

RESPECT THE ART MEDIA
PRESENTS

*Sincerely,
Me*

Volume One

What would you do
if you knew then,
what you know now?

SincerelyMeTheBook.com
#SMTBV1



Executive Producer
Matthew Garcia

Foreword By Torrian Scott

Sincerely,
Me

Respect The Art Media Presents:

*Sincerely,
Me*



Volume 1

Matthew Garcia
Executive Producer

Respect The Art Media - Ontario, California

Sincerely, Me - Volume 1

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I dedicate this book to my younger brother Shaun. I see the potential you hold and I hope you live a life to the full potential you were always intended. I pray this book gives you a major head start.

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FOREWORD

We all grew up hearing phrases like, “Hindsight is 20/20” and, “If I only knew then what I know now...” We get the impression that a person wouldn’t have had to go through the upsets, trials, and let downs of their past. But could sift through obstacles and go on to victory, had they only known in their past what they know in the present. As we reflect on things of our past with fresh knowledge, greater understanding, and dynamic wisdom, sometimes we wish we could turn back the hands of time and take this new insight and download it into our fresh minds of the past. Well, as of the wiring of this book those types of things only exist in the movies. However, it has been the track record of God to raise up a person or a group of people in every generation who will be selfless enough to share their testimony, of what is possible when someone takes a risk and “believes” Him.

If we look through scripture we find countless young people doing GREAT things through the inspiration of God. Samuel, David, Josiah, Gideon, Mary, the Disciples, and numerous others named and unnamed. They lived their lives so candidly that with each reading of their story we see a component of ourselves. We see their struggles, triumphs, and we see their lives played out through the turning of the pages of the Bible. And like a voice to the next generation, a group of young adults have come together to carry on this legacy. They are writing to a “younger them” sharing the wisdom, cautions, and preparations it will take to grow into a mature, complete, and whole person.

Through the following pages you will laugh, cry, dream, reflect, and hopefully take action to redesign your life based on the wisdom in these pages. This indeed is a working document of challenges, inspiration, and motivation. Our prayer is that you would be moved to write your own “Letter Project” to inspire those you have influence over. You never know, it could change the course of someone’s life. Enjoy this journey!

Torrian Scott
Director of Business Development
Abundant Living Family Church

INTRODUCTION

If I cracked open this book at your age, my first thought would be:

So, who are you?

My name is Matthew. As I write this, I'm 24 years old. If you are under 24 let me tell you, I don't know it all. But I know for most of you I wasn't your age that long ago. Whether older or younger, what we all know, what we all have in common is being in a place where we are looking for something. This could be pursuit of answers, looking for a resource, something or someone to help, someone that understands what I'm about and what I am going through. What I was really tired of regardless of my age, were people trying to down play my problems like they didn't compare to someone else's.

Bump that!

Little sister, little brother, your problems are just as real as mine were and are! You know how I know? The stress I felt from my problems in my teens, is the same stress I feel at 24. The difference is how I handle it now. I felt I needed to write this book while I could still remember, because it seems as you get older, you can lose sight of certain things.

This is why most of your parents can't seem to relate to what you're going through. It's not because they don't care or they don't love you, but sometimes the value of what you feel cannot always be remembered honestly. Our Young Adult generation though, is commonly overlooked. My friends and I are over looked. Where I know we have value is that we can be the middle ground, the generation to bridge the gap. We can help you transition from where you are to where you want to be, while remembering and understanding how you feel.

This book is for you to learn from, not by us telling you what to do and how to do it, but through the struggles we faced. This is an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and victories. It is with the hope that you won't go through all that we did.

Ok... What's this book about, really?

Imagine you're in class. You get your textbook, meet your teacher, and class begins. You hate it, can't stand it. It's hard. You struggle the whole semester. Finals come and you wonder if you're even going to pass. You try and ask for help but it seems no one is available.

Now imagine, you're in class. You get your textbook, meet your teacher and class begins. Imagine this class you once might have hated, but you begin to enjoy. Why? Because you received a new tutor every couple of pages, helping you and telling you about mistakes and successes they made in the same class.

You have a chance to spend time with 52 tutors all who have passed the class, didn't take the class long ago, and are willing to help you.

As you get older, even now I am sure you have these experiences where you think to yourself, if only I could go back, knowing what I know now... Well, here is as close to a chance as you are ever going to get. I have gathered a few of my friends, the "*Faithful Few*" as I like to call them, who love you and wanted to pass on the life experiences they gained. This is their gift to you without even meeting the majority of you. They wrote a letter to the younger version of themselves, to reflect on where they have come from, what they have learned, and are passing all of this wisdom on to you.

In a world where you feel no one else understands, no one knows what it is like, we do. You no longer have the excuse no one cares because we cared enough to put this book together for you now! We knew the crucial time for you would come, where you wanted something real, tangible, and different. Here it is! No more excuses.

We are not adults trying to tell you what to do. We are young adults only a few years older than you reaching back, as an older brother and sister, as a distant mentor, to help you when you feel no one else can or will. We were you and you are us. Yes the details

might not be identical, but between all of us we will and do all walk the same roads.

What's the catch?

You have to read something. That's it. No flash, no lights. You read, you get out as much as you invest.

Where do I start?

Where do you start? Well like in life, even though people may not tell you this, you have options.

1. Read these letters straight through. Take time with them, see the common in them, and see you in them. See how your life plays out if you make similar decisions that these people made.
2. There are 52 letters in this book, 52 weeks in a year, read one per week.
3. Feel free to randomly flip to a letter and read that one letter you stumble upon.
4. We have provided a subject index with a variety of topics this book covers. Look up what subjects you are currently dealing with in life and read those letters first. (*See Topical Guide*)

That's still a lot of work...

Well let's make it simple. First, make a decision. Here and now. You have free will. No one is forcing you, but after you hear about this you have no excuse. You can no longer say you didn't know better. You cannot say you are no longer loved or no one cares about you. Give this a shot. For the next 52 weeks or less, take this journey with us.

I want you to write your name and sign the bottom of the following statement if you are courageous enough.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is fear present but moving forward in spite of it.

I, _____, make a decision to commit and read this book for the next 52 weeks or less. I will read at least one letter per week and reflect on this letter. If I miss any reading, I will pick up where I left off, feel no guilt, and continue on with my journey. I will have no excuses for not finishing this book. I will learn from this book. I will gain knowledge from this book. I will be changed by this book for the better.

I will process each letter. I will ask what needs to be revealed to me about myself. I will seek the hidden truths that are locked in me, and knock on the doors of development to be a better me by facing who I am.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Great! Now let's begin.

I encourage you to keep a journal handy to write down some thoughts and ideas as you read through these letters. Please note, if after you read any of these letters, and are moved by any of them, I encourage two things.

1. There is another gift for you at the end of this book and you can go to it at any time during this journey together. Please do not skip this part of the book. (See page 171)
2. I encourage you to read all of these letters, whether you hop to the back of the book because you were moved to skip there, or reach it by reading chronologically. There are truths to unlock in each letter and things to gain from each author.

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TOPICAL GUIDE

This book is one that covers many subjects and topics. The letters are categorized and the 3 primary subjects addressed have been identified. These can be found at the bottom of each letter. Included are up to 3 more secondary subjects per letter.

The letters are diverse, and have been given categories based upon the amount of content devoted to a specific topic. For example, John's letter is 45% personal development, 45% relationships, and 10% depression in regards to topics addressed. Those 3 areas are his categories and you can find his letter based on those subjects, as well as any additional secondary topics.

The below outlines the broad topics used to categorize the content, along with the subtopics. As the reader, you may jump to a specific section if you choose. I hope the letters you need to read find you with simplicity as you read this book. Please find the topics and page numbers listed below.

Abandonment

1

Abortion

57

Abuse (*cutting, financial, physical, self, sexual, verbal - see also Sex and Sexuality*)

49, 57, 76, 136, 155

Acceptance & Identity

(*insecurity, popularity, rejection, temptation, weight, worthiness, self-image*)

12, 22, 26, 28, 31, 35, 38, 41, 43, 46, 49, 54, 65, 67, 76, 82, 85, 89, 94, 103, 109, 113, 123, 136, 141, 160, 165

Alcohol & Drugs

8, 57, 80, 97, 100, 106, 109, 155

Emotions & Healing (*depression, fear, hurt, healing, love, selfishness, shame, stubbornness*)

15, 26, 31, 38, 41, 43, 46, 52, 57, 65, 67, 72, 76, 89, 123, 127, 133, 136, 141, 147, 160, 165, 167

Mental Illness & Disorders

123, 155

Personal Development

1, 4, 8, 12, 46, 62, 70, 85, 119, 130, 136, 141, 147, 151, 167

Pray, Study & Worship

17, 19, 35, 52, 54, 76, 82, 85, 97, 109, 115, 130, 133, 143, 147

Purpose & Destiny (*general concepts, gifts, talents*)

1, 4, 8, 22, 26, 31, 35, 49, 62, 67, 70, 85, 89, 97, 109, 119, 133, 160

Race

28, 127

Relationships (*dating, family, friends, peers, God, mentor, parents*)

1, 4, 12, 15, 17, 22, 26, 28, 31, 35, 41, 43, 52, 67, 70, 72, 76, 80, 82, 97, 100, 103, 106, 109, 113, 119, 123, 127, 130, 133, 136, 141, 143, 147, 151, 155, 160, 165, 167

Salvation

8, 72

Sex & Sexuality (*abstinence, rape, homosexuality, lust, pornography, virginity*)

8, 15, 17, 28, 38, 43, 54, 57, 62, 80, 85, 94, 100, 103, 106, 127, 133, 143, 151

Spiritual Warfare (*mental*)

85, 94, 115, 127

Submission

19, 26, 89, 113, 115

Suicide

65, 82, 109, 127, 136

Last Note...

People are expecting you *not* to read this book. They are expecting you to fail and not complete it if you even start. I, along with every author in this book, believe you can, and will start and finish this book.

People say you're a generation that doesn't have patience, doesn't like to read. My friends, my team says you are scholars and not only readers, but also writers. We say you are doers, finishers, and strong in all that you do.

So, with both sides believing what we do, it is up to you whose side you choose to belong to. Be encouraged, the vision of you finishing this book has already been planted and lives.

Talk soon & God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Garcia', written in a cursive style.

Matthew Garcia

*What would you do
if you knew then,
what you know now?*



Dear Youthful Me (age 19–20),

Feelings of being alone and abandoned have taken over the sense of what is going on around you. You feel like no one understands you. You feel as if life has tossed you this way and that way and you no longer can stand.

I am here to bring to you strength with my words. Power lies within you that you don't even realize exists. Men will cheat, you will move on. People who are close to you will lie, you will move on. It will seem like you have nothing, but in reality everything you ever needed lies within the palm of your hand. The God that you serve hears your cries. He waits for the moment when you realize that nothing else in this world of sin can truly help you.

I stand right now bringing truth and understanding that what you are facing now is just a test of how faithful to God you are. Do not be afraid. Call on Him, your heavenly Father. He is waiting for you. Your friends cannot save you, but He can. Your friends cannot take away the hurt, but He can. You will not find satisfaction in the "relationships" you hold with those men who continue to lie and cheat and steal your joy, but you will find it in Him.

You struggle with feelings of indecisiveness as to what your future holds. Why are you concerned? God knows exactly where you are going and exactly what you will do. He wants to help you. He loves you so much that even when you find yourself straying away from Him, He knows that the faith He has provided in you—combined with the mercy He has for you—will lead you back. But He waits for you. Call out to Him and listen as He speaks.

I am familiar with the pressures of trying to fit in with the crowd. I am familiar with the pressures of pleasing your parents. I am familiar with the pressures of doing well in school. I am familiar with the pressures of making enough money to survive in a world

that is so expensive. I am here to tell you that the strength and the courage that you will need to face all of life's turmoil lies within you.

The heavy heart that resides within you can be lightened if you just talk to Him. He knows everything that you will ever want and need, but needs for you to realize that He is the only one that can give it to you when He wants you to have it. He loves you more than you could ever imagine. He hears you and understands you. Listen to Him.

My prayer for you...

Dear Heavenly Father, Most High, we love you. We know that you are all-powerful and we thank you for your love. We know that in your sight we are nothing, but dirty humans striving to be more like you in this world full of sin and wickedness. We thank you for your tender mercy.

I come to you, Father, praying for young Aleisha who struggles with feelings of being alone and abandoned. She struggles to find her place in life and identify which direction she should go. I pray, Lord, that you open her heart so that she may love how you want her to love. I pray, Lord, that you open her eyes so that she may see the things you want her to see. I pray, Lord, that you may open her ears that she may hear the things you want her to hear. For you know, Lord, that the devil attacks in all ways, shapes, and forms. Give her the intuition to know what is of You. Give her the strength to stand when she feels she is going to fall. Help her to understand that everything she could ever want and need lies within you, Lord.

Teach her to love through the adversity she faces. Teach her to love through the pain that is built up within her heart. Teach her to know that her path is already written by You and all she has to do is seek You and follow. I ask right now, Father, that you come into her heart, capture her mind, and take control of her spirit for she yearns for your strength and power over her life.

This I ask in Jesus' precious and holy name. Amen.

Aleisha M. Lander, age 23

ABOUT ME

I am a graduate student studying Clinical Psychology with a concentration in marriage and family therapy. I am one whom I feel has gone through almost everything and still I rely on God for strength, guidance, and direction. I never thought I would be where I am today. All I can do is thank God for everything.

