

'I Had Been Plunged Into the Pit of Hell'

"I don't know how you do it, Laurie," some would say. "You've been through so much. You're such a strong person." And in my heart, I'd think, I know. I am pretty amazing. These comments were intended to be compliments, words to encourage me, but they only fueled my growing pride. And, as they say, pride most certainly does come before the fall.

I started noticing issues with my health little more than a year later. I was nauseous all the time, and I just didn't feel quite right.

"I think I'm pregnant," I told Travis.

"Really?"

"Yeah, but the tests keep coming back negative. Do you think I should get a blood test?"

Travis thought I was being silly, but I went to my doctor the next week anyway. He ended up being right. I wasn't pregnant, and the specialist I was referred to said my nausea was most likely caused by stress. The nausea went away after I took some medication. But then my heart started acting funny, and I began having headaches all the time. Maybe something's really wrong with me, I thought. And that was it. I was struck with fear at the idea, and no matter how many times I tried to persuade myself that I was just fine, I couldn't believe it.

After that, a new symptom seemed to show up almost daily. I was tired all the time—and I mean ridiculously tired. I felt dizzy. I started having digestive issues. I felt nervous and absentminded. But I think the worst part of all was that my mind didn't seem to work properly. That scared me. I couldn't think clearly. My brain always seemed to be in a fog that left

me feeling out of touch with reality and emotionally detached from others.

I was desperate to figure out what was wrong. I spent quite a bit of money going from doctor to doctor in search of a fix, only to be told I was experiencing the physical effects of anxiety that had built up over the years. Quite simply, there was no easy fix, and I was left with absolutely no idea about how I might be able to get better.

It didn't take much for me to lose hope at that point. And of course, that's when the depression hit. I tried desperately to fix myself—to pull myself out of that dark pit—but, for the first time in my life, I could not save myself.

I tried all that the world tells you to do in situations like this. I tried therapy. I tried eating better and exercising more. I tried meditation. I tried taking a stress management class. I tried yoga. I tried reading self-help books. I tried implementing those silly principles found in *The Secret*—the power of positive thinking. And I even considered going to a Buddhist retreat, if you can imagine that! I truly was desperate, but nothing helped.

I really don't like taking medication—I don't like things messing with my body—but at this point I figured I had no other options. I took an antidepressant at the advice of my doctor, hoping it would finally provide the relief I desperately needed, but after only a few days, I realized that the medication was yet another rabbit trail leading to false promises. The medication was short lived. It didn't work. In fact, it had only made things worse.

I felt like I had been plunged into the pit of hell. Anxiety raged like a storm within me, as my mind spun completely out of control. One irrational thought after another entered my mind, as if planted there by another, sending me into a tailspin of fear. I was terrified. My mind was so cloudy and

unstable that I didn't know what I was capable of.

I don't think I was ever suicidal, but I do have to admit—a small part of me wanted to give up and die. I was terrified of dying. Truthfully, it was probably my greatest fear, but to die just seemed easier somehow. I felt so incredibly empty and alone. I had experienced so much pain, and that pain never seemed to stop. I wasn't sure life was worth all that pain. I desperately wanted to give up, but I couldn't. I was a wife and a mommy, and I didn't want to leave my children as Dad had left me. My family needed me, and because of that, I chose to fight.

But I couldn't solve this one on my own. I had no answers. I had finally come to the end of myself, and I needed help.

I called Sarah. She and I had become friends a couple years earlier, after meeting at a Gymboree class when our oldest were babies. We talked for a little while about nothing in particular, as I worked up enough courage and laid down enough pride to finally ask, "What church do you go to?"

"Oh, my church?" she asked, sounding a bit surprised. "It's called Grace."

The following Sunday, my family and I willingly walked through those church doors to attend a service for the first time since I was a teenager. I was terrified, but my desperation trumped my fear. All other options had been exhausted.

It seemed God was my last and only hope.

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When I walked through those church doors with Travis and the girls for the first time in many years, fear filled my heart. For some reason, I was completely terrified. But even greater

than my fear was my desperation. My last shred of hope was that God could help me. I was so surrounded by darkness—around and within—that I wondered if others could actually see it. I was a complete mess, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. I had no more answers. All my options had been exhausted. And I could not save myself this time.

I never thought it was possible for God to show Himself, but I was wrong. As I listened to the pastor preach, I was entirely astounded and surprised to hear a sermon that seemed to have been written just for me. The message spoke to where I was that exact moment, and it blew my mind. It was powerful, beyond anything I had ever experienced, and I thought, The sheer probability of that alone is crazy!

