next morning, my grandmother asked me why I slept in her bed that night because I had never done it before. I didn't tell her what I had seen because I knew that I would be wasting my breath. My family was not equipped with spiritual depth and they were not the kind of people to think outside the box. They were very much interested and aligned to fitting in and being normal. I would only find out as an adult how abnormal they actually were. That is, of course, if you subscribe to the idea of normalcy, then they were definitely not normal.

When it was time to go to bed the next night, I decided to sleep with the door closed. The door would block me from seeing out of my room and into the bathroom where the demon was. That door remained closed for as long as I lived in that house. I never checked to see whether or not the demon was still there but I had another experience that let me know that there were angels there as well.

The angels appeared just as the demon had in the middle of the night. Their presence was much stronger but felt more dreamlike. I am still unsure if the angels came to me in my sleep or if they were actually there above me in

my room. The way I remember it defies all laws of physics. While there is no doubt in my mind that a demon visited me while I was awake and aware, the memory of the angels has always left me wondering whether or not I was dreaming that I saw them. Perhaps, it's easier for me to accept that evil is real because of my life experiences.

Whether the angels were real or not, I still felt the message that GOD was sending me--angels were protecting me. I remember waking up to a glowing, purple sky above my head. There were so many spirits moving about directly above my bedroom but there was no roof. Initially, I was actually just as terrified of the angels as I was of the demon. They moved swiftly and quickly through the illuminated night sky. After a while my fear subsided and a sense of peace, calm, and protection came over me.

I have yet to fully come to terms with the experience with the angels because it was beyond surreal. I had dreams every single night and still do. While the encounter of the angels felt and seemed dreamlike, I feel that it was not a dream but I am not 100% certain. I am 100% certain about what I felt. I was being protected from that demon.

I've always had an obsession with supernatural and superstitious concepts. I am very intrigued by the concept of ghosts and spirits. From as far as I can remember, I read books about parallel universes and time travel. There was something about energy and spirituality that I found completely fascinating. Ever since I was little I could place myself so deeply within a story that I could feel what the person experienced. I used to love watching movies about monsters, devils, or anything that dealt with the battles between the forces of good and evil.

As I grew older into adolescence, I began to love music and television more than GOD but not by way of my own intentions. GOD hadn't answered any of my prayers and I found ways to cope. The ability to escape through

media made it easy to forget about prayer, especially when the prayers weren't working. In my fantasy world, my clothes fit right, life was good, and I could be loved by anyone. For every problem, I had in real life, I could imagine a life ten times better. Pretending or escaping became my religion. Where I used to pray for new parents, I had began pretending I had a different family. I went to my room alone and spent time with my imaginary mother, father, brother, and sister. Most of my cues came from sitcom families on prime time television.

I continued to have a spiritual connection to a higher power but I was spiritually immature and started growing a resentment toward GOD. *Why would GOD allow me to have the life that I had? What had I done to deserve to grow up in a family that treated me like an outcast?* Since GOD had all the power, I blamed him for everything. Church folk didn't help either. All I heard from them was that gay people were going to hell. That explained to me why GOD allowed everything to happen to me. I figured that I had just got screwed in life. It wasn't my fault that I was gay, but GOD hated me for it and gave me a crappy life as punishment.

I was angry at GOD for a few years and then I denied him for a while after that. What I didn't understand was that it wasn't GOD that spoke hate and damnation, it was people who claimed to be his followers. I had never been taught about the true nature of GOD, having a relationship with him, or how the devil worked. I was treated like I *was the devil*.

Nevertheless, I wanted to try and get right with GOD because I didn't want to go to hell. I remember telling myself, while walking home on hot days, I cannot go to hell. That was my very basic understanding of GOD--there was a GOD, a heaven, and a hell. And hell was hot!

By the time I was 15, I had convinced myself that I was going to die very young. I figured that the way my life

was going it would only be fitting for me to die at a very young age. So, I set out to get closer to GOD, convinced that I was going to die soon and fearful of burning in hell. I resented GOD for a lot of what happened to me and as I was trying to get closer to him, I continued to struggle with who I *thought* he was.

