

New Beginnings, New Friendships



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Do you ever compare yourself or your life to others, whether it's close friends, acquaintances or even people from your past that you are “friends” with on FB or other social media sites?

Do their perfect pictures and comments of their perfect families, perfect animals, perfect weddings, perfect everything, cause you to feel bad about your own imperfect life? When you are struggling with big problems and big heartaches, do you lose yourself in the Facebook highlight reel—wondering how your life seems so inferior to those you are viewing?

On a more personal level, during your day-to-day interactions with others, have you ever judged others or been judged by your cover? Does your life externally seem so great to others that they may think you have no troubles? Or are you vulnerable with people and allow them to really get to know your soul ... the person you are underneath the cover?

I have judged others, I have compared myself to others and I have been judged by others. In an effort to be authentic and real, to connect with you perhaps on a deeper level than I have over the years in other articles I have written, I am going to invite you deeper into the chapters of my book ... my life. I would ask that you allow me to ask you questions about yours—questions I know I may never hear answers to but perhaps, through my vulnerability, you might connect with me, knowing you are not alone in the struggles you may have endured or are in the midst of.

In order to get a fuller picture of any person, we must see some of the circumstances that have shaped their life. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately), there is not enough space here to go through every page of my book but perhaps a quick highlight (or lowlight) reel is in order:

I come from parents/family with many divorces. With that came being shifted between homes and a roller coaster of emotions—though I do not blame them for I know that they all have stories of their own and they did the best they could. But it was difficult.

On the first day of my senior year of High School in 1992, I discovered that I was pregnant. I had my son, Jake exactly two weeks before my eighteenth birthday and a month before I graduated. I pursued a nursing degree, graduated and began my career. I met my husband, Jeremy during that timeframe and we were married in 1997. Together we have three additional children, Jayden (19), Jace (17) and Briella (15). Jeremy owned a business with partners for ten years and then in 2011 he dissolved the partnership and he and I opened a business together.

That's a very basic synopsis of my life thus far. I wonder, what a bird's eye view of your life looks like? Have you ever written out a timeline and pondered your feelings in different chapters and how it has shaped the person you are today? I have done this and let me just say, it's an incredibly valuable tool that helps you get to the heart of why you are the way you are today and even how you might grow to be your best self. Not the best compared to everyone else, but just authentically, your best self. It can also be very healing to share what you've discovered with someone safe and get their input on your life and how you might grow and flourish.

But before any of us can grow and flourish, we must first get real. In the cliff notes of my book that I just gave you, I did not reveal the gunk along the way. Perhaps as I shine a little light on those dark chapters and pages, you might be able to relate and feel that you are not alone.

I've made so many mistakes, truly terrible mistakes as a mom. If I told you what has burdened my heart with guilt from my words and actions long ago, you might be shocked. I am so ashamed of my sins that I have cried buckets and buckets of remorseful tears.



Outside of my role as a mom, the list of sins in every other role I play is long and exhaustive. We would be here all day if I listed all that I wish I had not done or that I would change if I could have a do-over. What about you? Do you have any past actions or choices that you wish you would have done or made differently? How do you deal with the guilt you carry?

In 2001, I began a relationship with Jesus. I believed with all my heart that He forgave my sins and He truly gave me a kind of hope that I had never before had. But I still lived a life dependent on myself and the power I had in my life. I was a perfectionist. I used the skills God blessed me with to control my life and even those around me. During the really big events in my chapters and during many persecutions, trials, and betrayals I always seemed to persevere. And yes, I gave glory to God along the way, but there were still things that I held onto tightly for control—subconsciously I allowed God to have certain areas of my life, but there were specific parts that I held onto with a tight fist.

Often times, it seems the things we think we have the most control over are the things that rock our world when it's proven that we don't have any control at all. That's exactly what happened to me as a bomb exploded in my life two and a half years ago. In the course of 24 months, my faith was shaken, my marriage was broken, I lost the relationship I had with several friends (including my best friend), family members persecuted me and accused me of untrue things, I started shutting many people out because I felt so rejected myself, my dad's health declined and then he passed away, my sweet dog also passed, and a host of other terrible things were happening in almost every aspect of my life.

I was in the deepest, darkest valley, and I felt like I was drowning from the deep heartache and pain I was experiencing. I wallowed in self-pity. I could not understand the tragedies that did not seem to end. In the past, I was never one

to feel like a victim. Instead, I put on my super-hero cape and powered through. I dug deep, regained control, put on my perfectionist hat and persevered. But my cape had disappeared. I had no power, I had no control, and I had no energy to put on the perfectionist facade. I found myself, in that valley, covered in water, barely surviving and virtually alone.

