

About the Author

Amanda Dykes was raised in East Tennessee as the youngest of three children.

Church and faith were central parts of Amanda's upbringing, as she was raised in a pastor's home where she was taught the importance of laughter, love, family, and a foundation firmly rooted in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Amanda came to Christ at 19 and later learned the importance of having an unedited faith while working with incarcerated individuals and vulnerable populations, as well as others who were hurting, where honesty, compassion, and grace mattered far more than polished appearances.

She is the creator and host of Unedited Faith, a platform centered around honest conversations about faith and life.

She loves music, writing, laughter, and spending time with the people she loves most.

Amanda continues to live in East Tennessee.

Introduction

Somewhere along the way, Christianity became very polished.

Everybody's blessed.

Everybody's highly favored.

Everybody's smiling.

Meanwhile, many people silently sit with church hurt, grief, fear, bitterness, shame, unbelief and questions they don't always feel comfortable talking about.

All searching for hope.

I'm not a theologian, and I'm definitely not an author. This book will more than likely not reach the best seller list.

I just wanted to share a portion of what He's done for me in hopes that God will use it to help someone else the way He helped me.

If you're looking for perfect people with perfectly polished answers, this book probably isn't for you. Honesty seems to be the language God gave me.

At the end of each chapter are a few reflection questions and actions to help you sit with the hard things instead of running from them.

So pull up a chair.

This is my unedited.

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Oh That's What We're Doing???

Hurt is the gateway to a road of emotions.

The phrase “all-American life” described my life up until I was 15. That’s the year I learned what hurt was really all about.

The funny thing is, you think once that kind of hurt fades, nothing will ever hurt you like that again. Unfortunately, I learned the hard way—that’s not true. Hurt is something we experience over and over again.

No matter where it comes from—loss, relationships, hurtful words or actions, or even our own bad decisions—one thing remains the same...

It hurts.

We’ve all heard the same phrases:

“Just ignore it.”

“Brush it off.”

“Get over it.”

“It’ll be alright.”

“Just pray about it.”

All bad advice. Except, of course, pray about it. The problem with that is it’s often used loosely. Sometimes we don’t always know how to pray.

You can’t find the words.

You don’t know where to start.

At least, that’s how it was for me.

It would be easy if that’s all we had to do, but it’s just not realistic. We’ve all laid in bed dealing with hurt that won’t go away—whether it’s from our own actions or someone else’s.

During the day, we stay busy.

We distract ourselves.

We push through.

But at night... that's when it catches up with us. That's when it starts to eat away at us.

So how did I—how do you—navigate that kind of hurt? It's not linear. There are a lot of moving parts—up one day, down the next. I had to accept the things that were completely out of my control. That didn't mean they were okay, and it didn't mean I approved of what happened.

It simply meant I had to stop pretending it didn't hurt. It also meant I had to stop judging myself. We don't willingly ask people to hurt us, we don't invite people to treat us that way and we are not responsible for the actions of others.

Hurt from the people we trusted often does the most damage. And that hurt can come from many places—church hurt, family hurt, friendships, relationships, or even the people we thought would always protect us.

My list of hurts—like yours, I'm sure—was pretty long, with church hurt sitting at the center of it all. The very people who claimed to care about me caused some of the deepest hurt.

It can leave us angry with ourselves, asking:

"How could I have been so blind?"

"How did I let this happen?"

But the truth is, we allow people into our lives because we trust them. We believe they care about us. And sometimes people misuse that trust.

They manipulate situations to serve their own motives, leaving us hurt, disappointed, and questioning ourselves—even questioning who we are in Christ.

I had to face the years of hurt I had pushed down for so long. All I could say was: "That really, really hurt my feelings."

It was too much to try to handle all at once, so I decided I would try something I had never tried. I would deal with them one by one - breaking them down big and small.

I broke down the who, what, when, where, and how. Then I would go to the Word to see how the Lord wanted me to handle it.

Slowly, I started to see how ignoring it, walking in a facade, and denying it had caused more hurt than good. Everybody is searching for answers when they're hurting. The question is usually: Why?

That's where prayer comes in.

Now, I said earlier that can be bad advice—and for me, it was.

Because I didn't think being honest about how hurt I was was the "Christian thing to do."

To tell God what I was really feeling—to tell Him how hurt I was and how deeply it affected me—felt almost sinful.

I was hurt, and my thoughts toward others had been harsh and often time violent.

That's when I did something else I had never done.

I told God exactly how hurt I was and exactly how that hurt had affected me.

He didn't cause it—but He could fix it.

As it says in Psalms 62:8, "Pour out your heart before him..."

As I began breaking down my hurts little by little, piece by piece, I noticed my relationship with God start to grow.