I started visiting a church that a lot of the kids at my school went to. I didn't do it because they were there, I just didn't hear about any other churches. After going to services for a few weeks, I decided to join the church and get "saved." It seemed like that was all I had to do. Get up in front of everybody and walk down the aisle and then I was "saved." I was going to join the church, sing in the choir, and go to heaven. I was *saved* from going to hell!

As far as my sexuality went, I would just block it out and be normal. If I went to church enough and prayed enough, GOD would forgive me and remove it from me. Everybody was going to be so proud of me and I would probably make a bunch of friends. It must've been wrong to like boys. If everyone, even your own family, was willing to be so mean about it, it must be wrong. I didn't want to be this evil person anymore. The gayness had to go.

It didn't though. No matter how many new member's classes I went to or how much I prayed, it stayed. I still walked with a switch and kept all my other feminine ways. I just couldn't get myself to change. I didn't give up easily though. I wanted nothing more than to have my name written in that *Book of Life*.

Shortly after I took my walk to get saved, other kids started doing the same thing. Our pastor remarked at how wonderful it was to see so many young people giving their life to Christ. There was a social aspect to church that drew me in also. A lot of kids from school attended the church and once I went to church with them, they were nicer to me at school.

That wasn't my reason for going though. I was truly invested in seeking out my salvation. So I pushed through and immersed myself more and more. My goal was to learn as much as I could so that I could be baptized. I looked forward to being washed of my sins and cleansed. It did feel good to get acceptance from anywhere I could get it and that made the process all the easier. The kids who went to church and school with me were very supportive.

My father was very unsupportive. He took issue with the fact that I was going to a Baptist church and spoke very dismissively of the church in general. Since my mother was Baptist, he took it as a slight to him that I would attend a Baptist Church. I was floored at the fact that someone would be angered about their teenage son deciding to go to church. To me, it didn't matter what church I went to because I hadn't frequented any church ever before. I didn't live with my mother and I honestly didn't even know that she was Baptist. My father definitely didn't go to church or make an effort to send me, so I just thought church was *church* and it didn't matter. I simply went to the church that I heard about at school. There's a ton of other things I could've been getting into that were way worse than Church.

My father concocted this theory that I was lying about going to church to cover up for some juvenile delinquent activities. It was amazing to me that someone could reach so far to cause a problem for no reason at all. He actually stopped allowing me to go to church after a while. I lost quite a lot of respect for him as a result and battled with what I felt and what the Bible was telling me to do.

I felt that my father attacked anyone and anything that made me feel better. I believe now that he was jealous of the bonds I formed with people outside of our home and the fulfillment I received from church. If only he was better equipped at the time, he would've seen my interests as

opportunities to build a bond. Someone in the family encouraged him to go to church with me. I didn't want him too but I recall someone suggesting it to him. If he were to see for himself, then he would have to move on from his crazy theory. He made a complete mockery of the idea and reinforced his stance with his usual ignorant and offensive commentary. He was too good to attend *that* church.

He had a problem with the location of the church. Since it was in South Woodbury, and not within the confines of North Woodbury, the church was inherently inferior. It was amazing how someone could be so small minded. New Jersey is one of the smallest states and the city of Woodbury is just a little over two square miles in area. Yet, he found a way to make his world even smaller. Anything outside of his immediate vicinity was also too far outside his realm of understanding.

One person who did attend church with me was my Aunt Diane, my grandfather's sister. She contacted my father and said that she wanted to come down from Bordentown and go to church with me. He was too embarrassed to tell her that he had restricted me from going. Diane had been to my church before as a visitor. She had been to many churches as a visitor. Aunt Diane was extremely proud of my efforts to get close with GOD. She always pushed me, even as a child to seek a relationship with HIM.

I remember being so bored going to church with Diane but persevering out of respect. She always told the story different than I had remembered it happening. Diane always bragged to the family about how into the sermon I was and how proud she was of my behavior during the service. Now, I would sit and stare and behave myself but I was *always* bored out of my mind.