But then it happened. Just like in 2 Corinthians 12:9, I heard God whisper to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness”. Have you ever been so weak whether physically, mentally, or emotionally that

you didn't know how you might face the next day? If so, have you ever dwelled in the grace of God? Have you ever given Him all of your worries, keeping none for yourself and allowed His goodness flow into you and then through you?

God reminded me that it was time to practice what I had preached for years. That He was my strength, that it was finally time to let Him carry me through healing, that His plan was better than mine, that He would use all of this for His glory and that He is in control of everything. I fell facedown at the cross. I had already cried a sea of tears and had no more—it was simply time to relinquish control, allow God to speak His Truth into my life and obey. But I'm not going to lie, I still had doubts and I wondered, how could God make beauty from the ashes in my valley?

I was about to find out as God brought His army into my life.

God's people gathered around me in the form of wise counselors and new friendships. He brought people to listen and speak truth to me, guide me with wisdom, be the hands and feet of Jesus, help me walk when I could not, reveal my part in the broken relationships, and help me understand, finally, after forty-four years, that I am not in control of a single thing.

Furthermore, what I didn't realize until last spring was that He had also been laying a foundation of help by giving me a new Body of Christ—a new Church. You see, in His divine timing, we began attending Eagle Brook at the halfway point of my valley. The messages were so relevant and poured over many areas of my life. It was food for my weary soul and I did not even realize until later when I looked back that it was part of God's provision that would be integrated into several chapters of the book He was writing for me.

Dear friends, have you ever needed food for your soul but didn't know where you might find it? Do you have a void in your life but you don't know how to fill

it? Have you ever wanted to be chosen and included just as you are? Have you ever longed to find a place to just be you, sinful and broken, yet accepted and loved? Then I have excellent news for you ... but you'll have to read all the way to the end for I am not yet done.

Every good story has a good ending, right? Well, you have read the cliff notes to my book and you have been a part of the climax (my water covered valley). Now might you allow me to reveal the beauty that I never dreamed would come from the ashes of my book?

God and His great army drew alongside my husband and me, together, yet separately. As we both worked on our relationship with Him, He performed open-heart surgery on each of us. He put a mirror in front of our faces and as we discovered the gigantic logs sticking out of our eyes, He began showing us how to chip away at our logs rather than picking the specs out of each other's eyes. He reminded us that we are both sinners and fall far short of His glory. He made our sins glaringly evident so that we could confess, repent and be renewed. But most of all, He poured His grace over us and made our marriage new.

In August, on the weekend of our twenty-second anniversary, God allowed great forgiveness in our marriage as we truly gave Him control. We left our grievances in the past as we renewed our vows, exchanged new rings and made new promises rooted in the Lord. As we stood in our garden holding hands, with our family and good friend, Dan Farm who performed the ceremony, the wonder and goodness of Christ encircled us as hope was restored.

Dear friends, God's grace is sufficient for you! If He could make beauty from my ashes and bring so much healing in so many chapters of my book despite my sin and brokenness, He can work miracles in your life too!

Maybe you are not sold. Maybe so many terrible things have happened in your life that you don't believe there is a God. Maybe deeper circumstances have closed your mind to knowing God. Maybe sin has made you keep God at bay. I don't know where you are or what you are thinking. But I do know this, if there is any tiny little part of you that feels nudged to learn more about God, if there is any tiny part that related to me in any of this and you desire to know that you are not alone, if there is any tiny part that wants authentic relationships with people who love you for who you are despite your imperfectness, or if you are just curious and want to hear more, I have good news for you!

Tomorrow, on what would have been my dad's sixty-sixth birthday there is a celebration happening in downtown Rochester at the Mayo Civic Center. It is not a celebration for my beloved dad (though it will be partly in my heart) but it is the coming of part of my army—Eagle Brook Church has been planted here and tomorrow are the very first Live Services at both nine and eleven a.m.!

I personally invite you to come as you are. Come learn about the God who has saved my marriage and ultimately my family. Come be part of something big that God is about to do in Rochester. Finally, come hear God's word in the brand new series (in God's perfect timing) starting tomorrow called Picture Perfect Family. Together we will learn that imperfect people can truly be made perfect in Christ. Bring your friends, bring your family and come just as you are so that we can be imperfect together.