My faith became stronger every day.

Talking to Him with a level of honesty and transparency I had never shown before opened what felt like an entirely new line of communication between us—one I never knew existed.

It wasn't easy.

There were plenty of days and nights when the only thing I could pray was: "Fix it."

With every honest prayer and every step of processing the hurt, He showed up and He showed out—teaching me healthier ways to handle hurt and process emotions.

Through His Word, trusted resources, and legitimate people He placed in my life that I could lean on and talk to, He slowly began rebuilding me.

Some of those people are still the very ones I turn to today.

Time after time, we see in the Word of God where Jesus healed.

He knew what was wrong before He ever met those people, but He still asked, as seen in Mark 10:51,

"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

He wanted to hear it from them—because their voice mattered to Him.

And our voice matters to Him too.

As Jesus says in Matthew 11:28,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

He never told us to ignore what we’re carrying—He told us to bring it to Him.

Hurt comes with spiritual warfare, the enemy keeping us defeated. He wants us to suffer from the hurt that’s been done to us—no matter how it got there.

A million times a day, I’ve said:

“Get behind me.” As it says in Matthew 16:23,

I had to learn was to make that a daily habit.

I used to tell my “home friends” at the condos I lived in, “If you hear me yelling ‘get behind me, Satan’ today—just mind ya business.”

It’s okay to say it out loud.

And it’s okay to be loud when you say it.

Be honest. Be real. Be unedited before God.

Start with the small – aim for the healing.

Reflection

- What’s really stopping me from accepting what happened?
- What actually happened? (Just the facts—no judgment.)
- How has this affected me, my relationships, and my relationship with God?

Action

This week, take one hurt—big or small—and bring it honestly before God.

Say it out loud if you need to:

“That really hurt me.”

Don’t rush past it.

Sit with it.

Then give it to Him.

Give Me Something to Throw

When we neglect to deal with hurt, we get introduced to a new friend: Anger.

It entered my life suddenly and grew slowly. Addiction to anger is defined as the compulsive, habitual pursuit of rage-induced adrenaline and dopamine rushes (Bushman, 2002; Tavis, 1982).

And that was an accurate description of my life for years. I was hurt—and everyone who hurt me was going to feel my rage. The adrenaline kept me going. I found reasons to be angry and I took my friend everywhere.

Purposely nasty to anyone remotely affiliated with the people who had hurt me. My words were harsh, and there were plenty of vulgarities. At times, I would become so consumed with anger that I would pick up the first thing I could find and smash it.

I loved hearing the glass break and seeing the destruction on the floor. It was a release for me. I fed the anger, and I let other people feed it too. Anger was a defense for me. A “I’ll get you before you get me” mentality.

It spoke control, respect, validation, and power. All were a lie.

In reality, I was out of control, had no respect for anyone—much less myself—lived in complete chaos, and had no real power over anything.

As it says in Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”

And looking back on it now—I definitely looked like a fool at times. Like any addiction, anger convinced me there was no way I could live without it. But it wasn’t just exhausting me. It was killing my soul.

Before I learned how to deal with hurt, I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life: I refused to deal with it at all. And anger filled the space where healing should have been.

It led me straight down the same road the prodigal son had taken.

The hurt led to anger. The anger led to believing the lies it told me. And those lies led me to believe I didn’t need God. The reality of those lies finally hit me.

While sitting at a friend's house one day, she asked me a question that stopped me in my tracks:

"What's stopping you from giving it to God?"

My answer was simple: "I'm addicted to the anger."

Acknowledging you have a problem is the first step. And I had never said that out loud before. For the first time in a long time, I was finally at a starting place.

Once I acknowledged the addiction, I knew one of us was going to win: Myself—or the anger. I'm competitive, and I don't like to lose. But more importantly, I knew who already held the victory for me.

So the prayers, conversations, and honesty I had started having with God began to include just how angry I was and how deeply it had affected me. And just like with the hurt, His Spirit began speaking healing to my soul.

Slowly, I noticed changes. Walking away became easier. Reacting didn't feel as automatic anymore.

Because anger had become something the enemy constantly whispered in my ear. Always bringing back memories of how I had been hurt, replaying situations in my mind until eventually it would lead to rage, destruction, and broken things.

But one bright, beautiful day, something changed. He brought one particular situation back to my memory again — and for the first time...I said no.

There is nothing wrong with being angry. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4:26, "Be ye angry, and sin not..." God understands anger.

As it says in Psalms 147:5, "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite."

I prayed for guidance on how to deal with my friend.