Diane also said she would come to see me when I got baptized. The day she came to church with me, she brought a friend and I rode with the two of them.

Afterward, she offered up an awesome review, as protocol, of the service and how well-received I was. My father was convinced that I was in fact attending church all the time and he conceded to let me go again. He listened because Aunt Diane said it was good for me.

After Diane co-signed, the rest of the family started to get involved more. They began making plans for my baptism. Apparently, it was a big deal and required a gathering. Suddenly, they were proud of me and wanted to throw a party. None of that was in my plans, I just wanted to go to heaven. I didn't understand that GOD could do work in your life at that time. My brain was focused on avoiding hell.

I attended my new member's classes after school on Wednesdays and then I stayed for bible study and choir practice. I wasn't in the choir but I would watch them sing. I had found a place that felt like a home and I could avoid going home.

I admired my pastor and felt comfortable with him because he was also new to the church. He took over after the previous pastor died and was immediately subjected to lots of criticism. I was hoping that he would bless me and take away my impurities. Really, I was worried about my homosexuality. He handled the topic with kid gloves but did encourage me to seek out GOD. There were many times that he applauded me for trying so hard.

At a certain point, I became obsessed with salvation. Every Sunday, when they invited people to Christian discipleship, I thought I should get re-saved. I would think about any mistake I had made and would feel as though I needed to start over. While my attraction to boys wouldn't subside, I knew that I had to do something about it before my baptism. I was learning from my pastor all the things I needed to know to be a good and obedient Christian. One of those things was resisting temptation. That was the hardest part.

I continued to fight against my own sexuality for a little bit longer but it was something that I just couldn't get around. As I got closer to my baptism, I started to push back from church altogether. Now that my family was asking me questions about my baptism and planning an event, I didn't want to do it anymore.

My father was so unsupportive and even ridiculed the church but all of a sudden wanted to be front and center for a baptism. Everyone was planning to attend and a reception was being planned for afterwards. You would've thought that I would've been excited but I wasn't. None of it was genuine to me and I wasn't interested in any attention. I truly wanted to get right with GOD and I knew that their involvement would only cause me grief. That was all I had experienced from them.

I only had about two classes to go before baptism when I completely backed out. Our pastor had confessed to the entire church that he was having an affair with one of the ladies in the church, a prominent member of both the church and the community. She worked at the attendance office at the high school and was a very active member of the church.

It was an unreal experience. The First Lady of the church sat front and center every week with their two small children and he was sleeping with one of the congregation. She was front and center on that day. *How did that conversation go?* I thought to myself. Shortly after the pastor's confession, more news broke out that one of the older youth members, in his 20's had sex with an underage teenage member. I felt like I was joining the church of sex. There were all kinds of sexual sins going on, but the only person who felt under pressure about my sexuality was me and I had never had sex in my life.

That's when I understood that these people were not GOD, they were people just like me. They weren't even following his word but yet had the power to make me feel

nasty and impure. It was up to me to find GOD on my own and hopefully I could find him by myself. I didn't feel like something was wrong with me anymore. There was something wrong with all of us and some of us chose to point the finger at others instead of ourselves.

That's why everyone was so obsessed with my homosexuality. Labeling me took all of the focus off of them, their sins, and their imperfections. It was a common denominator of disdain that anyone could turn to, if needed. As long as you weren't gay, you considered yourself at least one level above me.

After my experiences as a teenager at church, I stayed away from organized religion. I viewed church people as big hypocrites and somewhat pompous about their beliefs and GOD. I became very judgmental toward Christianity and the church. My disdain only grew as I became an adult and politically active. Seeing how the political parties involved religious leaders and beliefs to create wedge issues and harvest votes only made my disdain worse.

There was nothing Christ-like about the way that the United States government operates and many of the churches that I saw looked like nothing more than large corporations who do not pay taxes. It was all a trick of the enemy to keep me as far away from GOD as he possibly could.