I wanted to be a part of this project because I feel that when I was younger, if I had someone to pour strength, direction, and love into me, I would have been in a better place emotionally back then. But I also think that God let me go through certain things in my life so that I may know where my strength lies. I am very strong today because of the strength that was uncovered in me through my experiences.

I think that there are young girls who are dying to uncover the same strength that I did at that time, going through what I went through. I feel that this project can not only help the younger people of today, but also older people who have not yet uncovered that strength and love has been within them the whole time. I feel like my words to the younger me can help whomever needs to be encouraged. This is the reason why I wanted to be a part of such a powerful project like this. Thank you.



Dear Andraé,

I'm here to share some wisdom and some food for thought with you, being that you're only 15 and a sophomore in high school. I know that there is a lot I can share with you to help you get past and over a lot of the road blocks and speed bumps you're going to face in the upcoming years. Fifteen is an awkward age; trust me, I know. Your primary focus is basketball and girls right now. And you're not exactly Michael Jordan or Chris Brown, so this time in your life is tough. I understand this stress and, that to adults, it seems like child's play and no one takes you seriously when you tell them this stuff stresses you out. But stress is stress and I get that. I know your pain.

Listen, if I know you as well as I think I do, you probably would want to work on your hard-headed and extremely stubborn traits. Even though you're focused on girls more than anything at the moment, you still are committed to being celibate and holding on to your virginity until marriage. I am here to say that I am extremely proud of you for that. You're doing well and I know you will continue to do so in the future. It gets tough (I won't lie), but I know how important this is to you, so I know you'll be just fine. Remember that God never gives us more than we are capable of dealing with.

You're in this phase of your life, though, where you feel as though you have to run your mouth, show out, and be cool. You're not being yourself and you're constantly getting called out on it. You've turned to the path your older cousin took, so now you're walking around campus blooded out with all this red on...stop. I'm telling you now, that's only trouble, and I know you know as well as I, that's not your lifestyle. You're too kind-hearted, you're too caring.

God has blessed you with traits that don't come as easy to some. The type of forgiveness you carry, your innocence—hold on to that, man. You're growing up quick, but slow it down every chance you get. There is no rush. You'll have your time to shine one day.

Remember that God is faithful, bro; don't take things into your own hands all the time. You're a fighter, and if you don't cut that attitude out now, you'll find yourself in a lot of trouble. Don't make things any harder than they have to be.

I know right now it's all about keeping up with everybody—the dress code at school, what everybody is wearing. But Moms and Pops can't afford that. Don't pressure them. They are going through enough as it is. Their marriage is being stressed in a big way right now whether you know this or not. You're the oldest child; act like it. Mature as the oldest sibling, and gain control over the situation at the house. I know the kids get under your skin, but be kind. They love you and only desire to be more like you. So be a responsible role model. They're looking up to you whether you like it or not.

So you've had your first high school kiss this year by now, right? You're starting to get comfortable with yourself and this confidence is allowing you to reach out to different girls. That's cool and all, but be careful. Respect them always, and be conscious of what you say to them. Treat them well. They are young women in the making and what you do to them and say to them at this sensitive time in their lives might affect the kind of women they turn out to be. And it might determine how they treat others in future relationships. Be fair to them. Don't lead them on. Not only are they someone's daughters, but they are also God's children. Be respectful and keep in mind that if you wouldn't do it in front of Jesus, you probably shouldn't be doing it with them period.

You're easily dyed any color right now. People have a strong influence over your life. Be yourself. You don't have to be a player. Don't worry about all that. You'll have different girls come your way. Focus on bettering yourself. Women in the future will appreciate that. I know these girls don't understand when you try to bring more mature things to the table, but that doesn't mean abandon those things, that just means wait. In time, someone will come who appreciates you for who you are at the heart of you, and not just your outward appearance.

I want you to know that you are loved. Not by just your parents and family, but by Jesus. Man, if I knew this when I was your age,

and truly grasped the meaning of what He did for me, I'm not sure I'd be who I am right now. I'd probably be a lot closer to Him and a lot better off. You have the opportunity now though. He is watching and protecting you daily. One day you will look back at all the situations that could have had you seriously injured or in jail and realize that it could have only been God that kept you from danger and out of trouble.

Humble yourself, Andraé, be as humble and meek as possible. Arrogance and haughtiness is not attractive anyway. Continue to build upon yourself. You are probably letting more than half of this go in one ear and out the other, but just know that you can always lean on Jesus if anything. Don't let the stress build to the point where you have breakdowns. Give your worries to the Lord. He will always be there to comfort you, believe that.

One last thing though, man. You're coming into the realization that you have a gift, a gift of counseling. Take this seriously, help as many people as you can, and do not take advantage of your gift for your own gain. This is for the glory of God. Help these people and give them your all. You have an inside advantage being so young and so much closer in age than adults are to them, so they feel comfortable speaking with you. Be responsible in this, and never use anything they tell you against them no matter how mad you get when you guys go downhill.

God blessed you with this for a reason. You're going to hear and experience some wild things, and no one has trained you or prepared you for this moment other than God. That is why it comes so natural and why you aren't fazed by the scary and deep stories you'll hear. These people need your help. Do the best you can and separate your emotion from this at times, because your mood can reflect your answer, and you want to give them the best that you can. So be cautious with that as well.

I know you can do this, Draé . Have faith in God first, then yourself second. You have a solid team in your corner. Be good. Stay true to your character and your integrity, and don't let anybody harden you away from what you know is right. I love you. Be blessed.

Yours Truly,

Andraé Alexander, age 20

ABOUT ME

I am currently a student working on my degree in Counseling Psychology. I'm hoping to make counseling my profession and marry the woman God has faithfully brought to me. When told about this project in detail, my jaw dropped at the possibilities of this type of ministry. I'm definitely excited about becoming a part of this in some way. The project presented a chance to tutor one's self, even though what's done is obviously done now. It always feels great to reflect on the decisions made in the past, and somehow still continue to learn from them this far down the line. These types of things aren't everyday occurrences, where you have an opportunity to sit and think back on a time several years back in such detail, bringing up more memories than you even thought you had at the time. It was more than a blessing on my life, and I hope and pray that it has this effect and many more on the lives of others who witness this project bloom into the idea God has planned for it to be.



Hey Andrea,

I first want to start this letter off by saying, “God loves you!” Know that if no one else does, He does, He has, and He always will; regardless of your present, past, or anything that you do in the future.

Please know that I am not writing you a letter to drill or criticize you for your past actions. I am very aware of how you shut down once you hear someone lecturing you. Up to now, you’ve been a pretty good kid! You could have done better in high school (we all could have done better), but you’re finally taking it seriously and it looks like you’re about to graduate. Now, that is a big accomplishment. In that alone, I am very proud of you.

Now that you are turning 18, life is about to get serious. So far you haven’t had much discipline and you’ve figured a lot of things out on your own. I give you much credit. But because of this you have developed an independent attitude as well and you have become a bit rebellious.

This young man that you’ve been dealing with for the past three years, I’m sorry to say, *“Is not the one!”* The sad thing about this whole situation is you know that already. Consistently, you’re crying every night, fighting and tearing yourself apart trying to please him. I am so proud that you have remained pure until now!

All of your friends have lost their virginites but, sweetheart, you are not holding your pureness for the right reason. And that is why you will give it to someone who doesn’t deserve it two months after your 18th birthday. Your basic reason of holding your virginity until you were 18 years old came March 27th and now that you are 18, there is nothing holding you back. Please know that once you give it away, not only will you never get it back, but you will face a long road of sexual temptation.

You are also facing a big move to LA, but it will not be what

you have always dreamed. The entertainment business is reckless and cruel. Without the proper guidance, you will be approached to compromise your morals on a daily basis. Praise God that you have some sense! Therefore, you won't reach the success level you wished to obtain, but you will definitely keep your morals and integrity. After three years of auditioning and small roles here and there, you will move back closer to home and unfortunately, this is where your life will see its biggest challenge.

At the age of 21, you will be introduced to alcohol. This drug will nearly become the death of you. At first you won't like it, but do not let that fool you. Your friends will encourage it, buy it, and peer pressure you to drink it every day. Honestly, when you came back, you should have moved in with your mom. I know that you have been out of your mom's house since you were 15 years old, but the sorority house you're living in now is too much for you. You'll get a job, a good one. They'll work you like a slave, but you'll meet a great guy and eventually move into your own apartment with him. Know that the drinking has and will become worse as time progresses.

After three months of living with this young man, things seem to be going great until you get news that his woman on the side, whom you knew nothing about, is pregnant with his first baby. Unfortunately, your biggest strength is also your biggest weakness and that is your loyalty. You will try to be there for him and his new child, but you will be very depressed! Feeling used and mistreated, you turn to alcohol on a consistent basis and begin to seek pleasure elsewhere. Hanging with your girls and creating an alter ego will be your emotional high for the next year.

Because the drinking has gotten worse and so have your absences at work, you lose your job and obtain a D.U.I. in the process. You appear in court one time, never show up to an Alcohol Anonymous class, and continue drinking for the next year. All of this has happened and you are only 22 years old. The following year you obtain your second D.U.I., and the judge slams you with nearly \$7,000 in total fines, classes, and tickets. Your lease is up and you and the gentleman you were with decide to go your separate ways. Even in this, some way you still have hope and can smile sometimes throughout your day.

Okay, 2 failed relationships, a failed career, no college education, and 2 D.U.I.'s under your belt at the age of 23. Sounds wonderful. You move back home with mom and begin attending church. Yes, you attend church! And you actually like it. The pastor reveals to you that Jesus Christ is Lord and forgives each of us of our sins. He asks, "Have you accepted Christ into your life? If you want, you are able to make everything right with God and start over." Those words are what turn your life around, "*Start over.*" You accept Christ and began to attend church consistently. You'll battle with your mind continuously and old friends will try to convince you to stay in your old ways, but as hard as it'll be, through Christ your mind will be renewed.

You will meet an awesome male friend who offers to help you enter school and show you what the world of education can offer. He also introduces you to a new church, Abundant Living, and that is where you'll connect and become a life member. God will reveal to you a new life, full of light and second chances. You complete your D.U.I. classes and pay your fines monthly.

Although your friend will leave to another state, Christ will continue to guide you along this new journey. You'll meet awesome new friends and help a few of your old friends to come to Christ as well. Many will be amazed at what God has done for you and also challenge your faith in Christ. But every day you will prove to them how awesome God is.

See, sweetie, I want you to know that you're going to face many challenges, but that the enemy won't keep you down. You may not know that the Lord had His hand on you your whole life, but He did. In your alcoholism, you could have died, you could have gotten pregnant during your premarital relationships, you could have not graduated from high school or been eligible to attend college, and worst of all God could have allowed you to stay lost and left in the dark. He loves you, Andrea.

By the age of 26, you will have consistently served the Lord since September 8, 2009. Not only has Christ renewed your inner self, but your outer self as well. It will be almost your third year since you've

drank alcohol, had premarital sex, used foul language, and many more beautiful continued changes.

I am proud of the woman you have become. Continue to serve Him and give Him all of your praise. He will forever stay faithful to you! But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—*"It is by grace you have been saved."* Ephesians 2:4–5

Love God and your new self!

Andrea Ma Gee, age 26

ABOUT ME

I am a resident of California and am attending college. Not only have I been blessed with the opportunity to go back to school, I also am an employee of the institution as well.

I pray to one day utilize my degree in a start-up company whose mission I believe in. More importantly, if it's in God's will, I want to connect broken relationships to the healing of Christ. I have a heart for young girls who don't know their role or worth in this world. With the Lord's help, I would love to encourage them.

I partook in this protect because I believe in giving back and molding the next generation. Delivering truth to the lost and watching lives change is the biggest blessing I've witnessed to date. I pray that I am able to witness more souls to come to Christ and I know this project is well on its way. It is not about us, but about the Lord and His promise. I believe in the message. *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is about the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18*



Andrea,

First things first—you won't be awkward-looking much longer and you will eventually find flattering jeans (though at this point you do not yet know that all your jeans are ill-fitting). Wardrobe improvements come with the times, but not everything is that way. Because of this, I have three main points you need to hear. You're not going to be thrilled about what follows, but bear with me.

Love your parents even when it hurts to do so. Love them when you're angry with them. Love them when they make you so upset that crying is your only reaction. Love them fiercely and make sure they are completely aware of it because they love you so much more intensely than your young self can imagine. Be kind to them always, even when they're not kind to you. You're not going to like it, but you need to understand that they are people just like you who need to know they're not doing everything wrong. Don't be so hard on them. There will be plenty of times when you'll want to tell them all the things you don't like about their parenting techniques, but don't jump at every opportunity. They are capable of feeling sad, discouraged, lonely, and inadequate. I urge you to make an effort to get to know them as people, not just as parents and authority figures. There is a disconnect between you and your parents that can only be solved by two things: understanding them and forgiving them. If you want them to be mindful of how they make you feel, you have to be aware of how you make them feel. If you want them to understand you, you have to understand them. You may not feel that they deserve your kindness and patience, but that is because you don't understand that they are one of God's most gracious blessings to you. Love them while they are within reach.

Don't shrug off constructive criticism, even when it seems more critical than constructive. Your friends have good reason when they tell you that you are self-righteous, though you don't see it yet. Your judgmental demeanor is unintentional, I know, but

understand that it will cost you relationships you thought you'd have for a long time.