Following the Spirit, I prayed for:

- wisdom to recognize what triggered me,
- help setting boundaries with those who continually brought those situations back up,
- strength to walk away from people who refused to respect those boundaries,
- and accountability when I neglected to do those things.

And He did. I still get mad. I still say give me something to throw.

God is always ready to stop me, and give me the 4 things I prayed for. It's a relapse plan that works over and over.

Reflection

- What hurt am I still carrying that keeps turning into anger?
- Have I mistaken anger for strength, control, or protection?
- What boundaries do I need to set to protect my peace and healing?

Action

- This week, pay attention to what triggers your anger instead of reacting immediately.
- Bring those triggers honestly before God and ask Him for wisdom, strength, and self-control.
- When anger starts whispering again, practice saying no.

You're gonna watch me get back up

Micah 7:8 KJV

"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

Nothing is more dark than shame.

It envelops us, slowly starts to strangle us, and strips away any love that we have for ourselves.

I've made plenty of decisions in life that have brought shame.

It certainly doesn't sing "Jesus loves me, this I know," nor does it remind us that He found us worthy.

Of course, you have those who thrive off our mistakes.

In my mid 20's, life was busy.

I had a full-time job, and my parents and I were traveling and singing every weekend, sometimes requiring me to get off work and travel up to eight hours to meet them.

Church was my social life.

One weekend in October, we finally had a break.

A friend and I decided to go visit her boyfriend and just hang out.

I had been a drinker before I got saved, so when I was offered a drink, I decided it couldn't hurt.

I took two sips, and the next thing I knew, I woke up to a sexual assault that was blamed on me.

According to her, he had done nothing wrong.

I had tempted him, and the crowd followed that narrative.

Eventually came the:

"You knew better than to do that."

"You had no business being there."

"That wouldn't have happened if..."

I laid in my room the rest of that weekend trying to process that I had been drugged and violently assaulted.

I had no words.

Though close with my parents and siblings, I couldn't tell them.

I was too embarrassed, and just the thought of disappointment on their faces was enough to shatter my heart.

Every day, I prayed that God would give me strength and peace in knowing that Christ saw the truth even when people didn't.

There's always one person who can't wait to tell it.

One day my mom confronted me.

Her request was simple:

"What happened that night?"

I died inside.

How could I tell her?

I said a prayer and went for it.

I explained everything.

The next few hours brought nothing but encouragement and love.

My parents were great like that.

The hateful comments continued, and one night in a restaurant the subject came up again, not in my favor.

I finally very loudly shared my side of the story with them, giving them the opportunity to ask questions if they wanted to.

Dead silence.

Not another harsh word was ever said about it.

There have been plenty of moments in my life that carried the weight of shame.

In my late 20's and early 30's, I struggled with alcohol and made decisions that went against the morals and values I had been raised with. I settled for sin while desperately longing for peace.

My dad always said I was extreme. Anything I did, I did it all the way — good or bad.

I didn't care about consequences. Consequences were my adrenaline rush.

Sunday mornings weren't for church. They were for nursing hangovers and laughing at the people going.

Anything was easier than dealing with myself.

Like the other things I've discussed, I had to make a decision.

Either shame would leave me sitting in darkness surrounded by pointed fingers, harsh words, and accusations, or it would find me taking accountability when needed, advocating for myself when I had to, and continuing to tell my truth.

And the truth?

John 14:6 KJV says:

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

When I think about shame, I often think about the woman caught in adultery. Dragged before a crowd, surrounded by accusations, humiliation, and people ready to condemn her. Yet standing in front of her was Truth Himself.

And in John 8:7 KJV, Jesus said:

"...He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

It matters not if we are brought down to shame by things outside of our control or by our own decisions.

Neither one disqualifies us from getting back up.

They didn't throw stones that day, but they did see the Truth standing with her, and they walked away.

People may still hold stones in their hands. But somewhere along the way, my perspective changed.

I would take accountability for my mistakes.

If I did it, I would own it.

I would also speak honestly about the things that were out of my control and make sure I used my voice to help others who had walked through the same things.

So throw your stones if I fall, or if you choose to believe the worst about me. By the grace of God, you're still going to watch me get back up in Christ Jesus.

Shame binds. Jesus sets free.

While speaking at a church one night, I shared how shame had kept me silent about things that had brought embarrassment, pain, and guilt into my life.

One woman asked one of the best questions I had ever been asked:

"Are you not ashamed to tell all of that?"

No.

Because no matter the story, mine ends with healing, redemption, forgiveness when needed, and a Savior who leads with love.

A Savior who took my shame.

Reflections

1. Has shame caused me to stay silent about something God never intended for me to carry alone?
2. Have I allowed the actions, opinions, or accusations of others to shape the way I see myself?
3. What would healing look like if I stopped allowing shame to define my identity?