I never turned back into the person who resented GOD, but I completely turned away from any kind of fellowship with Christians. I wasn't interested in the Bible because I applied a historical and intellectual interpretation to everything that I read, instead of reading the Word of GOD with a spiritual eye. I became one of those people who called GOD a higher power, but wouldn't give HIM a name.

I definitely still believe that the higher power we believe in can be different for different people, with regard

to the name that we call it. I don't think that everyone has to be on the accord about the identification of the higher power or GOD. I do believe that everyone is called to be something and that we are called differently. For me, ignoring the Bible and the word of GOD was me effectually ignoring my calling.

I am a writer. I am a lover of literature and storytelling. Therefore, for me to ignore the Bible was a complete missed opportunity on my part. The Bible was written for someone just like me. Now when I read it, it speaks to me, not as a book of facts or historical recollections, but as the word of GOD. Not the word of GOD because it was written by GOD, but because every word within it was given to the writers by GOD. Just like every word that I have written has been put inside of me by GOD. The only way that I came to that understanding was by writing my own book. There was a plan for me all along.

The word out there is that GOD will never give up on any of us. I am a living witness to that. Here I am, finally understanding things that have been said to me, that I have read, and that I have heard during sermons. Yet, my understanding came to me in a completely different way than I ever expected it to.

I became electrified by my new understanding. GOD knew me and knew exactly what I needed to understand him. He stayed with me and kept breathing breath into my body because he knew that one day I would come right back, but through my own path. That's how HE wants us anyway. HE wants us to seek him out!

So, what happens next? Happiness, joy, and freedom, right? Wrong! The devil doesn't bother you when you're on his side. But when you start to get right with GOD, he comes for you. And the devil doesn't just come one time. You may defeat him, but he does not go away.

The devil is more than an enemy. He is your nemesis. An enemy comes and goes, a nemesis never goes away.

TRIGGERS

My relationship with my mother also had an effect on my views of the church and contributed to a lot of my resistance to Christianity. While my mother is an ordained minister, I had never been an avid churchgoer. Seeing the behind the scenes of ministry did not match the expectations I had set of church when I was a boy. I have a habit, and suspect many others have this same habit, of disappointing myself because I hold such high expectations for others. I stared at the television for hours growing up, so I constructed my belief system on the happy ending structure of the media. I was always disappointed when I found out that yet another façade had come down. Police, doctors, teachers, government, ministers, everything was not what I was taught it was or believed it was supposed to be.

Regardless of my thoughts on church, I still found myself in need of prayer, reflection, and worship. I just approached it differently. In my spiritual immaturity, I turned to music and even the preaching of those who seek to inspire but not specifically through the word of GOD. I tried to fill my soul with inspiration and positivity but I was not filling it with the the word of GOD. I valued the word of GOD and respected those who lived by it, but I was not invested or interested in making it a part of *my* life. I was a Christian in name only or by default and sometimes I questioned if I even believed in Jesus.

I had always turned to GOD when things got rough in my life. It was not the right way to seek HIM but it was what I was used to. I was and still am spiritually immature but I had that part down. I sought GOD when I needed him the most.

I didn't talk to GOD on a daily basis, and I only went to HIM with the biggest of my problems. Other than that, I confided in people, or kept things to myself. My

husband and a few close friends were there to hear me out but even after I confided in them, I still felt that no matter what, I was never really free on the inside. All of the anger, resentment, and offense were consuming me and weighing me down.

It had almost been a year since my father took his last breath and a year since I had lost my way. I struggled to find my way back to that happy place but nothing seemed to get me there or even moving in the right direction. I tried and tried and searched and searched for some sort of direction, some sort of release but nothing came.

I brushed it off with the words that man provides us with in our time of need. I told myself I was just mourning, it was a process, I had been through a lot. I told myself all the things that the world tells us is wrong with us and I looked to that same world for answers, but there were none. I couldn't find my way out or back to happiness because both my suffering and the supposed cures for it were all a lie. I was being lied to.