You don't have to make sure people are completely aware of all the things you do for them. It is wonderful that you're a good kid who isn't influenced by your peers, but you don't have to go out of your way to make that known. Let your actions speak for themselves, and also be aware of how your actions are interpreted. You lack humility, plain and simple, so don't wait until you're shamed into being humble. Examine your actions and words, and don't forget that you are not the one to be making the most of yourself. Decrease so that Christ may increase. Don't focus so much on what people are or are not doing for you, but instead focus on how you can be Christ-like for others. Your peers are hurting and they need to hear about your hope, not about how you've been wronged. Seek Christ.

There is no shortage of newness in this life, which means that growth is possible and necessary. Don't think that you're done being worked on, for the refining has just begun. When complacency hits—and it most certainly will—run after God and seek to know everything He is and everything you are through Him. Seek to know the character of the Father and chase after Him with all you are. It is only through God that you will find your purpose and a life worth living. Understand that your identity is found in Christ. Don't let this be only head knowledge and not heart knowledge. If you don't know the One whom your identity is in, how will you know who you are supposed to be? You will have doubts, hard questions, and times of complete apathy, but cling to Christ.

You only have things to gain.

Andrea Celeste Pérez, age 20

ABOUT ME

I am an English student at the University of La Verne and entering my final year of my undergraduate career. I am in the process of figuring out the next step: graduate school or the work force. I hope to one day teach at a university where I will have the world's most perfect job. There I will have the opportunity to foster a love for learning in young adults and write to my heart's content.

For some time I have been aware of the forgetfulness that each person experiences when it comes to recalling what a younger age was like. We have a tendency to trivialize the problems of others because, compared to the "real" problems we face, they seem to be incredibly insignificant. I think we're all guilty of rolling our eyes at younger people. The thing is, something that is moving, life-altering, and earth-shattering to someone in their early or mid-teens will not be the same to someone who is only a few years older. Being a 20 something is so much different than being a kid in junior high or high school. Trying to remember exactly how it was when I was a teenager was pretty difficult and, though it was only a few years ago, the difference between then and now is like night and day.

I feel that I have grown a great deal in the past few years. I am pleased with the person I am becoming, but I still feel that I can learn from younger versions of myself. 15-year-old Andrea might be able to teach me a lesson. 12-year-old Andrea could teach me plenty of lessons. There is a great need for the gaps between age groups to be bridged and I hope this project is a step forward.



Dear Aneasha,

You are 19 and about to change how you will act toward guys forever after this year. I wish I could tell you that even though you may love your best friend, and truly feel like he feels the same because of all of the things that he says and does, it never happens.

From here on out you really don't show emotions for any guy. You may secretly be attracted, or very interested, but because of the way things ended with your best friend and how hurt you were, you won't. You would rather keep it inside.

I wish so much that I could tell you just to stop even liking him right now because you will spend the next 7 years off and on still liking him. You do end up talking to other people throughout the years, but none of them work out.

You talk to a guy in college and you have the best conversations online, but in person you guys really had nothing to say. The good thing is he was a heavy drinker and you wouldn't have dated him anyway. (I'm very proud that we didn't.)

About a year later you get back with the ex after 7 years apart. The only reason is because you know he has loved you since high school. It ends after 2 months because he is a habitual liar, lived too far away, and wasn't coming back to California like he said. But again, I'm proud that we didn't force a bad relationship.

You used to think one day you would still marry the best friend, but after some time you knew it wasn't going to happen. Actually, yesterday he got engaged. I'm very happy for him. He really deserves the best.

The Lord has really protected your heart from a lot of hurt. Don't worry you will make it out safe, still a virgin, and still haven't kissed

anyone. Although you did have the opportunity, you didn't let it just be a careless act.

You're still single, but actually happy about it because you know that God will bless you with the best because you love Him and waited.

God is good. Make sure you never forget that. I love you more now than I did when I was your age. Be strong and trust God. He is never failing and your true love!

Sincerely,

Aneasha DeJurnett, age 28

ABOUT ME

I'm an artist for the Lord aspiring to be everything God has called me to be through my creativity. I wanted to be a part of this because I know that people sharing the things they have been through helps others who think they are the only ones going through their situation to see they aren't alone and they will make it through.



Dear Anthony at age 20,

I want you to know that you have to stay in the word of God and not take church as something that is light-hearted and not serious. People will try to influence you to do things you don't want to do. By staying strong in the word of God, you are confident in the promises the Lord has for you.

Remember to pray for friends who share your faith and belief in God. It's good to have other brothers and sisters in the Lord who can support you in your walk.

Remember to live and stay pure. Friends and young women will try to influence you to live like them. By abstaining from sex, you can enjoy the true pleasure of being with your wife without fighting sexual images from past experience. Staying pure will help you through your journey in life. It will be hard and challenging, but rely on the Holy Spirit. Don't rely on your ability, but His and His guidance.

Learn to spend time with God in His word and prayer. You can have a better relationship with the Lord at a young age. You can become sensitive to His leading. This will help you avoid unnecessary damage.

Love,

Anthony Fletcher, age 34

ABOUT ME

I currently teach a young adult bible study. I work as a freelance contractor in television production. I'm currently in school pursuing a Master's degree in Public Administration. I had to take the time to help the next generation make better decisions and trust God. The next generation will encounter the same tricks of the enemy, greater hurdles, and land mines that I didn't have to face. This is a chance to empower the next generation with real-life examples on how God's plan is the best plan for your life.



To Anthony, My Better Half at Age 21,

The reason I call you “My Better Half” is because what I’m about to share with you, I pray you make it personal. If you truly receive what I’m about to tell you, you will be better off than I am now—so please listen.

The first thing I want to say to you is this: Christianity isn’t about religion. It isn’t about speaking “Christianese,” saying a few hallelujahs, or only acknowledging God on Sunday morning. Christianity is a relationship! Right now, you’re walking around, wandering through life with an empty heart because you only know of God, but you don’t truly know Him. There is so much more to Christ than you know!

When it comes to your salvation, yes, Jesus saved you from an eternity in Hell. But He also suffered and willingly died for you for a much greater reason—that you would be reunited with Him in an intimate relationship. The same intimacy He shared with Adam in the Garden, as He held him and breathed into his lifeless body the Breath of Life. Even though you accepted Christ, you’re still walking around lifeless and empty because you are missing out on the relationship part of what your faith is built upon.

In *1 Thessalonians 5:9–10* (New King James Version), Paul says this: *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*

God doesn’t want to give you a ticket to Heaven and walk away from your life and just wait until you get there. That wasn’t enough for Him! He loves you so much that He wants more of you! He wants all of you!

He wants to be involved in your life—now! I know you desire to be happy. I know that you are empty and that you desire to be loved

by someone. I know you want to be fathered and desire as well, to be loved by a woman, a wife who will care for your heart. All these things are beautiful, but they are absolutely nothing compared to the love of Christ that He so desperately wants to pour into you!

If you look throughout scripture, Christ lets you know how much He loves you. In *Jeremiah 1:5* (The Message Bible), God tells us: *Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day I had holy plans for you....*

Later on in *Jeremiah 29:11–13* (The Message Bible), He also tells us this: *I know what I am doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I will listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I will make sure you won't be disappointed.*

When I..when you read this, there is absolutely no doubt, you are loved! Seek God with everything in you. There is so much He wants to show you! *Jeremiah 33:3* (New King James Version) God says: *Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know!*

To build your relationship with God seek Him.

- Prayer—Speak to God and also take time to let Him respond.
- Worship—Find intimate worship songs, play them in a room where you can be alone with God, and begin to worship Him *“in Spirit and in Truth”*—worship Him with everything in you.
- Read His Word—Read the word of God hungrily, with an open heart and an open mind, receiving God’s truth.

As you do these things, incorporate some type of fasting so that your flesh may decrease so He can increase. This will allow Him to pour more of Himself into you.

If you begin to seek God in this manner (the way I started at age 27), if you pursue Him in this way now, you will have an encounter with God. You will have your “burning bush experience.” Your life will change forever! I promise you, Anthony.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4:8 (New King James Version).

Anthony Rojas, age 32

ABOUT ME

I’m a 6’3”, warm-hearted, passionate, crazy person! (Did I mention humorous?) I work for a distribution center and am currently working on becoming an author and speaker/teacher. I wanted to be a part of this project because I believe God has put something in us all to carry, grow, and sharpen to be used for the expansion of His Kingdom. For me, it’s to expose to people the very heart of God and to lead them to an amazing journey that starts with an intimate walk with Christ.



Beloved Ariel,

This morning when I woke up, I went to use the restroom. I couldn't help but notice the puffiness of my eyes. You know the kind of puffiness you get only when you have been crying the night before like I was?

As I lay down on my pillow last night, I began recalling all the events that happened during that day (which is a normal routine of mine). I began questioning my self-worth yet again. Am I pretty? Am I smart? Will I ever amount to something? Will someone ever love me? Almost instantaneously I started crying. (Yes, I am 21 years old and I still cry at the thought of me not being worth anything or not truly being wanted or loved.)

But at that very moment, the Holy Spirit answered me saying, "No, you're not pretty, you're beautiful. No, you're not smart, you're gifted and anointed. My child, you have an amazing calling on your life. I have called you to do great things and, yes, I love you very much—more than you could ever know!" God always has the words to say to make everything better. He will always be there to pick you up and sweep you off your feet. He will never leave nor forsake you, Ariel.

When people see you, they see the girl who is always smiling, the girl who never has a problem. You seem to be perfect. You are always so happy, cheerful, laughing, and generally having a good time. For the most part, that is who you are. But I know that there is much more to you. I know there is a hurt inside of you—that you rarely let people see because you don't want that to taint the image of what people see when they see you. You never really cry in public, you never really tell anybody how you are really feeling.

For as long as you can remember, you were the one who was supposed to be taking care of everybody. If your mom couldn't do it, you were the next in line. Looking after your younger brothers,

cooking dinner for the family, making sure that the house was cleaned before your parents arrived home, helping with science projects, math homework, or anything else that needed to be done—you did it. My questions are, “Who lent a hand to you? Who looked after you? Yeah, your parents took care of your needs by providing food, water, shelter, and clothes; but who took care of your emotional needs?”

Ariel, you are beautiful, funny, intelligent, and anointed. You have an amazing calling on your life. You will do great things for the kingdom of God. Do not ever let anyone tell you or call you something that contradicts what God says that you are.

As much as it sounds and feels good for a guy to tell you everything you want to hear, it’s not always good. “All that glitters isn’t gold.” You were the kind of girl that no guys really liked in school. You’ve never been in a relationship with someone, or had a “boyfriend.” You didn’t have a date to your senior prom. While your best friends were dating boys, you wished and longed for someone to sweep you off your feet and to tell you that they liked you. The enemy knows this and uses it to his advantage.

Ariel, don’t make the same mistakes I did. Don’t fall into the enemy’s traps. You don’t need the approval of a man. As long as you have the approval of God, that’s all that matters. Don’t let any guy take advantage of your weaknesses by sweet talking his way into your heart. God has the best for you. He already knows what you need and want; He will provide that for you. All you need to do is diligently seek His face, not his hand.

On a Tuesday night while you normally teach a group of discipleship kids, a group of your friends were having a prayer night next door. They invited you next door so they could pray for you. Yes, you needed it, but you would have never asked for it. (Remember it is because you don’t like people to see you weak.)

Well, God knew you needed it and put it on their hearts to pray over you, which they did, along with a very brief word: “*Do not settle.*” Do not settle when it comes to jobs, cars, loves, or anything else. (Thank you, Elena and Matt!) You are a child of the Most High! You

deserve nothing but the best. Imagine a kingdom, a great kingdom with a great ruler that has everything absolutely perfect. How would it look if the princess of that kingdom dressed in rags, was rolling in a bucket car, and just everything about her was raggedy? That doesn't add up, right?

It is the same with you; your Father is God Himself. The creator over everything. Why are you putting limits over the things He can do in your life? You deserve nothing but the best and you will get nothing but the best. If any guy you like is not the possible best, then you need to toss him and chug up them "DEUCES!" He is not worth your time, love, and definitely not worth being with you.

Girl, if you think of yourself as royalty, everyone else will and they will treat you as royalty. No matter what you do, seek God in every aspect of your life and He will bless you with the desires of your heart. Remember, "You is kind. You is smart. You is important!" Just as Aibileen would tell Mae Mobley in one of your favorite novels, *The Help*.

"Sometimes you must hurt in order to know, fall in order to grow, lose in order to gain, because most of life's greatest lessons are learned through pain," Unknown.

With all my love,

Ariel Hudgens, age 21

ABOUT ME

I am currently attending a local community college studying Early Childhood Education, while working at the mall and as an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Tutor for middle school-aged kids. I know that my passion is children and the younger generation, so I am going to school to become an elementary school teacher. Then I will make my transition to middle school, then high school, and finally college. I love to teach. I especially love being the vessel to a child and God. I wanted to be involved in this project because I feel like I have a unique story. I wanted to be used in a way that would help a young girl who felt like me, overcome those temptations and fears and hurts that I went through. I know that this project will help a lot of kids, but as long as I just touch one person, then I am satisfied with that.



Brian,

First off, breathe. I know being 17 is keeping you crazy busy and you aren't sure which direction your life is going to go. I am going to give you some advice that will help you get to 25.