Actions

1. Ask yourself honestly: Is there something shame has kept you silent about that needs to be brought into the light?
2. Separate what was truly your responsibility from what shame unfairly placed on your shoulders.
3. Find one safe person you trust and practice using your voice, even if your hands shake while doing it.

I needed a break

2 Peter 2:21 ESV

"For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them."

In the summer of 2005, life was rough. My ex and I were in an off-again period, and I was having a hard time dealing with those emotions.

I had previously been diagnosed with asthma requiring the vent, and the first of June I did not feel well.

My oxygen dropped quickly, and for 15 days I lay in a coma. Once I came out of it, I realized I could feel, but I couldn't move anything.

I was diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy, and the prognosis was that the most motion I would have would be to walk with a cane in a year if that was even possible.

I didn't care for that, so I began to pray. Two weeks later, I walked out of the rehab center.

Again, life was different. The tube had caused severe vocal cord damage that left my voice struggling to hit the high notes. Though I could walk, I wasn't exactly running anywhere, I still wasn't released to drive, and I was still single.

One night sitting at a red light in a friend's car, I made a dangerous decision.

I brought all those things to God's attention and matter-of-factly said:

"You can't make those things right, so I'm just going to take a little break from You. I need some time."

Six months was the time frame.

It turned into four years.

Everything was great at first. I was making great money that afforded me trips across the United States, expensive clothes and purses, and even the little sports car.

Eventually my ex and I returned to an on-again period, and to me I was in control.

Until I wasn't.

The entire time God had been dealing with my heart, begging me to come to an altar of repentance. I refused to listen.

Finally, one Thursday in October, I said out loud:

"God, leave me alone. I'll talk to You when I'm ready to talk to You."

And He was gone.

Hebrews 10:31 KJV

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

My life went to crap, and it happened fast.

While moving apartments, my oxygen dropped again. Before, I had always had peace in God knowing I was going to be ok.

This time I was terrified.

Laying in the hospital bed one night, I begged God to just talk to me.

I heard the Spirit clear as day:

"I'll talk to you when I'm ready to talk to you."

For the next two weeks, they hit me with every narcotic they had to calm me down, and nothing worked.

Two days after being released from the hospital, my dad found me in the closet... scared.

He rushed me back to the hospital and that's when we learned what dope sick was.

It was painful. My mind was all over the place, suicidal thoughts played over and over, I was soaked with sweat, and the nausea and stomach pains were worse than any menstrual cramp I had ever had.

There was no presence of God, and eventually I was just going through the motions and life was about to get harder.

Eight months later, I found myself in a small rundown apartment wanting to go home. An eviction notice and final utility notices lay on the table... again.

My sports car was gone.

No more fancy clothes and three slices of cheese, stale crackers, and a 20-ounce soda were my groceries.

I called the only place that had ever been safe.

I called home.

I explained that I just wanted to stay the weekend. Thirty minutes later with my bag, and my little dog Nigel in hand, daddy opened the door welcoming me in.

Luke 15:22-24 KJV

“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found...”

The next three days were peaceful.

We ordered pizza, I rented movies just like I had as a teen, there was Saturday breakfast, hamburgers for dinner, and her famous Sunday spread.

Most of all there was no judgment.

The three of us said very little.

I didn't want to leave, but shame and pride kept me from saying:
“Please let me stay.”

They had given me the best and shown me love without ever having to say it.

As I went to leave, I was given a choice. Leave, and there would be stipulations. Stay, and they would help.

I chose to stay.

It gave me hope. Hope that one day I would feel His presence again.

One night unexpectedly, I felt a love I had missed surrounding me once again.

From that moment on I kept praying, and kept trying.

I started going to church but often left running out the door from conviction before the altar call.

Why?

Pride.

Pride got in the way.

I don't know why we do it, why we run, but we do.

Finally, sitting on my bed one night I simply said:

"Lord, I'm sorry. Please let me come home."

Immediately I was there. Surrounded by His presence. Held in His love.

A couple of days later, I went to the park just to talk to God. I knew my walk with Christ would look different than it did when I first got saved. Very directly I said:

"God, I promise You with everything in me... I'm going to fail You."

I knew there would be things He would ask me to do that I would either say no to, procrastinate on, or be in such a hurry to do that I would mess it up before I even started.

Matthew 5:48 KJV says:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

For a long time, that verse intimidated me. But somewhere along the way I realized God was not looking for a false perfection. He was looking for effort, obedience, growth, repentance, and a willingness to learn.

It had been a fearful thing to be in the hands of a living God, but I was still in His hands.

God's mercy and grace extend far beyond anything we will ever understand.