It wasn't until one day, when I came across a very sassy and unorthodox woman on Facebook, that I became open for the first time to the idea that maybe I was missing GOD. I considered myself a believer and thought I was doing a good enough job. She was different and spoke with an authority and swagger about her belief that made me ask myself if *HIS* word was what *I* was missing. Her approach and message touched me and brought me back to the word of GOD for the first time in a long time.

This woman was broadcasting live from her car and speaking about strife and how we bring it into our lives and it blocks our blessings. Her message was so on time that I knew it was for me. It was no coincidence. When a word is yours, it will hit you right in your gut and you will know it is for you. This word was mine, and it sent chills all the way through me from head to toe. I had invited strife into

my life, and the spirit of strife was on me everyday. My attitude, behavior, and mood at that moment were evidence enough that I had succumb to discord. All I wanted to know was...where did the strife come from?

I thought back to where the change happened in me. It was right after my father died. It continued with the presidential election and the backlash that followed my first book. I could pinpoint every single mistake I made, every single thing I did that was not of GOD. I needed to cleanse my spirit and I needed to do it quickly. The only way to cleanse my spirit was through the word of GOD. I still wasn't ready to fully immerse myself in reading the word, so I continued to listen to the word via Facebook and YouTube videos. A change was happening, slowly but surely.

I've always been a fast learner, and I immediately immersed myself in communing with HIM as much as possible. For the next few months, I listened to ministers, changed the music I listened to, and started to study my bible. Suddenly, I started to receive prophetic messages and spiritual revelations that I had sought my entire life. I didn't know that's what they were at the time, nor did I even use that terminology until I learned what they were. It was complete and utterly amazing how GOD started to speak to me.

I was becoming one of those people that I had heard people preach about so often. I was changed. Not perfect...but changed. I was well on my way, on a journey that would take me places I had never been before, through HIM, and not through anything negative or of this world. It was my only choice. If I weren't obedient, I would spend the rest of my life struggling.

The more I listened to the word of GOD, I became more amazed at the answers that GOD was giving to me. Sometimes, it felt like no one around would understand just how in awe I was. So, I kept a lot of my feelings to myself.

Yet, each and every day GOD would reveal more and more to me about my life, the motives of others, and the mistakes that I had made. It was what I asked for and I kept asking for more.

The biggest and most valuable lesson that I learned was learning about “The Enemy,” who I have gone further to name as “The Nemesis.” I’ve always heard people speak of the devil and even blame him for a lot of things, but getting to actually know what the devil does and how he does it, was life changing. It changed the way that I looked at everyone in my life and everything that has occurred in my life.

It wasn’t my family that I should be mad at, or any of my friends. I shouldn’t be mad at the world or any of the people walking in it. Everyone is under attack from The Enemy, and so many of us are just not spiritually mature enough or strong enough to even recognize the attack, let alone combat the forces of The Enemy. I was one of those people and I’m blessed to say that I’m on my way, but I’ve still got a lot of spiritual maturing to do.

Once I learned about The Enemy and what his goals were, I started to see all the damage that he had done in my life over the past year and some months. I went back even further to see just how far back The Enemy had started on me. I felt a mixture of anger and excitement, like a detective who was solving a case. I could see how he moved, but I was devastated by how I had been deceived, for so long. Then, I wondered why The Enemy had even bothered with me.

Why me?

Why was he coming after *me* so hard? How come others had it so easy? I became frustrated by these thoughts for quite some time, but the more I learned, the more I became empowered. The Enemy only comes after those who have something that he needs. I must have something that he needs or is afraid would benefit GOD.

I thought deeply about what he wanted from me and it came to me that it was my talent. Since I was 15 years, I've tried to make something of my talent but have been met with obstacles. My talent is writing and I also believe it is a gift from GOD. It comes so easily to me. Whether everyone likes my writing or not is a matter of opinion and taste. However, it doesn't hurt me to know that someone doesn't fancy my words because I know that for each person who hates my writing, there is a person who loves it, and vice versa. It's no different than any other form of art. Some people hate Picasso, yet he's still revered by many.

