

GOD RESCUED ME FROM A LIFE OF PAIN AND ADDICTION

This is a story about how the unyielding grace of God and a thirteen year old girl saved my life.

I married into a family full of believers in 2008. I wrote my own vows and read them to my wife in front of a church full of everyone I love most in this world, and a God that I didn't really believe in. This should have been my first sign that my ideas about God were all wrong, but it wasn't. They knew I didn't have the faith that they had. They never made me feel bad about it, they barely ever brought it up. This may have been because I played along. I didn't actively resist any of their traditions. I went to church on Christmas and Easter. I bowed my head for grace before meals. I copied what everyone else was doing, but the words were empty to me. I wasn't comfortable in church. I thought I didn't belong in a place of worship. I was too broken, I had too many vices, my ego was too big to think that I wasn't in charge of my own fate. I didn't want to hear any of it.

In 2010 my wife and I welcomed our first child into the world, a son. I had the chance to be the kind of father that I didn't have when I was a child. I soon found myself falling into the same behaviors that I learned as a child. Anger, bitterness, spite, frustration. I don't think anyone would have classified me as a bad father, but I felt my father's behavior coming out of me at times, and it didn't feel good. I did the best I could with the tools I had at my disposal, but I fell short more times than I am comfortable with admitting. In late 2012, we found out we were expecting our second child. In January of 2013, we received some news that would change our lives forever. We found out our second child would be incompatible with life outside the womb, and there was nothing we could do about it. My wife and I chose to carry him to term so that we could love him as long as possible. It was five months of torture. Perinatal hospice, planning a funeral for a child who hadn't even been born yet, and trying to be present in the moment for my 2 year old son was more than I could manage most days. Our second son was born in May of 2013. He lived for about 30 minutes. Holding my newborn son while he struggled to breathe, knowing there is nothing I can do to save him, broke me in ways that words just don't do justice. I had always enjoyed drinking a little bit. After his funeral, I started drinking for the wrong reasons. I couldn't deal with the pain and feelings of failure sober. His death sent me into a very dark place that nearly consumed me.

I held it together the best I could. I pretended everything was okay when I was dying inside. I did all the things I thought I was supposed to do. I did my best impression of a good father and husband. In 2016 we welcomed our third child into the world. You can't enjoy pregnancy the same way after what happened to us. It was 9 months of constant anxiety that wore me down to a nub. He was happy, healthy, and I was more often than not hanging on by a thread. I did a really good job of convincing people around me that I was strong, and that I had everything together, and I was "healing." The truth is that I was slowly killing myself with drugs and alcohol. I always seemed to be able to dial it back before it got out of control. I'd stop periodically just to make sure I still could, but every time it got a little harder, and a little harder. I'd take any pills I could get my hands on, I'd drink a handle of liquor every few days in the winter. Nobody ever told me I needed to stop.

We moved on as a family of four, and I carried on with a hole in my soul. We took vacations, rode dirt bikes, saw beautiful parts of the country, went to monster truck shows, spent time with family and friends, and a lot of it felt empty to me. I was a shell, doing his best impression of a good man. I did a really good job of hiding it. Nobody seemed to notice, nobody expressed much concern. I was disguising slowly killing myself as being the life of the party. Hiding pain, dark thoughts, and depression behind a smile and kind eyes. I carried on that way for quite some time, over a decade. My life changed in a way that I never saw coming.

In October of 2024, everything changed. My oldest had just turned fourteen. He said he was "dating" a girl, but this one seemed different to me, he wanted her to come over to the house. It was a first for us as parents. I had been told he had a couple girlfriends before, but the relationships seemed to stay at school, or outside of our home at least. I don't remember the exact date, but I remember the first time I saw the little girl that would eventually change everything for me. She walked in the front door behind my red-faced son, and a chill ran down my spine. She was beautiful, but with a deep sadness in her eyes. That sadness gnawed at me. I did my best to ignore my instincts, mind my own business, keep my nose out of it. I lasted about a month. I asked questions, I got answers, and in January of 2025 we opened our home to her and she started living with us full-time.

As a parent, there is nothing you can do to prepare yourself for falling in love with a child like they're your own flesh and blood. I didn't understand the way I felt, or why. All I knew is that I had been handed something precious, and I had to act. There was no margin for error. If I didn't get this right, her safety and future was at stake. I couldn't afford to make mistakes like I made with my biological children. Something had to give. The moment she stepped foot in my home, I stopped drinking. I didn't make a conscious decision to quit, I just didn't drink when she was in the house. For three months she was here any time I was, and after that she lived here. When I stopped numbing myself with drugs and alcohol, clarity came with the sobriety. I realized my feelings and emotions weren't a liability, they were an asset. They allowed me to see unspoken pain in a little girl who needed someone to protect her and love her unconditionally.