He's not looking to push you away. He's preparing the best He has for when the Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find you and bring you home.

I made another decision. No matter what I did or didn't receive in life, nothing would ever separate me from God again.

Too many times the devil whispers:

"Quit. Give it up. It's too hard. It's too much."

I fell for that once.

Now I just grind harder.

Reflection

- Why am I angry with God?
- Have I mistaken disappointment or unanswered prayers for abandonment?
- In what areas of my life have I been drifting instead of drawing closer to Him?

Action

- Spend time honestly talking to God about any disappointment, anger, or distance you feel toward Him.
- Reflect on the ways God has still pursued or protected you even in difficult seasons.
- Make intentional time this week to reconnect with God through prayer, worship, or stillness.

I only asked you for one thing

We all have that big fear. The one that sends us into a panic just thinking about it.

After moving back in with my parents, their health declined, and me now on disability, I found myself taking care of them.

I learned my biggest fear was finding them passed away one morning when my dad decided to ignore my attempts to wake him up, leaving me to think he was gone.

I panicked. I cried. And all he said was:
"I wish you would shut up and let me sleep."

At the time it wasn't funny, and I expressed the fear in what had happened. He responded:

"Well if that's how God wants it to happen, you can't stop it."

On January 6, 2012, my fear became my reality. He simply went to sleep, and the Lord called him home.

For a moment, I was happy for him.

Then the weight of it hit me.

Quickly confusion and panic set in, fueled not only by a broken heart but sheer terror pulsing through my body.

The thing is, Satan does not care about our devastating moments. He's not going to back off because of them.

As I stood there looking at Daddy, he whispered:
"Just end it for yourself."

I won't lie... it was tempting.

In that moment, I felt the presence of God wrap around me, creating a moment I will never fully be able to explain.

The rest of the day the terror grew, shaking my insides to their core. Finding him had scared me to death.

I had questions, and I wanted answers.

Only one person could answer them.

That night standing in my living room, I remembered the disciples on the water.

Mark 4:37-38 KJV

"And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

Him calming my waters wasn't an option. I had one concern:

"I'm about to perish and You don't even care."

As you've read, I had walked away before. I didn't want that life again, so I went to my room and for the next four hours I prayed:

"It hurts. Help me understand."

Calming my storm, He reminded me that as a child, if Daddy left and I knew he was leaving, I was devastated. If he left when I wasn't looking, it didn't hurt as bad.

The only way to take him was when I wasn't looking so it would not completely break my heart.

1 John 4:18 KJV

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear..."

Just like that, the terror I had been feeling all day was gone.

As the dust settled and I began navigating life with both parents gone, that night replayed in my mind often.

He tells us in Hebrews 13:6 KJV:

"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

And in Isaiah 43:1 KJV:

"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

Something started rising in me. He hadn't just delivered me from my biggest fear. He had shown me I really did not need to be afraid of anything that came my way.

I found a new courage that is only found in Him. I walked with a new confidence, a new peace, and my relationship with Him elevated to a new level.

In the moment, the terror was so real I couldn't even pray.

I didn't need to.

To say fear never comes creeping in would be a lie. We all have fears. Running from them, sitting and worrying about them, will not prepare us if God chooses to allow those things to happen, just as He did with me.

What I can tell you is this: He will still be on your boat when it does.

The smartest decision I made that day was going to God quickly and honestly in prayer, even through confusion, fear, and hurt.

He has a reason for everything He allows us to walk through. Had I not experienced that moment, I would still be living my life in fear — not only of major things, but of people's opinions, rejection, and countless "what if's."

There would be no confidence found only in Him, and I certainly would not be able to testify of everything He has done for me.

Fear is a huge barrier in our lives. It keeps us from trusting fully, moving forward, and walking in peace. Whatever your fear, take it to the throne of God instead of letting fear be the throne of your life.

Reflection

- What fear has the strongest hold on my life right now?
- Have I allowed fear to keep me from trusting God fully?
- What "what if" thoughts continually replay in my mind?

Action

- Be honest with God about the fears that truly control or torment you.
- Reflect on moments where God has already carried you through fear before.
- Face one fear honestly this week instead of continuing to avoid it.

Please Stop Talking

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord..."

— Jonah 2:7 KJV

Grief is tricky.

Growing up, I watched as my parents experienced the loss of my grandparents and several aunts and uncles. To me, it looked simple. They planned the funeral, went through the motions, and life seemed to go back to normal.

As they got older and we planned for the time their day would come, I was adamant it would be hard, but I would be ok. I realized in a second that would not be the case. I learned that I was not only grieving the physical loss of them, but the life that would never exist again.