Life Lesson #1:

Be honest. If you want to find love and acceptance through friendships and relationships that last a lifetime, be who God made you to be. Honesty doesn't only live in the words that you speak, but also in the actions you live out. In order for people to love you, be you. The hardest thing for you to do in this life so far is to be honest. You love people-pleasing and telling people what they want to hear. But true friendships and relationships are stronger when honesty is the foundation.

Life Lesson #2:

Be okay with making mistakes. You will make them. Every person who ever lived, aside from Jesus Christ, has messed up over 1 million times. Christ died for your sins, so don't focus on them. Focus on how to become a better man. Look forward and progress as a Christian in order to be an example for your Christian brothers and sisters. As Hell-bound as you feel sometimes, don't lose the fire to bring glory to God. You'll be surprised who tells you they are a Christian because they feel the Spirit emanating from you.

Life Lesson #3:

Be selfless, not selfish. Dude, whenever you choose to pursue your own desires, which are often of the world, you hurt someone you love. As you get older you will see the relationship between immediate and delayed gratification. When you rush for gratification you feel awesome for a short while, but then you hurt or disappoint the people you love the most. When you delay your gratification,

when the goal is achieved, the awesomeness lasts for much longer and the ones you love enjoy your results with you! This lesson is one you will work on your whole life. Just remember, when you feel like choosing your selfish immediate gratification, see *Life Lesson #2*.

In closing, keep grinding. I don't want to tell you what you do or where you live now. (You wouldn't believe me if I did anyway.) Life makes more and more sense as you mature because you are maturing in your walk as a Christian. Keep the ones you love close. And you may want to start learning Korean for future use. Just kidding.

Love you man,

Brian Strauss, age 25

ABOUT ME

From Tennessee I am a Special Education teacher for 3rd–5th graders in a self-contained classroom. I am married to Meredith and we aspire to be parents in the not-so-distant future. If I can be a father who equips his children to be positive individuals who make a difference for the good, I will have achieved my life-long dream. I wanted to participate in this project because as tough as life gets, if you can keep it simple, life will not get away from you.



Dear Sister,

I thought I would write to you and share my journey of how I came to Jesus Christ and share the wisdom I learned along the way.

When I was 17, it was the end of my junior year. I went through some major life changes. At that time I was a virgin, but I began to question if I should remain one the more I was hanging out with my guy friend. As time went on, we began to hang out more frequently and began to catch feelings for one another. We became very close and we were actually neighbors. One day, we were hanging out and things began to go too far. It began as a joke and then I lost my virginity. It was not planned. We weren't even a couple. I certainly did not think he would be my first.

Let me tell you, the act itself was nothing like the movies. No fairy tales or romance at all, which is all false ideas of love anyway. After the incident, I immediately felt extreme regret. Even if we were "in love," I knew I would still regret it (which later I will explain).

When I went to school the next day, I shared the news with my girls and all this excitement came over me. I felt like I had arrived. I finally had something to really talk about. It was fun when I was talking about the deed with my girls. But deep down inside and behind closed doors, I hated what I did and wished I could take it back. Little did I know though, that this was going to be the first of many regrets I would feel.

From 17 to 21, I was truly lost. Guys became my idols, gods. I began looking for love and affection in all the wrong places. I had low self-esteem. I didn't know who I was, and I didn't have any knowledge of my value and self-worth. I was very insecure. I felt I wasn't pretty enough. I hated my dark skin complexion especially because all of my friends were mixed, light-skinned, or had very curvaceous bodies. They always received more attention than me whenever guys would come around. I hated the fact that I wasn't

light-skinned, mixed with colored eyes, and super-long gorgeous hair like them.

When I graduated high school, started college and had my first job, I began to change my outer beauty with my new idol money. I felt I finally had the power to change the way I looked since guys were overlooking my genuine big heart. I began to shop like crazy. I started wearing 18 to 20 inch weaves. I wore Mac makeup, grey contacts to look like an exotic beauty, and revealing clothes and stilettos, modeling after my friends.

Once I began my physical transformation, the guys began to come, even the ones whose attention I didn't want. At first they pursued me, but then I flipped the script and became the hunter in my relationships. I took the guys' job of pursuing me and became desperate and in slang terms, "thirsty." I learned the hard way that my physical beauty, internal gifts, and huge heart wouldn't keep the men. Eventually some verbally, emotionally, and mentally abused me, even cheated or broke up with me.

I was lost, confused, desperate, empty, and lonely. I felt that I needed a man to complete me. I felt completely broken. What I thought sounded good and looked good left me. After my four-year cycle of failed relationships, I gave up. I didn't know what to do anymore.

One day my co-worker at the time invited me to her church. The pastor did an amazing message on her journey to Christ, how she struggled and how Jesus met her where she was at. At the end of the service, she asked if anyone had any unforgiveness in their hearts. On the third call for altar call, I finally had enough courage to stand up. I cried out to God and forgave all those who hurt me.

December 2010, I was saved! That Sunday I went to my church and never stopped going again. I am now free, forgiven, and loved. My past is gone. Jesus' blood erased my sins. I am a daughter of Christ Jesus, a child of God, forever a part of His eternal kingdom.

Know that no matter what society, friends, or family are doing, you don't have to be a follower. You are gorgeous, intelligent, worthy,

and valuable beyond money, materialistic things, and guys. No man validates you but Jesus. It's His unconditional love, grace, mercy, and faithfulness that validate you. His love covers all your past, present, and future sins. His love is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Daddy, also known as God, loves you. (Read *Ezekiel 16* to know my story from the biblical perspective.)

Love you sister,

Brittany N. Abraham, age 22

ABOUT ME

I go to Abundant Living Family Church, and I volunteer at Culture Shock, the young adult ministry. I am about to begin this fall working toward a degree in Psychology. I want to become a Christian counselor to help people have healthy relationships and marriages through Christ Jesus. I also am counseling young ladies like you on knowing their worth in Jesus. I aspire to have my own women's ministry and be a motivational speaker. I want to empower and encourage young ladies with my testimony, as well as write books. I wanted to be a part of this project for those specific reasons. And to tell you God loves you, and that no matter where you came from God is always here for you. God Bless.



Dear Life Changer,

How are you? I hope well. I just wanted to write to you and share some things I think you can use at this time in your life that will help you. I know we have been talking about some of the personal things you have been dealing with lately. And you're in this search of more for your life and your overall purpose. So to encourage you, I wanted to provide some advice for you while you process this journey in your life. But for starters, just know that there is so much more to your life than what you see right now. And you definitely have a purpose in this world.

I want to reach out to you because I have had the opportunity to go down a similar road. I wanted to take some time to help give you some tips. I hope you are open-minded and take some of the stuff I am going to share with you. I am only doing this because I love you. God loves you. God has great things planned for your life. I support you and understand what you are feeling 100%. I hope this blesses you and gives you hope for your life!

I know one thing you have brought up is that you have been feeling rejected, empty, angry, lost, and with low self-esteem. You have been feeling very lonely, even making poor decisions in your personal life that you know you shouldn't. You are very smart, class president, popular at school, liked by all your teachers and everyone you come in contact with. You're a successful athlete. Your mom and grandma support you and most people would say you have a great life. But you don't feel that way all the time.

That pain you feel is very common for your age. A lot of middle and high school students that feel this way, not really understanding your purpose or why you are even living. Just know you and your life and are so valuable. God created you just the way you should be and has gifted you with all your talents, so that your life can be used to bring others to Him and you can be a light to this world.

Trust me when I say you have a purpose and your life is more valuable than you can ever imagine and see right now. Just wait to see how great your life will be and how blessed it is going to be. What you're going through is just a process you have to go through to become stronger and prepare you for what your life is going to hold.

I also remember you saying that a lot of how you feel is because you want to meet your dad or have him in your life. You have never known your dad, but you desire to fill that void and gap that is missing from him. What I want to tell you in regard to that is to let that be your motivation to continue to be successful in life. I grew up just like you and I felt the same way. I never understood why my dad wasn't in my life or feeling like, "Why didn't he want me, but he's taking care of his other kids?" Then having the feelings of being alone, lost, confused, hurt, and rejected by people.

It was very hard for me as a teen, but I learned to rely on prayer and read my Bible more. I grew up in church, but when I went to this one particular church for 7 years of my life, I learned to have a personal relationship with God. I learned by growing and maturing with Christ, that would help strengthen me and help me learn to push through all the hurt and problems in my life. Learn to just depend on Him in everything, knowing that it will be okay in the end if you just have hope, faith, and you believe. That might be the last thing on your mind or you might not even know how to do this, but trust me when I say it makes a difference.

The last thing I would even recommend is getting a mentor in your life that is older than you, has been through some things, and can share knowledge with you. Someone who is living the journey you want to, it really helps because of the hands-on experience. This is someone that you should trust and be able to confide in with different questions and areas of your life where you need guidance. I know this was a major help in my search for a better life and desiring more which I now know was the Lord. I needed Jesus in my life. But I needed someone's help to get me there who cared about me and wanted to see me grow in my walk with God. I needed help to mature in my life because I knew I couldn't do it by myself, and it wasn't going to be an easy journey.

The void, pain you feel, and emptiness can be fulfilled by building a relationship with Jesus. All that pain or negative thoughts can be satisfied and renewed by what Jesus can bring to your life. He can be your dad, your best friend, and that person you need to talk to.

Don't quit. Don't rely on hurting yourself, hurting others, or giving up in your life—because your life is powerful. Make sure to make the right choices and decisions in every area of your life. Because the way you live the life God has given you can determine the degree of how far and how much God can use you. You have to learn to live righteously and always be open to change, grow, and get better. God needs you to help change the world and change the lives of others. You are going to be used for greatness and those moments you want to throw in the towel, when you doubt or worry, just know there is a bigger and greater plan that needs you to accomplish it.

Pray, read your Word, and stay encouraged. Just know you can do it and you can make it through. You are valuable and you matter!

Bryana E. Williams, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am a follower of Christ who loves life, loves people, and enjoys laughing as much as possible. I have been born and raised in Southern California. I am an only child and am someone who loves to smile and give out hugs. I am thankful for the things I have been through in my life because I can honestly say it has molded me into the woman I am today, and I am continuing to be transformed daily!

I am currently a supervisor at an after-school program for a middle school, and coach middle school and high school girls' basketball. I am currently aspiring to start my own nonprofit and become a youth pastor and missionary.

The reason I wanted to be a part of this project is because I believe that this is truly a God-given vision that was entrusted to someone I trust and care about, who I know for a fact cares about discipleship and seeing others grow. I am always in support and agreement for encouraging and empowering people. I feel this project will be impactful for many and can be a resource to help motivate and change people's perspectives of their lives. People can know that others have lived and/or been through what they are currently going through. Or this can prepare them for what could come, how to handle it better, or prevent it from happening.



Dear 15-Year-Old Me,

You are perfect. You are capable. You are loved. You are funny. You are gorgeous. You don't need to change to be someone else. Your quirks make you unique.

The love you seek from your parents will be hard to get in the quantity you want. Don't fret, dear one; turn to God. His love will overwhelm you.

Please, please, please don't give into worldly temptations for they'll only derail you. Stay strong, dear one. Know that I love you more than words could ever describe. You are me, and I am you.

Don't worry about the future, but rather enjoy each day as it comes. Loved one, you will accomplish so many great things because of your faith. However, you will also face hurt because of your faith or lack thereof in certain realms.

Precious loved one; ask for help when you need it. You'll know you need it when you doubt yourself. The easy decisions that you'll make for the next 10 years will be clear and work out not entirely because of your doing, but because you are blessed. I am still not sure why God loves you so much, but trust that He does. There will come a time when you feel like a hypocrite in church because your sinful nature and flesh have led you to satisfy it while your Bible is hidden in the corner.

As soon as you read this letter, pick up your Bible and read *Galatians 5:19–26*.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Plaster the ideals of this verse on your heart. Confess your sins without fear of judgment for only God can judge you, and He will forgive you as soon as you confess. Refocusing your life now will make the next 10 years more enjoyable, fruitful, and productive.

When I reflect upon the end of your freshman and most of your sophomore years of high school, I recall how you were self-confident. Yet a few disappointments made your confidence decrease. Loved one, please know that you cannot change people and sometimes you'll have to swallow your pride and let people think they are correct.

You'll have to realize not everyone loves you as much as I. Loved one, live life by sharing love with those you encounter. Forgive your father and mother for their shortcomings. Connect with your siblings, step dad, and cousins. Build lasting meaningful friendships with those worthy of your time. (Oh, and the two closest friends you'll have freshman year will be gone from your life by the end of sophomore year.)

Apply yourself in class. Collaborate with classmates. Utilize your time wisely and work to overcome procrastination.

Establish daily dialogues with God. I know you'll struggle with disciplined devotions, but your prayer life will consist of daily dialogues with God that can and should begin now.

Remember that you are loved and you will achieve the goals you set out to accomplish.

Camille B., age 26

ABOUT ME

I have met my goals professionally thus far. I am entering my second year of full time teaching and will be the head volleyball coach at the school where I teach. My passions have merged to provide me with an income.

I wanted to do this project because my professional life worked out nicely, but my personal life could improve. Much of the reason is because I lacked a foundation in love with God. I lacked a sense of self produced by social self-doubt. My 15-year-old self began to doubt my abilities to establish and keep friendships. By doing this project, I hope to steer another away from the obstacles that I faced, and still face today, because of the decisions I made when I was 15.