Travis and I met Pastor Dan after the service. He gave us a mug filled with goodies and a pamphlet introducing newcomers to Grace. I read the pamphlet as I lay in bed that night next to Travis. Most of it seemed innocuous enough, but I was a bit startled when I read their belief statement. One by one, I read the list—thinking, these people are crazy!—while fear and defeat gripped me by the throat. What if this is simply yet another rabbit trail, like all the others? I wondered. What if I never get better? In all my searching, all my pursuits to get better, I continually came up empty-handed. And, in that moment, it seemed this pursuit would be just like all the others. It was yet another mirage promising life that would soon reveal itself to be a lie.

“Can you read this?” I said to Travis, passing the pamphlet to him.

He read through the pamphlet as I stared at him, anxiously waiting for him to reel back in disbelief as I had. But when he finished, he simply handed it back to me and said, “It’s good.”

It's good? At the very least, I expected Travis to call some of these crazy beliefs into question, but he didn't. He didn't question their belief in the validity of the Bible—that it's completely inspired by God and free of all error. He didn't dispute the claim that there is only one way to heaven, through the blood of Jesus, though it seemed ludicrous to believe the blood of some guy who lived thousands of years ago could "save" us. Nor did he balk at the one belief that really had my head spinning—the claim that all other world religions are false, a result of Satan's deception.

"So you believe this stuff?" I asked.

"Yeah. There's nothing weird in there."

I set the pamphlet down on my nightstand and pondered anxiously a few moments before picking it up again. I couldn't stop myself. I had to read it again. Perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps there's a different way to look at it. Travis—noticing my irrational behavior and knowing me well enough to realize I was thinking entirely way too much—asked, "What are you doing?"

"I just don't know how these people can believe this stuff. I mean it's just—"

"Do you know what you need to do?" he interrupted.

"What?"

"You need to get up, take that pamphlet, throw it away, and go back to church next Sunday."

I was a bit stunned by Travis's response, but I complied.

We went back to church the following Sunday and every Sunday after that, each time fully expecting the God-thing to be a fluke. How could a God so grand and so holy take notice of mere man? I thought. But time and again, Jesus faithfully

showed Himself.

It wasn't just in church, either. Strange things began to happen all the time, things I couldn't explain. One night, Ella—who was three at the time—called me into her room after I had put her to bed. She said, “Mommy, you know that Jesus loves you, right?” Tears stung my eyes as I stood in her doorway, startled by her comment. We didn't talk about Jesus at home. She knew very little about God herself, yet here she was, a little three-year-old, giving a message from God to her mommy.

Another time, Avery—who was one—began crying inconsolably after bedtime, which was not like her at all. By eleven o'clock, after spending hours trying to calm her down, I felt exhausted and defeated. Nothing I did worked. So as a last resort, I threw my hands up and said a prayer, fully convinced it wouldn't work. I didn't think God could really hear me and, even if He could, I certainly didn't think He'd pay much attention to my little problems. But I stood over my little girl and prayed anyway. I asked Jesus to calm her heart and give her peace so she could go to sleep. And that moment—and I mean that very moment—she fell asleep while I stood looking at her in amazement. Tears ran down my cheeks. You are real, I thought. You do hear me.

There are so many stories like these. It seemed God showed up daily. And I was given the proof I needed.

It was true; I couldn't save myself. So I was given grace. And as my eyes were opened, I began to see clearly for the first time. I began to see God's love. His mercy. His grace. His forgiveness. Yet I was still fighting. All along the way, I fought as I tried to apply reason to faith. But in the end, Jesus won—as He always does. He rocked my analytical world, tore down my every argument, turned my life upside down—or perhaps right side up—and gave me life.

The moment we surrender ourselves to Jesus, we're made new. We're made alive in Christ, and this is precisely how I felt. I felt free for the first time as I began to be healed of the anxiety and depression that had held me captive for months. The joy and peace I so desperately sought finally took residence in my heart. And the void that I had been unknowingly trying to fill with worldly things—accomplishments and accolades that ultimately led me down the dark alley of my soul—was filled with the light and love of Christ.

I had been made new.

*In 2010, **Laurie Coombs** was called to forgive the man who murdered her father. What happened as a result of that journey is chronicled in her book, Letters from My Father's Murderer (Kregel, 2015). She blogs at [and](#) is a regular writer for [and](#) . Coombs and her husband, Travis, make their home in Nevada along with their two daughters and are in the process of adopting from Ethiopia.*

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