Ever since I was 17, things have come against me and my pursuit to utilize my talent and take it to the next level. I believe this is why so much has happened to me in recent years and over the course of my life. The Enemy knows that I have something to share with the world, and he doesn't want me to. You have something as well, and The Enemy will do all that he can do to keep you from sharing it. It is his assignment and his duty. He is your nemesis!

Facebook picked up on my interest and started suggesting that I watch videos of Dr. Juanita Bynum. I resisted at first, because she looked too traditional and I had heard of her name before. I associated her with all the other Christians who never moved me before. After resisting for months, I finally decided to see what she was all about. So, I tuned into her live and was immediately turned off. Then, she said something that shook me right in my gut. "Anyone watching this is called to me. Even if you don't like me, you are called to me."

She had my full attention and from that day forward, I was hooked. Every single word she spoke seemed to talk directly to me. I started watching her old videos on Facebook. That's when everything went to an entirely larger than life level. I went back over her videos

for the past year and each and every one them contained a prophetic message for something that I had gone through at that very same time. But I was not listening to her or anyone at that time. When I compared the dates of her videos to the experiences I had at the time, I was blown away.

I started watching her videos over and over again, everyday for hours, and each time a new message was revealed to me. I was piecing together a puzzle of my life and seeing how I had gotten to such a low place in my life. I had connected the dots and could see each and every attack from The Enemy and each and every failure of mine in response. I thought about how I was called to her, and wondered whether there were people that were called to me.

My inner voice kept telling me that someone would be called to me. Even though, I couldn't see who at that present time. I could feel that I was called to write to that person or those people. It was why GOD gave me my voice and my talent. There was a job for me to do.

I immediately went to work on this very book that you are reading and knew that I had to write something that spread the word of GOD to someone out there. I was called to spread the word in my own little way, which is different from anyone else's way in the world. Knowing that empowered me and it also opened me up for stronger attacks from The Enemy. Now that I knew what I was called to do, the devil wasn't going to just sit by and let me do it.

This book has been delayed many times and the writing process was even harder than the first book. Knowing what I know now, I understand that the attacks that I have been under are only further confirmation that this book *had* to be completed.

There were times when I would sit down to write and could never complete anything because I would either

be distracted, pulled away, or just plain exhausted. Things started to go awry in my marriage and I would respond by wasting unnecessary energy getting angry or arguing. It was to the point that I would sit down and write and be unable to. I had to get a handle on my triggers. The Enemy uses triggers to control us in so many ways and some of us get to a point where we embrace our triggers as who we are.

Learning to recognize my triggers and how detrimental they are to me has been a cornerstone of my attempt to grow. Originally, I just wanted to be better at containing myself and exhibiting self-control. More recently, I've realized just how much deeper my triggers are and how The Enemy has used them to keep me from getting further ahead. Now that I see everything through a spiritual lens, it's even more important for me to get a handle on my triggers.

I have many triggers that I had embraced over the years. Most of them were a result of developing defense mechanisms and priding myself on being a strong survivor. Long before I embarked on this spiritual journey, I learned that it was no use to be triggered by insults or words because they didn't really mean anything. As a gay man, I had been called a *faggot* so many times that it no longer triggered me. In fact, I often expected to hear it. I was still triggered at times by financial insecurities, or when I felt like I had failed at something but I learned how to harness that energy. The one trigger that I couldn't seem to get a hold to was the need that I felt to respond to or defend myself against lies or attacks on my character. If I have a flaw, I own up to it, and I have plenty. If you want to say negative things about me that happen to be true, I'll let you. But I couldn't stand when someone lied on me or about me.

When people say things about that just aren't true, I can hardly contain my anger and frustration. There's a major difference between miscommunication,

misunderstandings, or disagreement and just flat out lying. When I'm lied on, it sends me through the roof. It triggers me. Immediately, I feel the need to set the record straight or give someone a piece of my mind. All you have in this life is your good name, right?