Dear Bright Eyes,

I love your joy. Your smile shines from ear to ear and overtakes your entire face. Your eyes sparkle like you're hiding a secret, and your nose gets these little wrinkles on top when you laugh. It's contagious!

I love how people can always count on you to see the silver lining, even in the most dreary of situations. Your positivity is contagious. Foster it. Don't let anything take it away.

The excitement you have about the little things—corn bread in the cafeteria, freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, crushed ice in your fruit drinks, frozen Gatorade, napping, funfetti frosting, and *"The Lion King"*—it makes you who you are. Don't shy away from what brings you joy.

You have this gift of remembering the little things, the details of past events. The way you can recount the words of a conversation simply by looking at a picture is uncanny. You are adventurous, but cautiously so. Your ability to think ahead will help you make the right life-changing decisions when faced with them. You are absolutely disciplined, people admire and envy this about you. Don't let your discipline restrict you though. You're not a robot. You can say no to things. Practice it. It'll feel natural soon enough.

You have this remarkable ability to look inside of people straight into their potential. You look past who they are now toward who they can become. Those in relationship with you know they have someone who believes in them, someone who wants to journey with them as they make their dreams come true. Because of that, you're comfortable. You make even the socially awkward feel at ease in your presence simply because of your love and belief that they will, one day, "be somebody."

The unconditional love you have for those around you and your desire to go to the ends of the earth and back for your friends—that’s what makes you special. Your heart is so big; you even love those who have wronged you countless times. That’s what makes you unique—your ability to forgive and see the potential in people, even when they’re at their worst.

Stretch, you have all this love inside of you pouring out to those around you. But you don’t save any of it for yourself. You can’t believe that someone would look at you with your chicken legs, swimmer frame, nappy hair, chocolate skin, and find you desirable. It’s impossible. There’s no way that a man would be honored that you’re in his life. You can’t even imagine a guy would hang out with you during normal daylight hours, not only after 10:00 p.m. It’s impossible, isn’t it?

Of course it is. You think you’re worthless. So you accept far less than what you deserve. And you do your best to keep the treatment around. At least it’s something, right? False.

How is it that you’ve come to accept late night phone calls and rendezvous? Now you’re sneaking around? Just for some attention? The dude said he didn’t want to be in a relationship when you met him! Stop thinking you can try and change his mind. You know he is no good. He feeds off of your loving and caring spirit. He doesn’t really want you, you’re simply a pawn in his game.

You keep this up and you’re going to get hurt. And this pain that you’ll feel, it will be so much that you’ll go into hiding. It’ll be your little secret that you’re too ashamed to tell anybody about. You were warned, right? You knew better than to drive all the way out there and “just be friends,” right? “I shouldn’t have fallen asleep,” you’ll tell yourself. You’ll feel responsible for his asinine decision, for his insistence after each time you say, “No.” And that fear you’ll feel when you wake up disoriented and protecting yourself, that shame you’ll feel driving back at five in the morning, will tear you to pieces.

You’ll box yourself up, refusing to let anybody in to avoid any future pain. The protection you’ll operate out of will be destructive. It will make the walls surrounding your vulnerability so impenetrable

that people will leave because you won't let them in. It will take years to open yourself up to others, see the silver lining among the clouds, and find your joy. Believe me, it's not worth it.

You're above his antics and game playing. Don't let him force you to his level. Walk away now before you get hurt. Expect more from those who hold your heart. End this chapter once and for all. You don't owe him anything.

Value yourself. Love yourself. Treasure yourself, Bright Eyes. You owe yourself the rest of your life.

Love always,

Cassandra D. Page, M.A., age 24

ABOUT ME

I'm a daughter, the oldest of four, a friend, and a child of the Most High. I am a student currently in pursuit of my Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. I also aspire to be a mentor and encourage minority students pursuing the same. I wanted to be involved in this project because I wish that I loved myself enough when I was 19 to treat myself like a prize. I felt it was time to share part of my story and keep someone else from making the same mistake.



Letter to Teen Self,

I am writing to let you know that you are special. You are also stronger than you think. You have recently gained a new passion for Jesus and the things that concern Him, but you still have much that weighs on your heart. You deal with depression and struggle to find who you are and what your place is on this earth as a young person.

You may feel alone in your high school, but your decision to pursue the things of God is the best decision you have and will ever make. But it won't be your easiest decision. Some of your family, friends, and peers won't be fully supportive, but through this time God will be sharpening and strengthening your character and drawing ever more nearer to you. He holds you up. Though you may not feel it at times, He is there, working behind the scenes, moving your mountains and taking care of every need and concern on your heart. He truly does Love you.

In the days ahead, you will begin to see the favor of God on your life. You will see Him open doors and close doors. You will learn and see how prayer changes things, how God hears and answers your prayers when you pray with boldness. You will still have struggles, but your sadness and discouragement will only last for a short time so stay strong, full of faith, and expectant of God's restoration and victory. He is bringing you from glory to glory.

Stay away from self-pity and guilt. You are not perfect and will make mistakes, but learn from them and keep your heart pure. Don't be concerned about what the people around you are doing, with envy, jealousy, and feeling as though you have been forgotten; not everyone will see or is meant to see the great things that God has put inside of you.

In due time people will see your genuine heart, integrity, and consistency. You will be a good influence on those who are watching your life, especially young people. Exciting days are ahead of you and

it's solely because you chose to cling to Jesus. You will see miracles not only happen around you, but on the inside of you. Encourage yourself daily with worship and the promises of God; that He has planned good things for you and knows the desires of your heart. He put them there.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 2:17-18

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4:8

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly. John 10:10

Christina Clara Juarez, age 26

ABOUT ME

I am Christina. I was brought up in the church. My parents took me and my siblings to every service growing up. I made my own decision to follow after Jesus at the age of 13. God has shown himself real in my life since then. I currently help out in the Outreach Ministry at Abundant Living Family Church (ALFC). I love being able to relate to and encourage people who are around my age. It is an honor to take part in this project. My heart is to see the Lord show Himself in the younger generation as He did in my life at such a young age.



Dear Cindy,

It's time to stop hiding your pain. You smile so nobody will see, you laugh to hold back those tears, and you keep yourself occupied so you won't have to deal with what's happening at home or with the people you keep surrounding yourself with. I know you're only 17, and yet you are expected to act like a 30-year-old. But if you don't get a hold of yourself sooner or later, I'm afraid it might just hold you back. I think it's time for you to just listen and understand what you're doing to yourself.

You have a job now and since you've stopped wearing the same outfit every week, guys are starting to pay attention to you. You finally went to your first party. You drank, which made you look cool. You have a boyfriend that you just started dating and life is looking pretty chill. Better than what you used to have, right?

Well, you go home only because you have to and realize that your parents are still sleeping in separate beds. And dad just came home with an attitude...great! I guess it's time to go upstairs to your room to hide out. You get upstairs and start talking to your boyfriend and he starts telling you all these nice things. You can't help but smile since your dad only tells you, "You're fat" or "You're useless." Your boyfriend just told you he loves you after only a week of dating and you know deep down he's lying. But you wish he was being serious so you just tell him that you love him back—hoping one day you'd feel that way toward each other. He starts talking to you about sex and you're nervous because you're still a virgin. He finally convinces you to say yes and you plan it out. This weekend you guys are going to meet up after work and just tell your parents you're working late so they won't question you. He's happy, but you're not. You just want him to stay with you and love you.

After a long day at work, you clock out and it hits you: tonight is the night. He picks you up in his car and starts telling you he loves you to make you relax a little. He parks the car and leans toward

you. After a few minutes go by and you gave up that one special gift, he takes you straight home. As you're walking up to your house, you can't help but feel disgusted about yourself. You walk in to hear your dad complaining and telling you how your younger siblings are your responsibility and that you need to take care of them. You think in your head, "Well, that's nothing new. They've been my responsibility since I was 9."

You go straight to your room to avoid the nonsense and you are flooded with regret. Then these questions run through your mind. "How could you do that? You are so gross! How easy could you be? He doesn't even love you!" Here you were thinking your dad was hard on you, not even noticing that you were doing the exact same thing.

The weekend passes and people are already finding out in school. Your boyfriend is acting a little strange. You keep yourself together so nobody would see you hurt and act like you were cool for having sex. As the days go by (it's been one week since you and your boyfriend had sex), he finally sends you a text message and you smile. Seconds go by and your face is full of tears. He just broke up with you, said it wasn't working out. All you do is say, "Okay" and cry yourself to bed that night.

If I continued on with the list of mistakes you made after that, Cindy, it would probably seem as if I never forgave you. The truth is, I couldn't for the longest time. The most important thing is I do now. While you were so busy searching for forgiveness from everyone else who hurt you, you completely forgot about the one person you should've forgiven first—which was yourself.

You want to know what makes you different from who you used to be to the people still living in the world? That you saw you needed help and love, and you went straight to church to find it in God. You went to seek Him and you found Him. It wasn't easy and yet you still pushed through all your past hurts and found love in Him. Even if no one else ever came to you to apologize, you were still happy in knowing that God took care of everything. And the beauty of it all is that He forgave you! Yes, you, Cindy.

No matter how many times you might slip up, no matter how many times you question Him, and no matter what struggles you go through, He sees what no one else could see. He sees a leader forming and He knows one day you will be sharing your testimony to all those lost girls who just need to know they are loved. Remember, nobody can ever take that away from you. You can always look toward a brighter day.

With all my love and hope,

Cindy, age 21

ABOUT ME

I am a servant of Christ doing what I've been called to do. I'm a leader in the church, as well as working part-time in retail to pay for school. I hope to one day become a nurse and a mentor to the younger generations. I wanted to do this project to help those young girls struggling with what I went through so they know they're not alone. So they may see that God really can deliver them from past hurts and create in them a leadership mentality.



To My 17-Year-Old Former Self,

I am writing you this letter out of the love and concern I have for you. At this moment in time, you may feel that the negative opinions of others offer little or no effect on you knowing your self-worth. Unfortunately, that will not be the case for much longer.

Right now you have no sense of who you are or what you want to accomplish in life. For that reason, you have unknowingly opened the door for words, thoughts, and actions to penetrate your heart, giving you a sense of doubt in the small amount of confidence that you have.

When your confidence hits an all-time low, you will try and become a little bit of everyone. Pressure to be society's "perfect girl" will start to infect your mind like a disease, making it the main focus in your life. Eventually the pressure will become so great that you can no longer hold it. You will feel ashamed and disregarded by others. The "perfect girl" you were holding on to will become unrecognizable. Here lies the seed of self-loathing.

My message to you is simple: There is no "perfect girl!" You hear it all the time, but for some reason it is very difficult for you to understand. You really need to get this. Look, you think you will be happy when you're thinner, smarter, move away to start over, fall in love, etc., but when you're waiting on something to change, you'll never get there. You're not going to be happy when you "get thinner" or "have the best personality" or "find someone to love you" because the problem has nothing to do with those things. Even if you do get everything you want, you're not going to be happy because you're not happy with who you are. You won't be happy once you get into a relationship because you'll be so insecure with yourself. You'll be too afraid that the other person might actually see you and hate it. (That took a huge toll on your relationship, FYI.)

Insecurity is a choice. God did not create us to have these feelings. Stop idealizing those situations because nothing will ever be as “magical” as you will envision it to be. Being different is not a problem, it’s the solution. If God wanted all of us to look the same, He would have created us to be that way.

I’m not saying that goals to better yourself are sinful. What I am saying is that being consumed with these thoughts, goals, and actions on how to change this “mistake” you consider yourself to be, is sinful. God doesn’t make mistakes. You are His workmanship. There is a divine purpose for your life and you need to be you in order to accomplish it. I marvel at how this plan of His works.

Uniqueness is key. You are someone. You are a daughter, a friend, an artist, a lover of musical theater, a leader, a personality, a colorful vision and example of God’s love, and most importantly you are you. You exist and you are unique. No one can ever or will ever be you. They can share your thoughts, your actions, your similar experiences, your interests, but they will never see life through your eyes.

You are your own person. Embrace it. Stop hating yourself. It’s what sets you apart from everyone else and it’s beautiful.

With all the love and grace from Him,

Your Future Self, Crystal Irene Ortiz, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am a woman who is just trying to be a *Proverbs 31* example. *She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. Proverbs 31:26.*

I am currently working for the Children's Ministry at Abundant Living Family Church. My interests include performing arts, reading, and paintball. I wanted to be involved in this project because I have a heart for our youth. I remember how difficult it was being comfortable with who I am in God and this world. I want my words to help change a life.



Danna,

I know that at your young age there are a lot of things that you do not understand and wish you could. I know that growing up in a Christian family you feel as if things should be perfect, and yet they are not. I can see that you are hurting, but I am here to tell you to hang in there.

I am sorry to hear that your parents beat on you when they are upset with you and they just do not believe what you have to say. You say that you feel alone and feel that you need to find love and affection. But at your age you should not be looking for this in a guy, because you then just end up heartbreak.

You tell me that you were in a relationship that ended the trust between you and your parents. I am so sorry that they did not handle the situation the way they should have. They let their anger get the best of them. I felt the pain in your heart when you told me that your father slapped you, disowned you, and said he was ashamed of you having his last name. I am not here to justify your mistake, but I also do not agree with his actions to your wrongdoing. I do not understand what would lead a father to send his own child or anybody to go and sleep with an animal (in your case, your dog) saying that you are just like her because only female dogs chase after their mate!