Nothing felt right anymore.

I was shocked that the gas company's response a week after my dad passed was: "We're sorry for your loss. We understand you've had a lot on you, but the bill has to be paid to reconnect it."

To me, it felt like responsibilities should stop too. I shouldn't have to worry about those things. I was hurt, looking for things to throw, and absolutely, with all due respect, tired of hearing people say the things everybody says. Such as "They're in a better place." They're with Jesus now." That was the problem. They were there - and I was here.

I got tired of smiling while silently praying: "Please make them stop talking. Just please Lord, make them shut up."

They meant well, and I truly did appreciate the effort in condolences, but it didn't solve anything for what I was feeling.

One day while praying, the Lord reminded me of a conversation I had with my mother.

"You can't go back, Amanda. You either choose to move forward or you stay stuck feeling sorry for yourself."

Not only was I grieving that loss, but I was also grieving a relationship that was never meant for me. Everything was changing, and grieving loss was the star of the show.

Like hurt and anger, I had to accept that the change was inevitable. "Stay stuck or embrace it" echoed in my mind.

According to psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the five stages of grief are:

- denial
- anger
- bargaining
- depression
- acceptance

Those are not linear. You can experience all five in one day. I had to accept that no matter how many times I closed my eyes wishing the things I had lost would come back... they weren't.

Screaming "give them back" was doing no good. It wasn't realistic.

The more I processed the grief, the more I realized I also had to grieve:

- a life that felt cut short at 18,
- a church and community,
- and the future I thought I would have.

When denial came creeping up, I prayed for comfort with my new reality. I found new things I enjoyed and picked up old hobbies that had been neglected.

I replaced the unrealistic with the realistic. I stopped forcing myself to smile when I didn't feel like smiling. I became honest about not wanting to discuss certain losses.

As healing came, I learned to laugh with people over the memories instead of breaking from them.

After 20 years, I walked back into the church my dad pastored, sat down, and cried through the entire service. I thanked God for the foundation that had been laid for me there, the hurt He had helped me overcome, and the freedom I felt sitting there.

I accepted the grief that came with a broken relationship by admitting it was never meant for me to begin with. I started working on myself, my confidence, and the things that truly mattered to me.

I realized my raising was over. I was finally grown now that my parents were gone.

I embraced the life skills they taught me, the wisdom they left me, and the one thing they gave me that remained firm: Faith anchored in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Grief changed me – But so did God.

The truth is I still grieve my parents, and the “good ol days.” However, in processing that grief I found that when my sister passed away it was a different grief, but I was able to navigate it better. Having the basic coping skills was key, and knowing he had brought me through it before was the peace.

Reflection

- What loss am I still struggling to accept?
- Have I been honest about what I’m truly feeling?
- Am I allowing myself to move forward, or am I staying stuck in what once was?

Action

- Give yourself permission to grieve honestly without forcing yourself to “be ok.”
- Spend time with God asking Him to help you accept the realities you cannot change.
- Revisit one healthy thing that brings you peace, comfort, or stability this week.

Wait... Just Who Is the Enemy?

Bitterness became part of my personality.

I was hurt, grieving, bitter, and carrying offenses I had no intention of letting go of.

Psalms 110:1 KJV

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

I knew what the Bible said. Matthew 18:22 KJV says:

"Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

I just tried to justify the reason as to why I didn't think I should forgive.

At some point in my life, I realized the phrase "forgive but don't forget" contradicted the way Christ forgives us.

Psalms 103:12 KJV says:

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

When we ask Christ to forgive us, He forgives and doesn't hold it over our heads. Yet here I was not forgiving, and I certainly was not forgetting.

Especially when it came to three individuals. The very thought of their names and the hurt they had caused would send me spiraling again, and bam, glass would be all over the floor.

When I moved to Knoxville, it got real. Out of the three, I realized one was myself.

I had made mistakes. I had hurt people and there was nothing to justify that. I could have handled things differently, spoken up more, and not tried to please others just to keep peace in my life. I could have also been nicer.

It required digging deep, facing myself, and taking ownership.

I made apologies. Some were received. Others were not.

You can't hold yourself responsible for what people choose not to do. Sometimes people aren't ready, and when we hurt people, we damage their trust in us. We have to earn that back.

If they still choose to walk away, that's their choice. Your responsibility is to grow, heal, and change the behaviors that caused the damage. Not chase them.

As for the other two, it was more complex.

They had both reached out willing to talk and had apologized. My response was: "You reach out again, say anything else, and you're going to find out how angry I am towards you."

I didn't stutter when I said it.

They went on living their lives, happily. Every time someone brought them up, I had something sarcastic to say. I fed the bitterness every chance I got.