Wrong.

There is way more to this life than maintaining your good name and what is understood doesn't need to be explained. Folks are going to talk about you until the day you die and even after that they will probably keep on talking. So goes the saying: "They talked about Jesus Christ." That saying couldn't be more helpful in life. Not only did they talk about him, they took the very life from his body.

So, why did I expect for people to roll out the red carpet for me? If they talked about and murdered Jesus Christ in the most brutal fashion, what made me believe that I shouldn't be attacked? What did I think I was accomplishing by putting someone in their place?

You accomplish nothing by letting someone have it or putting them in their place. They were already in their place before you ever opened your mouth. All you do is actually invite them into your place when you go about exchanging energy with them. People know exactly who you are and who they are before they begin an attack against you. You aren't doing anything but expelling your energy on them, which you could be using for good.

This was one of the biggest triggers to get over on my spiritual journey. I spent so much time defending myself and fighting to survive, that I had developed this attitude that I would let any and everyone have it at the drop of a dime. I refused to take any prisoners or hold any punches. If you came for me, I was going to let you have a major piece of my mind.

It didn't help that the culture we see today promotes so much aggression and strife. Fighting, arguing, and

constant strife are the storylines of most reality shows. The stars of these shows have been rewarded handsomely and if you aren't willing to bring it you won't last on one of these shows. Its called entertainment, when it truth it is nothing more than manufactured strife.

After my first book came out, I learned very quickly how draining responding to negativity could be. It was like the negativity was transferred to me whenever I would respond. When I first encountered the backlash, I took to the same platform as the negativity and responded with more nasty language than was hurled at me. My goal was to be meaner, nastier, and more disgusting than the person who had attacked me. When I would get done typing my rants or going live on Facebook, I would feel like a complete idiot. Each time, I would accomplish nothing but make myself angrier than I was to begin with.

I stopped responding out of practicality. It just didn't make sense to validate someone's negative opinion or comment and responding gave them all the validation in the world. It was extremely counterproductive to waste that energy on defending myself or my work, when I could be using that energy on producing.

A lot of times, I have been blessed to make choices that I later would find out were a part of GOD's plan. Something inside would tell me to do things a certain way and later I would receive revelation from GOD that I made the right decision. This is why I am so grateful that even when I wasn't committed to my relationship with GOD, he never left me. HE was faithful to me, when I wasn't faithful to HIM.

Months after I decided to use my energy more effectively, it was revealed to me why it was so important. As I became closer with HIM, I understood so many of the sayings that I used to consider clichés. I finally understood what people meant by the battle is the LORD's, and not mine. This thing is so much bigger than me and a petty

exchange between a family member. When I respond, I do The Enemy's work. When I turn to GOD and let him handle it, I am being obedient to HIM.

“Do not go up and fight with them, because I will not be with you. You will be defeated by your enemies.” – Deuteronomy 1:42, NIV

We don't have to fight against anyone for the things that GOD has promised us. It is always ours. If we are disobedient, then we shall perish on our own. Your good name and your blessings don't come from anyone walking this Earth, so they can't be taken away from anyone walking on this Earth. Overcoming this trigger was life-changing and transforming for me.

Triggers are one of The Enemy's most effective weapons. Often, we dismiss our behaviors caused by triggers in a light-hearted manner. This is very dangerous because the fact that the words or actions of someone or something else other than GOD can control or manipulate you is an easy opportunity for The Enemy to seize.

Have you ever felt like the more you were annoyed by a situation, the more it seemed to present itself? Have you ever felt like the more you told someone not to do something, the more they did it? As a result, you become frustrated and possibly lose your temper. This is a ploy of The Enemy.

I talked about this concept in *Inheritance* when I discussed the law of attraction. In short, the law of attraction states that what you think about most, you will attract. One of the tenets of new thought is that whatever you resist, will persist. The more you are irritated by something, the more it will be placed in front of you. You only gain power over something by focusing on something different.