Danna, I know that at this moment you are just at that breaking point and don't care anymore what your parents think. I understand that this is what led you to make your father believe that you lost your virginity at 16 years of age. I want to tell you that you are worth more than you value yourself and you will learn to understand that in due time. I know that you are hurting inside and feel that no one can possibly understand what you are going through, but I do.

I also want to warn you that there are going to be times when things are going to get tougher in your learning experience, but do

not give up on life—please! It is a gift that God has given you for a greater purpose than you might see right now because of what you are going through. I would like to advise you to focus on God. You have grown up in the church and even though sometimes the family actions might not reflect it, yours should.

There is going to come a time when more guys are going to come and make you want to fall in love, but all for the wrong reasons. You are going to feel vulnerable because of the past relationship that went sour, but do not lose sight of God. Be strong and be patient because He has a greater purpose for your life.

You will be presented with opportunities in life that you might be scared to move forward with, but be bold and take chances because that is where you are going to grow spiritually. There are going to be times when you and your parents are not always going to agree, but do not worry too much because your relationships will get stronger through time.

Seek the Lord in all that you do and ask Him to give you strength to be able to face the things that you will go through. Don't give up because I know that you are going to mature to be an amazing young woman of God. Do not lose hope. There is more to life than heartache.

I know that you cannot see the full picture in this time of such need, but just know that what you will go through will only make you stronger—and that from what you learn you will be able to minister to many.

I am not telling you that it is going to come easy (as you already know, it has not been so far). Learn how to make wiser decisions. Make friends that will help uplift you, and you them.

Danna, you have a wonderful journey that awaits you. In time you will see that life is not so bad when you have the right mindset and the right focus. God will be there through it all. Just have faith now, because if you do your faith will only get stronger in your

years to come—you will be able to move mountains with it. Do not doubt it!

Danna Melina, age 25

ABOUT ME

At the moment, I am working a part-time job, and I am serving as a youth leader in California. I am also attending a School of Ministry to gain better knowledge of the word of God. I desire to become a great worship and youth leader to inspire the youth to want to seek the Lord's face. I also desire to one day start a business. I am in the works of starting business school in order to achieve this. I became involved with this project because I felt that there are people who have gone through something similar or who are facing similar issues. I felt this was an amazing opportunity to reach out to them and let them know that they are not alone, that there is a purpose for everything.



Dear Deborah,

I am writing you this letter with great hope that it will help you make wiser and better choices for your future. I know you are only 13 years old, but this is an important time for you. You will be making some serious life altering decisions soon. *The best advice I can give you at this point in your life is not to have any boyfriends.* Wait until you are more spiritually mature to understand the true concept of dating and relationships. Although you may have kissed a boy already, stop there. Do not allow your feelings and emotions to get the best of you.

I want to remind you to hold on to your values and morals, strive to live a life of integrity no matter what happens. Your parents and siblings may be on a different path in life where church and fellowship are no longer a priority, but you know better than that. I understand you are just about to start high school and you want to enjoy all the fun that it has to offer, but don't allow yourself to get swept up in the moment. Enjoy every moment, but don't get caught in the moment. Stop to think things through. Pray before making serious decisions. Remember that everything you do in life has a consequence. Set aside time every day for God. Read His word daily, meditate on it, and know it well. Doing this will give you the strength and power to be the leader you are born to be.

God has great plans for your life; trust me, you do not want to waste any time on foolish things. Surround yourself with good friends who will lift you up and encourage you to be the best that you can be. Understand that we are all human and will make mistakes. Do not dwell on them. If others make a mistake, forgive. If you make a mistake, repent, turn away, and forgive. Learn from these mistakes. This will help you to grow in your character and your integrity to become who God has called you to be. *Last but not least, always be humble and compassionate to everyone, and make an honest effort to be quick to listen and slow to speak.* It is hard to do, but it can be done.

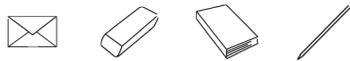
I know that no matter what, you will make a great woman of God one day. Stay strong, keep focused, and be blessed.

Love always,

D. Marie Smith, age 29

ABOUT ME

I am a loving wife and new mom to a beautiful little angel, Sarai. I work as a vendor manager for an appraisal management company to pay the bills, but I am also a freelance makeup artist which I pray one day will develop into my career as a film and television FX makeup artist. My husband and I have recently launched our young adults marriage ministry which I know God will continue to bless. I wanted to be a part of this project to possibly encourage at least one young girl to stand strong in her faith and not to be shaken by life going on all around, as I once was. No matter how independent and strong I thought I was, the reality is I was weak in all areas. I just pray that having simple directions from someone who has lived through it will make adolescent life just a tad bit easier to swallow. I'm proud to be a part of this project.



Donald,

You man of God, it is my pleasure to write to you. I know the struggles you're going through. I'm now 27 years old and I have been where you are. I remember 15 like it was yesterday. So many things were going on around me.

My father, too, is a pastor and he had just gone into full-time ministry at a very small church, compared to where we came from. Instead of being against the decision your father has made, I challenge you to fully support your father. With you and your immediate family being supportive, the decision will be that much easier for him.

Proverbs 3:5–6 (Good News Translation) Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way.

When I look back on the decisions I made, not just this decision in particular, but all the decisions I've made), I oftentimes wonder if I would've sought out God's counsel, would it have been so hard? Being a PK (preacher's kid) is not easy, but your access to the Father is that much more. Your earthly dad is a servant of His. I don't know why most times we don't embrace it, but I tell you this day be encouraged.

Often times as a PK, people expect you to be almost not human. The reality is that it's the exact opposite. Don't allow their reality to be your path, but rely on God. It sucks that it took me so long to figure this out, but it's all good.

I struggled with several things when I was your age, mainly the peer pressure of being one of the fellas and sexual lust. Yeah, my hormones were raging, but through the Word all issues can be answered, and I had my father at home who was totally open to talk

about these things. I usually wanted to just deal with them on my own, which at no age should we do.

The brotherhood bond is great, but we have to watch the company we keep. What I didn't realize was my company played a role in supporting impure things that I would later really struggle with. For example, lust of the eye, trying to get into bed with every beautiful woman I knew and worse, struggling with pornography. (And we wonder many times why God is separating us from certain people.) Be thankful! More times than not, it was for your good.

In closing, I challenge you to not drown in sorrow. You will make mistakes. Get up, ask for forgiveness, dust yourself off, and keep it movin'. God will never leave you nor will He disown you.

Joshua 1:5 (GOD'S WORD Translation) No one will be able to oppose you successfully as long as you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will never neglect you or abandon you.

We PKs must stick together, God bless,

Donald E. "LyricalGent" Montgomery, age 27

ABOUT ME

I'm a believer of Jesus Christ; the whole Bible is my belief. I'm a Business graduate student myself, a singer/songwriter/arranger, and lastly I am a college administrator in California.

I currently aspire to impact the lives of those I come in contact with in a positive way. My prayer is that anyone who crosses paths with me meets a genuine person, who strives to walk in love and understands that nothing I do is for me. But for the one (Jesus) who died for me to have an opportunity to have access to His Father.

I wanted to get involved with this vision because I believe in it! Nothing is like having someone who knows you sharing with you openly and giving you some wisdom from the Word that you can take with you as you continue on this journey we call life.



To my sacred, sweet, sensitive,
most precious, beautiful
and innocent li'l pumpkin,

You trust and love with all of your heart. Your love is untainted, unbroken, strong, faithful, and unshaken. But I need you to understand that there may soon come a day when the love and everything you believed in so strongly will shake the world right out from under your feet.

It will hit you like a brick building collapsing in on you. And as you are there feeling completely crushed—feeling completely destroyed, destructive, deceived, and stuck under the rubble of it all—it will be at this very point of the journey that you will come to a crossroad. The direction you choose will be one of the most critical points in your life. One direction will offer a life of love that cannot be shaken, broken or fail—ever! The other will eventually lead you to that same love, but you will go through a number of different destinations before you arrive. Walk with me for a moment, my love.

When this destructive force attempts to wipe out everything you know. There will be a number of different remedies the world will offer you to make it all feel better. The lie will be presented to you that not only will these things make it better, but if you take “this” you won’t even have to feel all the pain; it will numb it and take it all away. You will never have to deal with the pain ever again. Lies will tell you, “Here, put together the following combination of these remedies, and all the hurt and pain that you feel will go away.”

Let’s start here, our first of many stops. A much older man will come in and tell you how beautiful you are at the age of 13, how “mature” you are for your age, how sexy you are, and how you turn him on. He will touch you in a way you have not ever felt before and tell you things you have not ever heard. Where your natural father failed you, he will be more than willing to come in and fill those empty places without you even realizing what has hit you. Your

natural father will eventually find out and because your father has never experienced a protective, fighting love, he won't fight for you. It won't be because he doesn't love you, but because he doesn't know how—allowing you to be handed to the enemy himself, allowing him to have complete and total control.

You will experience the effects of alcohol, the remedy that allows you to “forget” all about the pain, shame, and Hell that you are living in. You will use it as part of your medication regimen every single weekend until it eventually leads to your destruction. Amongst everything else you will encounter along the way, you will soon discover that adding drugs to your treatment makes it all feel even better.

Boys will enter and continue where everyone and everything else dropped you off. You will begin to believe that sex is love, sex is intimacy, and that your value and worth lies between your thighs. *It's a lie!*

Lies will be thrown in your face continually by the father you once held closest to your heart. You will eventually begin to believe and live them out with the mentality that, if he says it, it must be true. He is my father, so why would he say those things if they were not true?

Your heart will become so enraged with hate, anger, and resentment that your emotions will be displayed and forced upon others to deal with. The lie is that this way of operating is what will keep you from being hurt. But ultimately in the end, these things will end up destroying everything inside of you like a terminal cancer.

Men will become the enemy and you will seek to destroy them and inflict as much pain as possible on them because of the one man who hurt you. You will then let the lies convince you that a man cannot and will not ever be able to love you, connect with, or care for you emotionally. So you will then turn to women as the remedy for your hurt because they “understand” you emotionally. They are more sensitive, compassionate and loving, and you will eventually figure out that they will fail you miserably as well.

Your drinking will get worse, the drugs will get stronger, and you will begin to live unafraid to die because at this point you really don't feel you have anything to live for. Maybe you have never stated that verbally, but your actions speak for themselves. When you are done with women, you will turn back and forth to men and women, never staying long enough to allow your emotions to become involved. You will be surrounded by hundreds of people on a regular basis, the life of the party, the attraction to the eyes and flesh of men and women. Yet you are, and feel, completely alone through it all.

On one of many lonely, drunken nights, you will turn to someone for “companionship” and in a matter of minutes your life will be changed forever. Another crossroad. What will you choose: life or death? The lie will enter. If you choose life, you will prove your father right, that you are nothing but a worthless whore and a slut that's been passed around. But if you choose death, you battle your own self. You would become nothing but a hypocrite, doing something you have sworn up and down that you would never do. It was so much easier to make the statement before—until it was you having to make the decision.

You choose a four hour endeavor that took 20 minutes of your life. Those 20 minutes that you have no recollection of at all because you chose to sleep through it, so you could wake up and it would be all over with and you could move on with your life.

From there, you will live even more emotionally detached from everything and everyone you encounter. You will now begin to put yourself in positions where feelings are not an option. You will become the secret. You will be treated as if you don't even exist and your existence will be for short periods of time, out of the public eye, behind the scenes. Because if anyone ever found out, his life and everything he knows of life would be over. It is there that you will convince yourself that it's the best position to be in because he has to go home to his wife and family. You will move on until the next time he sneaks away to call you or take you out somewhere out of the local city, so no one at all would ever see you. He has to treat you very well with material gifts. Because, after all, he operates in continual fear as he has everything to lose and you have nothing to lose.

This becomes an ideal situation for what you are looking for because you convince yourself that it's easy. You are already going in emotionally detached because you know what you are walking into. And even if you wanted to have feelings, they are not an option—ever! The drug use will get worse. The drinking will get worse. You will party until you forget about life completely, medicating yourself until all of life literally blacks out. You will come close to death a number of times but, for some reason, you are spared.

Why?

You are spared because over all things your purpose remains and truth will prevail. God will be victorious and God will have His way, no matter what! There is another path at the crossroads: Love—love that conquers all, love that never fails, love that always protects, love that always defends, love that will never intentionally hurt you, abandon or lie to you. A love that will fight for you and with you for all of eternity. Love that is not shameful, never deceiving, always faithful. Love that respects you, cherishes you. And a love that cannot ever be broken or separated from you. This path has just one other stop: Truth—truth that will prevail, the truth that you are worthy of great, unbreakable, unshakable, and fighting love. A truth that a man loved you so much that He gave His very life for you under the most gruesome manner. Because He wanted you to spend the rest of your life and eternity with Him! A truth and love that no matter what stops or mistakes you made along the way, Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you and Jesus cherishes you with an immeasurable amount of love that cannot ever be taken away or replaced.

So here are just a few things I learned along the way to pass onto you. Don't fault your father or any other human for failing you in any way. Instead, forgive them. They usually don't know any other way. Their reaction to you is not a reflection of you, it is a reflection of what is or has gone on inside of them. Forgive with all of your heart. Forgiveness is for you, no one else. Always remember that a lie told long enough will eventually lead to a self-proclaimed truth that will eventually lead to death and destruction.

Through all mistakes, big and small, God has a plan even when you can't see it. You are worthy of great love. Intimacy is not sex.