So yeah, I was still addicted to parts of the anger.

Then it happened.

I had put together a curriculum to teach incarcerated women. A couple mornings before the class, I woke up knowing I couldn't do it. I could not stand in front of those women and teach something I had not done myself.

I had lied to myself too long saying I had forgiven everyone.

Later that night, the reality hit me hard.

Praying for your enemies and making them your footstool hits different when you realize... you are the enemy.

They had done their part. They had reached out and tried to apologize.

I had not.

So I called the other two to have a conversation.

I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect, and I knew enough to know that if the reception was not good — I was going to match that energy.

On my way to work that morning, I sent them both a message asking if I could speak to them.

Both conversations ended in love and peace for all.

Today, they are both supportive of me, and I am supportive of them.

Bitterness gone. Peace finally present.

Forgiveness is hard whether it's ourselves or others. What I learned was this: Hurt may explain our behavior, but it does not excuse it. Forgiveness gave me freedom.

Forgiving myself first, then seeking forgiveness from them, had finally released me.

It also humbled me, softened me, and taught me I really do love people.

The truth is, I had carried bitterness toward one of them for 38 years.

Forgiving yourself is the hardest part. Not only does it take humility, it takes courage. Your light wasn't meant to be dimmed by the shadow of bitterness.

Freedom comes when we finally stop building homes in places God was trying to heal.

Reflection

- Is there someone I have justified refusing to forgive?
- Have I allowed bitterness to shape my reactions or behavior?
- What would change in my life if I truly let the hurt go?

Action

- Ask God to reveal any bitterness you may still be feeding instead of healing.
- Be honest about the ways hurt may have changed your behavior toward others.
- If you feel led to, take one step toward peace, honesty, or accountability this week.

Stay the Course

Philippians 3:14 KJV

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

God said move to Knoxville... so I did.

I stepped out on complete faith trusting He had a job for me to do when I got there.

I knew no one, and when I left the closing table I told my niece:

"I just bought a condo and I don't even know where it's at."

After about a year, I thought I had misunderstood. Nothing had transpired.

Then God moved.

I took a job working with a vulnerable population that not only taught me how trauma and the Word of God align, but also helped me begin navigating some of my own trauma.

As myself and my "home friends" had conversations about the Word and their beliefs, He also used them to show me that I didn't have to fit inside a box.

They had real questions. The population I worked with had real questions, and giving a boxed answer did nothing to help.

In 2016, I had made major strides in healing. My relationship with Him was strong, all of which continued once I moved there.

But there was something inside me that needed out. A woman that I knew God wanted me to be. I just didn't know how to let her out.

She went against man-made religion, sugar-coated gospel, and just flat out did not care what people said. It was literally driving me crazy.

Then like a prize-winning alarm, it hit me.

He didn't call me to be "the standard."

Not all man-made traditions are bad, but that's exactly what they are — man-made.

Rules that determine how you should even walk into a church, stretching as far as deciding whether or not you're truly a child of God.

That day at the park, I had also prayed that God would make me different so I could have the tools needed to help those that no one else wanted to help.

I realized the woman inside me wasn't rebellious. She was compassionate. Honest. Unafraid to sit with broken people without pretending to be above them.

I needed to stop trying to make her fit inside other people's expectations and simply let God use her.

With a deep breath, I did just that. Just as I suspected, the judgment came quickly.

"She's not right with God."

"She listens to the wrong voice."

"She's not biblical."

"She doesn't do it right."

My response?

"Is that right?" with a smile on my face.

I care more about obedience than I do the approval of others. I do pray for them.

However, sitting around worried about opinions wastes precious time that could be spent loving people, leading them to Christ, and spending time with those I love.

I've learned that testimonies don't have to sound dramatic to matter. Sometimes honesty alone is enough to help someone feel less alone.

So if God has brought you through something difficult, don't hide it. Someone may need to hear it more than you realize. Everything you've been through in life is a walking testimony for Jesus.

I decided that nothing I had walked through would be wasted. Somehow, God would use all of it for His glory.

No plan that God has ever had for me has truly been stopped. The opinions and accusations from others are their problem to work out with God, not mine.

All I have to do is stay the course.

God has always sent the right people to help me with the things I didn't understand or simply did not know how to do.

You'll make mistakes. I make them every day as I navigate a new calling. Learn from them. Pray and allow Him to guide you on how to restructure when needed.

Just don't stop.

1 Samuel 15:22 KJV says:

"...Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice..."

Obedience is not always easy.

With all the support I have, I've still found myself feeling as though I'm carrying the calling by myself at times. I'm not for everyone, and that's ok.