If you find yourself triggered by someone's driving or a comment that crosses someone's lips, you are basically giving them control of you and your behavior. When The Enemy becomes aware of this, he will use these triggers to distract you and throw you off as much as possible. These triggers can develop into a major problem when you find yourself unable to produce or physically affected.

Triggers are defined as something that sets off a flashback or causes one to replay tapes in their head of a prior trauma. Each one of us has our very own unique triggers based on the tapes and memories we hold onto. Some of us have experienced so much trauma that we find ourselves triggered all of the time. It can consume us.

For 10 years, I worked in the public schools in St. Louis and I found myself triggered on a daily basis by the behavior of the students. Most of the schools I worked in were deemed as failing schools or were on the brink of becoming classified as low-performing. On a daily basis, I worked with students with behavior problems, some with personality disorders.

By the time I was ready to stop teaching, I was walking around the school on a daily basis pissed off. I had been triggered so many times by the inappropriate language and behavior that I hated my job and couldn't stand to be at work. It seemed like every five minutes, I was fighting back a complete meltdown. I held my tongue, which was a major struggle for me at the time, but my body felt the physical effects. I knew that it was time for me to go.

I considered myself a good teacher and I truly cared about my students. When I left my career, I was just becoming the teacher that I was working so hard to be. I can honestly say that I left when I was at my best. I didn't want to become one of those teachers who were bitter and resentful and I could feel myself headed in that direction. If it weren't for those triggers, I would probably still be teaching. Maybe that was what The Enemy wanted. Maybe

he was triggering me until I left behind the students who really needed me. I'm still waiting on the answer from GOD on that one.

Taking inventory of my triggers also helped me to identify moments in my life where I self-destructed my own blessings. At one point, I was so weak to my triggers that I proactively sought out to be triggered. I would look into every little detail and overanalyze everything, just looking for something to be triggered by. I presented myself as angry or bitter, when I was really in a very bad place spiritually.

The worst part about triggers is not the response we have to them, but the way that they keep us from following through on the assignments that GOD has for us. They weaken our ability to follow our dreams, achieve our goals, and fight against The Enemy. How can you fight against The Enemy when you have spent all of your energy fighting against other people?

You may never eliminate all of your triggers and the goal is not to eliminate them but overcome them. The key to overcoming your triggers is to utilize them for your own good, instead of letting them be an opportunity for The Enemy. When I am triggered now, I do not get upset or discouraged, instead I see them as a sign that The Enemy is after me. My triggers are a reminder for me that I need to read my bible, change my thinking, and stay aligned with GOD. Instead of being angered that The Enemy is after me, I process his relentless attacks on me as an indicator that I am moving in the right direction. I will say this again and again that The Enemy will not come against you unless you have something to offer the world that threatens him.

In the bible, Moses was chosen to lead the enslaved Israelites to the promised land. But it wasn't easy. He had to overcome Pharaoh. It will be no different for you or I, we have an enemy to go against. And after Pharaoh finally freed the Israelites, they remained lost for forty years. It is

not going to be easy. Anything that comes from GOD is going to be tried. This is where a lot of us get tricked. GOD is going to continue to bless us, but with each and every blessing, The Enemy will come against it! If it is not tried by The Enemy, you must ask yourself:

Where did this blessing come from?

We simultaneously co-exist in more than one realm. We are both physical beings and spiritual beings. Our minds have the power to create our realities. As a result, whatever our minds believe, will manifest into our physical world. If you believe in GOD, you believe there is an enemy. The Enemy will manifest in both your physical and spiritual life. The Pharoah was a human manifestation of The Enemy to the Israelites, the children of GOD.

Triggers are always going to be apart of who you are. They are an essential part of who each of us are. We are comprised of our experiences and molded by the things that we experience. When we are triggered, we have to act in GOD's way and not in our own way. When The Enemy sees that your triggers are only going to further GOD's way, you will find that you are even less triggered. The Enemy will no longer see any benefit in triggering you, if you are triggered to fight harder, work smarter, and move closer to GOD!

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