Above all things, guard your heart with everything in you because it will overflow with what you allow to enter into it. Anything not dealt with will eventually resurface with a more powerful and more destructive impact.

I love you and I am praying for you always.

Elena L. Alvarez, age 32

ABOUT ME

I am a woman who has been saved by unbelievable grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness that goes beyond all comprehension—none of which I deserve at all. I am compelled to become a human extension of the same character and love that was so graciously extended to me through Jesus Christ. I was created to reach the people of God so that they may be able to experience Him through me. I once lived in Hell, but then I was rescued and saved to tell about it. I am, in fact, one of the worst sinners who ever existed. So I am that much more honored to be a part of this project, to let you know that God will use everything that has ever happened to you and that you have ever done for His glory. I am compelled to share my life and experiences with other young adults so that they may be saved from the Hell and torment of unnecessary pain and sorrow. I am a woman who deserved to be stoned to death, but then Jesus stepped in on my behalf. I am forever grateful and have been captured by amazing grace.



June 2001

Dear Gilberto Myers Wilson Jr.,

I am writing to you to give you some much needed insight, as I have peered into your life and seen the road you will soon travel.

You are soon to graduate high school, and though this is an accomplishment, you and I both know how well you could have done. To you, however, it does not yet matter because average grades are good enough to get you into a college, and you'll be able to get by on your intellect. Let me be the first to tell you that this is not the case. I say this not to instill fear in you, but to inspire you and spur you on to realize that there are two forces you need to overcome if you really want to change your life and the lives of your family members. The things I strongly encourage you to overcome—and soon—are fear and laziness.

Even individually, allowing one of these to be the basis of your choices can keep you from the vision you have, and the vision you've always had. So let me tell you now that the fight will not be easy. And if I know you, you like a good fight that ends in victory. Let me then give you an advantage that will secure that.

First, fight fear. You are probably thinking, "I'll never take out student loans for school. Look at what debt did to my parents, and the rest of my family! It's shameful." Trust me, I've been there. What you need to understand is that the degree is more valuable than that shame or pride. Don't stay more than one semester at a community college because you may become complacent with the monetary price of your education. Though you may make friends, the friends you will need are down the road. They are friends that will push you to become you, and nothing else. Do whatever you can to get in and out of a four-year university.

Do not focus on women. They take up lots of time and money, and you don't have much of either. The woman on your arm does not determine your worth; you do. Take care of you first. In other words, be able to afford (and be content with) a life on your own before starting one with someone else, no matter how much you might want it. And if you do find a girl that you like (and the feeling is reciprocated), let her wait. If she knows you're worth it, she will. And think about it: How cool would it be to have your own place? It's something you want, this is how you get it, point-blank period.

Now about you, personally. Don't worry about being accepted, and don't expect to be completely understood by anyone. Eventually, you'll end up with a simple foundation that will make your view too complex for a lot of people. You have a very unique background. It's sometimes hard, I know, but you are easily someone who will attract lots of interesting people when you realize that you were created with a gift to perceive what others simply can't. This is the advantage you have over lots of other people, but use it wisely. Use it to build, to encourage, and even to bring a smile to someone's face and laughter to their hearts. It's a rare gift to be comical without being crass, so treasure it. You have a unique background, and everything about you will be under constant construction.

You may not know this, but you can play any instrument you want to with or without a real teacher, and, if you get your work ethic right, you'll be able to afford those pricey instruments that you've seen in catalogs. Not that this is your goal, but I know how musically inclined you are. You need to know that even the best are constantly improving. You'll never be the "next" to anyone, because you are the first you. The Bible says, "*All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose,*" in *Romans 8:28*. And you can literally see that happening. Your gift to see the bigger picture will cause conflict with some friends and even family, but you'll be okay. Just remember that it all works together, both the good and the bad. If you lose friends, you'll find better ones.

Lastly, no sex. Not until you're married. Not even if you think or even know that you'll be married. You'll be so strongly haunted with the regret that you'll wonder if forgiveness for you is real. It is,

let me tell you, but it's hard for you to accept when you specifically are the one asking.

Be strong and of good courage. You are very intelligent, so put that intellect to productive and sometimes humorous use. Your life will be blessed, and you'll know that you made the right choices.

Gilberto M. Wilson Jr., age 28

ABOUT ME

I am currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Health Care Administration and I work in retail. I wanted to be involved in this project after I was given the idea by a friend, and I saw the potential impact that something like this could have, both for writers and readers.



Dear Jasmine,

I just want to let you know, first and foremost, that you are a very beautiful young lady and deeply, deeply loved by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Do not let anyone tell you that you are not, because there are many people in this world that will say otherwise. They will say you are not because they do not want to see you happy or succeed in your God-given purpose.

I know the time right now may seem extremely hard. You may feel like you are all alone and have no one to turn to, but if you just keep persevering and hold fast to the good, I promise things will get better. I want to stress to you how much you are loved because there is going to be a dark road ahead where you are going to feel like giving up and ending it all. I have to tell you that the enemy is going to try to plant thoughts of depression and suicide in your mind, and tell you that you do not matter to anyone or anything. He is going to keep taunting you until the point where you actually give in to those thoughts that will manifest into actions.

So please do me a favor, when it comes to that point, surrender yourself to Jesus because He is the only one who can sever the pain. Give all your cares and worries to Him because He knows exactly what you are going through and will never put you through more than you can bear.

On the days you feel ugly, look in the mirror and say to yourself that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and you are a child of God. When you feel depressed, remind yourself that God will never put you through more than you can bear. A wise man once said, "Our afflictions/transgressions are only for a moment. Don't let a moment become a lifetime."

So whenever those bumpy roads come, and it may seem like a lifetime, take it back to a moment not a lifetime. God has tremendous things in store for your life, so do not let the devil or people deter you

away from your God-given destiny. Keep on keeping on, and keep your head up high because better days are to come. And God will never leave you nor forsake you.

You are beautiful and you are loved,

Jasmine U. Coleman, age 23

ABOUT ME

I was born and raised in California. Currently, I am working with a nonprofit, and I plan to implement a sustainable mentoring program to help enrich the lives of the children in foster care and group homes. In the fall of 2013, I will begin a Master's program to achieve an M.A. in Transformational Urban Leadership—where I will be living, learning, and serving among the urban poor around the world. I wanted to be a part of this book project because I wanted to show/tell young girls that they are beautiful just the way they are and that God loves them very much. Even through the many adversities that I have faced in my life, I wanted to show that you can still come out victorious when you allow God to step in.



Jeffery A. Davis, II:

I am son to the wonderful parents Jeffery Sr. and Terry Lynn Davis. I have a beautiful sister by the name of Ja'Nae, and we have a family dog by the name of Shiloh. I am currently an after-school program leader; however, I aspire to be a professional music producer and youth motivational speaker.

If I could speak to a younger me I would speak to Jeffery at the age of 9. The first thing I would tell a younger me would be, "Never lose and/or forget who you are." Do not allow outside influences or the thoughts of outside influences define who God has called you to be. Remember you are a kind, outgoing person and not everyone will understand your personality or the genuineness of who you really are. On the contrary, because of your uniqueness, instead of condoning it they will attack it and try to cause you to conform to what they believe.

Trust me, there are going to be days when you want to be more outgoing and other days when you will want to just be yourself. But it will be a challenge because your new "normal" is not really your "normal." So I repeat, do not forget who you are and don't lose who you are because of what people want you to be or expect you to be. Be you just "do you" because of what God has placed in your heart.

At times people will make fun of you because you're different; and it will hurt. But remember, people are people and sometimes they disguise their insecurities in trying to make others feel how they feel. Learn how to press through that and continue to walk the path that Christ has laid out for you. Don't stop being you.

The second thing I would tell a younger me is, "Don't worry about dating at a young age." Wanting to date is not a bad thing; however, learn how to live life, get good grades, and enjoy being a teenager. There are going to be so many unwanted distractions when

you are in high school and even in college. Why add any more with getting a girlfriend?

Learn how to be a friend. Learn how to serve the ladies around you. But until then, your mental capacity, hormones, and responsibility level are not even ready for a girlfriend.

Play sports, learn as much about music as possible, and honor God in all you do. So when your parents give these instructions, trust them. They are just looking out for your well-being because they have a deeper understanding of what it takes to have a relationship. They are honestly trying to save you from as much unnecessary heartbreak as possible and with the size of your heart you will want to listen.

The third thing I would tell a younger me is, "Don't fear anything." You will learn that fear at times is running away from the actual thing that you really want. Whether that is picking a college, applying for a particular job, reading a part in a play, or presenting an award in front of an assembly. Whatever it may be, don't allow fear to dictate your actions. If you are holding back because you are afraid to fail, learn from the failures.

In addition, don't allow the fear of others take you out of position for what you really want to do, and what you know you need to be doing. Nerves are real, but in any situation you can either allow fear to overtake you or you can overtake your fears. Trust me when I say this, "If God has given you a gift and you know that you have the ability to make a difference in this world with that gift, don't allow fear to hold you back from sharing that gift and showing people how much you love God with that gift."

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 1 Timothy 1:7

Although there is so much to share with the younger me, I know his attention span is only so big and is thinking about dancing or some type of musical concert. But if I can tell a younger me one more thing, and I guess it sums up all three points I was trying to make,

it would be this, “Dream no small dreams and live life to its highest potential.”

Blessings,

Jeffrey A. Davis II, age 25

ABOUT ME

I am a young man who really wants to make a difference in this world. I had the great opportunity to graduate from a California State University. I have a great love for my family. I enjoy reading and watching late 80's and 90's television shows. I am currently an after-school program leader and a professional musician. I aspire to become a youth motivational speaker.

I believe that this project was a great opportunity to give back to the up-and-coming generation. Although I am still young and have so much life in front of me, I believe the lessons that I have learned thus far in my own life will either allow someone to avoid the mistakes that I once made or encourage someone not to be complacent in the position they might find themselves in. I believe this project will shed light and show this up-and-coming generation that they are not alone. I believe in the heart behind this project and I am honored to be able to share just a little of my life with it.



Dear Jeff Jr.,

Hey man I hope you are doing well. I'm writing this letter to you because I want you to be the best that God has created you to be. You are 18 and a half, almost 19 and I know right now you're feeling the girls, the club, making money, hanging out, and that school is too long. Well check it out, it's going to take you 8 years to get to your goal. Don't get off track, stay focused and you will get there. 8 years is going to come anyway. You might as well get success from your pain, right?

Don't let the girls distract you from your purpose. I know you are finally coming into yourself, but it can hold off for a *MIN*. If they like you that much they will wait and push you to be better. Your friends will still be there and your true friends will push you for greatness, not pull you away from your destination. Clubs and partying are not going anywhere either. They were there before and they will be there after.

You have a stronger purpose than you know young brotha. Don't let what everybody else is doing get you off track, off what you know you have been called to be. It will be worth it at the end, trust me. All the things you dream of doing are possible as long as you stick to the game plan and don't get off track. And the last two things I want to leave you with are this: *Life is not hard, your bad decisions make life hard. And lastly give Christ a solid chance as He is the one that gave you your gift.* Now go to Him to help enhance the gift for His glory. Stay blessed youngster.

Jeffery Smith, age 28

ABOUT ME

I'm a janitorial maintenance worker at my church. I am striving to be a marriage counselor/pastor. I wanted to be a part of this project because I feel like the knowledge I have now can keep young men from making the same mistakes I did. And hopefully helping them stay on-course for their purpose and striving for the greatness God has called on their life.

**1990: 8-Year-Old Jeni**

"Fight the good fight of the faith. ..." 1 Timothy 6:12

Little Jeni,

You are so full of life and color! Mom always says that you are her Jenn Jenn who continuously spreads laughter through the house and desires nothing more than to make others smile around her. Your mother is caring, loving, timely, and compassionate. She loves her family as the Lord speaks through the Bible, unknowingly teaching you the valuable lessons of life that you will later carry with you throughout yours.

You love your older sister dearly and worship the ground she walks on, even though she may never know because somehow at nine years younger you want to be the boss. However, her walk with God will be the forever life changing example that will truly lead you to salvation.

You are attached to your father's hip whenever he is around and love the fact that you believe you are his favorite, even though at this age you really have no idea what that means or what plans he has for you. You yearn for the time when he gets home and yells across the house, "Where is daddy's favorite girl?!" Little Jeni, to you your father is your best friend, your basketball coach, and your everything. You have found your faith and pray daily thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father for the family you have been birthed into.

Little Jeni, your faith is growing stronger and you are grasping to the examples of your mother and sister. You see your sister continue to be obedient and faithful to the Lord, so you want to do the same. You are contemplating baptism because you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior attending church and youth group regularly. However, this year will be a time of transition, valleys, and trials that you could never imagine.

On New Year's Eve 1990, you are home playing a board game with your mom and dad while your sister is away at a party. Suddenly your father can't breathe, as he falls to the ground your mother calls 911, while you never leave his side. As your neighbor, who is a paramedic, arrives and the ambulance is set to take him, you feel the tears stream down your face and you have a vision that your father will not be coming home again. You remember being pushed in the kitchen as if your presence meant that you were in the way and that your father didn't need you then. As they take him down the stairs on the gurney, you run to him and tell him you love him. He looks straight in your eyes and says, "I love you too, daddy's favorite little girl."

When your mother and sister return with the pastor, you receive confirmation that your dad passed away on the way to the hospital. You have no way of knowing that the hatred, resentment, unforgiveness, sadness, and depression will haunt you well into your late 20's.