When you decide to fully surrender to what God has called you to do, chances are you won't be for everyone either. You can't let that stop you. Your calling is special to you – one that He handpicked with you in mind.

Sacrifice and obedience look different for everyone. Surround yourself with people who understand the meaning behind the verse.

The truth is, I'm still old-time Gospel. Just with a little kick every now and then.

The difference now is that I'm no longer afraid to be exactly who God called me to be.

Reflection

- Have I allowed fear of people's opinions to silence parts of my testimony?
- What gift, calling, or part of myself have I been afraid to let God fully use?
- Am I seeking obedience to God or approval from people?

Action

- Spend time thanking God for every part of your testimony, even the painful parts.
- Ask God to help you walk confidently in the gifts and calling He has placed on your life.
- Choose one area this week where you will stop shrinking back and simply be obedient.

How Did I Get Here

Hebrews 11:1 KJV

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

In January of 2026, I moved back home. I knew at some point it would happen, and for the first time in my life I waited patiently... well, most days.

Doing so meant I walked away from a career I loved. I had beautiful coworkers that had taught me a lot while encouraging me to be the best version of myself. I had no job lined up and was walking strictly by faith, praying that the podcast would take off and Unedited Faith would be the only “job” I had.

That wasn’t the reality waiting on me.

In February, I stood at a sink at a popular pizza chain looking at a sink full of dishes wondering: “How did I get here?”

How did I go from a career to washing dirty pizza pans wearing this tacky uniform?

As I stood there, my mind drifted back.

At eight years old I went to an old-fashioned altar feeling the conviction of the Holy Ghost. But once I got there, no prayer was prayed.

At eighteen I found myself in a domestic violence relationship. When he ended it, I was devastated. I hit my knees on the kitchen floor and said:

“God, give him back.”

That sounded strange to me because I had never called on God before. I decided maybe it was time for me to figure all this out, so I started in Psalms.

A few Sundays later Daddy gave another altar call and I went. Not for salvation, but for that relationship to be repaired.

He asked me:

“Honey, have you ever been saved?”

Not wanting to let him down, I said yes.

All he said was:

“Ok, go pray.”

He knew, and I knew he knew.

Life continued on, but so did the pulling.

Then one day in the middle of packing up a house, with my mom in full panic because that’s how moving goes, I heard a voice say:

“Go to the church, He’s waiting.”

I didn’t explain it. I just left with her yelling:

“Where are you going? This has to be done.”

I don’t know why I kept it to myself other than it felt personal, and I wanted to keep it that way.

As I pulled into the parking lot, I believe I saw Him walk through the church doors ahead of me.

Once inside, I made my way to an old-fashioned altar and accepted Christ as my Savior.

I prayed then that if it be His will, my life, career, and all would be solely focused on Him. I was willing to go where He wanted me to go and do what He wanted me to do.

I prayed for my life to reflect the power in the blood of Christ so others would see Him.

Years later, when I repented for turning away from Him, I made another decision.

I would tell my story in raw form — the good and the bad.

I was no longer chasing titles, relationships, approval, or things.

I was walking by faith.

He answered my prayer.

Every painful thing I had lived through now allowed me to sit across from people and understand them.

The victim.

The addict who is dope sick.

The one angry from loss.

The one hiding in shame.

The one struggling to forgive.

The one terrified of what comes next.

The one who needs help getting started.

All the negative had become relatable, and the fire in me to use it was not to be contained.

Working in jail ministry taught me the importance of telling our truth honestly, because broken and lost people are searching for someone real enough to understand them.

There is something powerful about looking into the eyes of someone searching for hope and being able to honestly say:

“You’re right... I don’t know exactly how you feel. I only know how I felt when I walked through something similar.”

We were never meant to carry life alone, saved or lost.

Devotionals, sermons, and faith-based curriculums are wonderful tools, but hurting people know the difference between a polished answer and raw truth.

And more often than not, raw truth is what they are desperately searching for.

So how did I get there standing over a sink full of pizza pans in my tacky uniform?

Because I decided to follow Jesus.

A prayer for you

Heavenly Father, we thank You and we praise You for all that You are. I thank You for the inspired words for this book and the ability to tell my truth, bringing glory to Your truth.

I pray You use this for all who read this to be able to break the chains of the heavy emotions that we feel in life. I pray for their comfort from hurt, peace in healing, and resilience to move forward.

I pray they find forgiveness for themselves, others, and most of all forgiveness in You. I pray those who have strayed see home is waiting, and for the lost who may read this feel the love of Jesus and the power in his blood calling them to salvation.

Take it and use it for Your honor and Your glory. For it's in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen

love

Amanda

I would love to hear from you amanda@uneditedfaith.com