As they often do, especially under the circumstances, her relationship with my son failed. A few days later, my now fifteen-year-old son showed me exactly what sacrificial love looks like. The stakes were higher than ever for her at the moment through no fault of her own. My son told me "I want her to stay so I know she'll be safe." That decision pulled the pin on a grenade. It wasn't long before our house became a war-zone. Kids weren't meant to live like that after a breakup. We were between a rock and a hard place, and I very quickly became overwhelmed. It all felt wrong. Nobody could get along. There were constant outbursts, both of them took turns pushing me away when I tried desperately to hold it together. I've never cried so much in my life. I felt helpless, I had nowhere to turn. Someone would suffer no matter what I did. I wasn't good enough, it was falling apart and I couldn't stop it. I loved her like a daughter, but it felt like it was tearing my family apart. I was sober, I had nowhere left to run. I made this little girl a promise that I would never give up on her and it felt like it was killing me. I leaned on everyone I could think of. Family, friends, other parents, anyone who would listen. A few people told me to surrender it to

God. Sure, I'll do that. I thought to myself, "If God does exist, he's definitely sitting this one out. There is no way he has his hands in this, it's too big of a mess. I got myself into this, nobody else."

At some point in 2025, I saw a quote on Facebook that marks the turning point in my faith. "God often uses imperfect messengers to carry out his will. Demonstrating that his power and glory are not contingent upon human perfection." I asked myself, If God sent her to my family, then why is it so difficult right now? Why can't I bond with her the way a father bonds with a daughter? Why does she always push me away when we start to make progress? Why me? I can barely take care of myself; I'm a mess. I have no faith, I don't pray, God doesn't care about me and this mess I've made for myself. I sat down and talked to her one night. I told her if she thought it might help, we could all start going to church as a family. I wasn't comfortable with it, but I'd do my best to lean into it for her. She resisted. By this time, my wife and oldest son were already going regularly. I wasn't ready to face what I thought might be coming when I walked through those doors, the truth. She and I had a huge argument Labor Day weekend of 2025. I said a lot of things to her that I swore I never would. I opened my mouth and my father came out of it. I was done; I was ready to let her walk away and out of our lives. I was fed up, out of strength, and out of options. She left to go to her mother's house, and I cooled off. That night, she disappeared from her mother's house without her phone. I was mortified. The last things I said to this child that I loved dearly were awful, and now nobody knew where she was. It broke something inside of me. She showed up at her mom's house a couple hours later. I told her that she could come back; this is what we signed up for. The truth was, I didn't know what I signed up for. I didn't know if I could help, I didn't even know what I was doing anymore. All I knew is if she was with us, we still had a chance.

I went to church the next weekend. One of her friend's mothers whom I leaned on for advice told me to lean on a church family and start with the Book of John. I walked into The Way, and they were in the middle of the Book of John. It was a sign. I was out of options, I was tired, I was broken, and I needed answers. That day, I surrendered. I cried for a good portion of the service. I didn't know much, but I knew I had a purpose, but I couldn't fulfill it alone. I'd like to say there was a flash of light and everything was suddenly great, but that isn't how it works. The life I had been begging for wasn't going to fall out of thin air. What I did get, however, is perspective. Bonds aren't forged in the easy moments. They were being forged in the hard times. The misbehavior, the pulling away, the testing boundaries, those were all opportunities given to me by God. Opportunities to step up to the plate and prove that I belonged at her table. I wasn't handed the bond I wanted with her; I was given opportunities to build it. I was given opportunities to stay when leaving would be easier. I had a second chance, not only with her, but with the rest of my family. If I went back and fixed all of my mistakes, I'd erase who I am today. This version of me can't exist without those versions. I can't change the past, but I can change the future. There is a very real sense of ambiguous loss I feel when I think of the 13 years of her life that I missed, but I'm here now, and it's never too late.

God has been working in my life for far longer than I have been giving him credit. Life got easier when I quit fighting it and submitted to the idea that I wasn't in control of everything. I look forward to walking into The Way on Sunday mornings as a family of five now. Sometimes she and I will go sit closer to the front because the rest of the family prefers to sit further back. That feels really special. This isn't a story about me rescuing a thirteen-year-old girl. This is a story about a thirteen, now fourteen-year-old girl softening my heart enough to let God in. SHE rescued ME. What we have done for her pales in

comparison for what she has done for me. I'm not the same man I was when she came into my life. I was a year sober January 18th of 2026. She has taught me so much in such a short period of time. She taught me how to love sacrificially. What it REALLY means to stand in the rain with someone when you have the choice to be dry. She overwhelmed me and brute-forced me into turning to God for answers. God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called. He intentionally called me into a situation that was beyond my abilities in order to bring me closer to Him. I still have a lot to learn, and I'm not where I want to be yet, but everything is headed in the right direction. I don't remember what life was like without God and her. I didn't have to fix my life to go to church, I had to go to church to fix my life. I wasn't broken, I was just lost, rudderless. He really will leave the 99 to come after the 1. I am living, breathing proof of that.