Little Jeni, you need to go to God, not hide from Him. Your family is doing everything they can to try and repair the damage that has been done by this experience, not to mention the additional loss of your grandfather and half-brother over the next year and a half. What I would tell you is that all of those emotions you are experiencing are directed right at God. It will take you two decades to come to a realization of this and you will have to be broken to realize it. But through the brokenness and torment, God will never leave your side. Even though you believe in Him yet don't trust Him, He will never fail you nor forsake you.

I also urge you to deal with your anger head on and do not take it out on your soon-to-come stepfather who only desires a loving family that he can continue to build with your mother. Finally, your mother needs love more than anyone else and you should be that for her, instead of rebelling as if it is somehow her fault that she chose to continue happiness and marry again.

Little Jeni, through time God heals all wounds and before you do anything—*fight the good fight of faith*.

Understanding the road I had to walk to get to this blessed place in my life was definitely a challenge. But God was there every step of the way. I have learned many lessons throughout my life and I hope my testimony may bless your life and in some way awaken the call God has on your life.

I hope I shared perspective, faith, hope, and joy with you. If I could go back and speak to the people who helped shape my life I would share these words. I have to thank God for continuing to love me through my anger, regretful sins, and disobedience.

To my Mom, who has stood by me through thick and thin, words can never express the appreciation and love that I have for you. You have been a stunning Christ-like example to my life that has directed me on the path toward grace.

To my sister Teri, I am thankful for your continuous fellowship in every aspect of my being. I love you so much and thank you for always being there and being patient with my walk.

To Tess, who was my saving grace and turned by head back toward God, was there when I took the plunge into baptism, and continues to bless my life: Thank you and I love you.

I also pray blessings and am thankful for all of my students, friends, and family who have continued to minister to my life. God is great and I am finally in a place where I can hear His voice clearly.

And finally let this scripture guide you into the call God has for you, others are counting on your obedience.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.”
Romans 12:12

I pray for His perfect will over my life and yours.

Jeni Watanabe, age 31

ABOUT ME

I am a single female preparing myself for the partnership that is graced by God and blessed by His hand first. I am prayerful, obedient, mindful of God's call on my life, and allowing Him to use me for I am sent.

I work at a university where I am blessed to provide a positive transition for new students and their families. I aspire to positively impact every person I come into contact with, pouring into the lives of my students, assisting in their development, and allowing God to use me to help them with their walk.

I am also aspiring on a daily basis to be an obedient servant to the Lord that is palpable to others through how I live my life and by how I walk this earth. I am currently in a transition where I am seeking God to truly come to the realization of the call on my life.

I wanted to be involved in this project immediately after I heard the heart behind it. The reason I am becoming a mature Christian is due to other brothers and sisters who have taken the time to inform my life and allow me to gain a closer relationship with God. Because of the unselfishness of others, I am now equipped to help others with their walk and to let the Holy Spirit lead me to loving and caring for those I am blessed to come into contact with. For this reason I wanted to pour into the lives of others and share my testimony so that God can use me to speak to His children.



Jessica,

I am writing you this letter as an encouragement, to uplift your spirit, encourage you and tell you to have faith and be strong, for God has a divine plan for you. *He will never leave you nor forsake you, Hebrews 13:5.* Despite what people say about you, despite what people think about you, and despite how people treat you, you are a child of the Most High. And that is God our Father, Jesus Christ.

I know you are 12 years old now and have already endured years and years of prior verbal abuse: “You’re stupid. You’re a waste of sperm. You don’t know how to do anything right. I can’t wait until you’re 18 and move out.” I know exactly how you are starting to feel. I know you are starting to believe the words you hear as a child from your father on a daily basis, but please do not believe them.

I know that in addition to the verbal abuse, you suffer from physical abuse. If your father is not hurting you enough with his words, he is hurting you with his hands. With all the shoving, the slapping, the thumping, the cord whoopings and pulling, your heart is torn. You dare not show emotion because then he will start to question why you feel the way you do, as if this is all your own fault. Such confusion to be told how you should not be feeling when you were just hurt physically and mentally. And now he’s playing innocent like nothing just happened—as if you deserved exactly what just took place.

I know that not only do you feel worthless at home, but then you go to school and kids are so mean with their words. They intentionally belittle you to make themselves feel better about themselves. They tease you about your hairstyle, your big bottle cap glasses, dark skin, and your baggy clothes. But please do not pay them any mind.

I know that for such a young child, this is a lot to bear and you don’t have anyone to talk to. You hold everything in and it just builds up and builds up with no outlet, no escape. You cannot talk to anyone

because if you do, then your father will get in trouble. And because of the threats from him, the fear keeps you from talking about it.

You cry many times and ask God, “Why? Why did you put me here? Why did you give me the parents you did? Why did you give me a father that doesn’t want me, and a mother who allows it?” You question, “Does she not want me either?” You didn’t ask to be born. You ask, “Why do kids have to be so mean? Why can’t I be like everyone else at school—either cool, liked, or popular?”

I am very happy to know that you call out to God because, trust me, I don’t know that you would survive without knowing of Him. But don’t just know of Him, cling to Him. Know that He loves you and is with you in all that you endure.

Pray for your parents often, even when it hurts and you feel they are so undeserving. Pray for yourself, for strength and guidance because God will be that for you. And pray for the kids at school because they don’t know what they’re doing, and they themselves may be going through their own struggles.

Jessica, please find peace in your heart. Know that your Heavenly Father loves you and is with you every day, every hour. If you do not find Him or truly know Him, I am sorry to say that you will only begin to create new battles and struggles for yourself. You will now be creating bondages. You will look to people to try and fill that emptiness and hurt. You will look for love in all the wrong places. You are weak and broken. And because of that, the enemy and his deceitful ways are already at work. The enemy already knows what devices he will use. I am here to tell you men and sex cannot fill what you’re longing for. Men will just use you because they know you’re weak. If you go this route it will lead to further problems.

What will you do if you catch a disease or get pregnant? Or when you find out you were just being used? Or that this man never really loved you? Then what will you do? Please do not look to men, as I have already told you. Only God can fix what is broken. Stay in His will. You need to first let Him fix you.

If you let those hurtful words stick with you, you will lack confidence because of the words that were said to you. But you are greater than those words and know that words hurt. But they are not who you are or the person you were created to be. Lacking confidence can hinder you in many ways. It will cause you to not go for that job position in life. It will keep you from expressing your feelings later on in life when you develop a marriage. It will make you doubt and not use your God given talents. Realize God gave them to you because you are worthy of them, and He can use them for His glory.

You are not responsible for the way other people treat you nor are you the judge of people. Please look at your own heart and don't let the hate you feel keep you from what God has in store for you. He has created you with a purpose, and the choices you make will affect that purpose or block that it. I know that feeling whole and loved and pleasing your Heavenly Father is really all you want to do.

I am telling you beforehand in hopes to keep you from all the future hurt you may create as a result of previous hurt, which can be avoided by simply seeking God and keeping your eyes on Him. You were not created to please man, but you were created to please God. Your life is not your own.

So as my final plea, don't take your eyes off Him and forgive those who hurt you. Life will still be a journey and difficult at times, but you'll know where your help comes.

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Psalms 46:1*

Lean on God's words and promises. Keep your eyes on Jesus, even when the enemy tries to remind you of those past hurtful words and fears.

Heartfelt prayers,

Jessica Nicole, age 30

ABOUT ME

I was born and raised in California. I am a wife to a wonderful husband and man of God, and have been for 10 years. God truly has joined us together and could not have joined us together at a better time of our lives. There is no other who could fill his shoes as a husband and a father. I have also been blessed with two beautiful children, a daughter age 9 and a son age 6. They are a huge part of my life and I am so grateful that God has so graciously allowed me to mother and bring up these children. I have learned so much from being a mother and a wife.

One of my ministries that I love and have a passion for is working with special needs children—children who many would shrug off and turn the other way, making them feel out of place. God has truly touched my life through these children. To see the love these children have for Jesus is merely indescribable. To encounter children who come into class with no reaction, and then see a total change in them. And see the joy on their faces when praise and worship begin is just breathtaking. I know if I feel this way, I can only imagine God's joy.

My aspirations have always been to teach, not necessarily to teach in a school classroom setting, but to mentor children, which is why I was so excited to participate in this project. I want God to use me in children's lives so they don't have to carry these burdens to the next stage in their lives. So they can fulfill the plans God has for their lives as we are all called to a purpose. Sad to say, there are not enough unbroken people who take the time to train up this next generation. I pray this project reaches many lost, hurting people. We all have and will make mistakes, but I pray many take heed to the advice and the bad decisions from those who have gone through similar situations before. I have made mistakes, but I know my thinking would have been altered had I had someone to talk to or had some advice to read. So I pray for the lives this project reaches.



Dear Kevin,

I am writing to tell you to be careful in the choices you make when you are older. College is a fun place, but it is easy to lose track and focus of God. The parties might look fun and everyone goes to them, but be careful. Just because everyone is following a trend or doing something does not mean you need to follow. There are plenty of students who do not party, and do have hearts that are right and want that relationship with Christ. I urge you to hang out with these students. You will have more fun than following the majority anyways. Parties are not as they used to be. The dancing and ways the ladies dress are very provocative and sexual. You do not need to be part of this environment.

Also, watch out for the ladies. Not every woman has a mindset to stay pure, and they will tempt you. Right now you are in high school so you don't have to worry about these things. You are a virgin, but I tell you prepare for war. It will not be easy to try and remain pure. Try not to be alone with any women. It will be so much harder to abstain from sexual desires.

Another thing to watch out for are drugs and alcohol, but you never will have issues here. The taste of alcohol is nasty to you and drugs are not appealing at all. It is easy for you to say no because of how stupid it is. You do not need any substances to feel better at all.

Continue to make friends in the young adult Christian clubs at school and church. This will be the best fun you have ever experienced and the best friends you will ever make. I know you like to keep thoughts to yourself. But it is awesome when you have guys you can hang out with, be transparent with, and share whatever is on your mind.

Keep up the good work and continue to look toward God and have a strong relationship with Christ. Be grateful for everything even though it seems like you do not have much. And continue to

work hard for everything. You will appreciate things a lot more than if they are just given to you.

God Bless,

Kevin Mitton, age 22

ABOUT ME

I am a student aspiring to obtain my Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. I wanted to be involved in this project to give insight to those who are entering their college years on what to look out for that can hinder their walk with God and their relationship with Christ. It is so easy to become involved with things of this world, like having sex and drinking alcohol and doing drugs. But everything depends on choices that are made.

Sex is an area I struggled with when I was not living right. It all started in the dorms during freshman year of college when a neighbor seduced me into having sex by saying I am too scared. My pride won and I lost my virginity. After then I continued to look for "love" by sleeping with a few other women, and could have gotten someone pregnant or caught an STD. I never felt that sex fulfilled the way I felt or wanted to feel. I am mad at myself for not waiting.

I believe when I get married that if I would have waited, and even now that I am saving myself again until marriage, I will have the best relationship and sex ever. God knows what He is doing when He tells us to wait. And if we put God ahead of our own feelings and desires, He will bless us with the best everything. He will bless us with the best relationships, the most beautiful wives in the future, and the best jobs.

Do not take your eyes off of Jesus for one minute because then you may fall into temptation and can be trapped there for a while. It is not as hard as you may think to do what is right.



Dear Kim,

What happened?

I know how difficult it must be to find yourself in the position you're in right now. It kills me to see you like this. I'm sure there are a million thoughts running through your mind. Well, actually, I know there are a million thoughts running through your mind—pain, fear, sadness...embarrassment.

The moment Mom and Dad walked through that door, you knew their hearts were broken. I know you wondered what they were thinking. As I see you lying there in the hospital bed, I wish you knew what I know. I wish you knew that it does get better over time. I wish I could have given you this priceless information beforehand, before you took the pills. Maybe then, you would see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Kim, I know why you did it. You were seeking attention from the one who broke your heart. You didn't really want to kill yourself; you just felt that taking the pills would relieve some of the pain.

It saddens me to say that the biggest struggle you will deal with throughout your 20's is the desire to be loved by a man. What happened to you in the past as a young girl has left a void in your heart, and I get that. But you have to let that go and forgive because, if not, you'll constantly be searching for something to fill that void. Alcohol, drugs, and especially men will be your target. I'm explaining this to you because I want you to understand that those things will only be temporary relief. They will hurt you tremendously and leave you worse off than you were before. Don't look to these boys for approval, and don't give in to a slight sign of interest. The type of guy that you want will only break your heart.

I can promise you that you will find something constant, something real that is never changing. The love that you are

searching for will most definitely be found, but just not in a way you would think. This love that I'm speaking of is the love of Jesus Christ. Remember when you would pray, read your Bible, and preach to your friends at a young age? Well, that relationship with the Lord that you once had will materialize again. And I suggest that you stay diligent and never waiver. There are a few times that you will want to disappear and revert back to what comes easy. But I promise: *If you hold tight to His commandments and seek Him with all of your heart, the desires you have been praying about will most definitely happen.*

Here are a few things that I believe you may want to know. Your first child is amazing, a beautiful boy. Constantly pray for him and lead him in the way of the Lord. Also, a few years from now you will hear a term called "swag." Let me tell you this right now, steer clear because it's overrated. The "swag" is usually all they have. Allow a man to pursue and court you. Don't accept anything less than that. Also, enjoy your singleness. Get used to waiting for the one because it will take a while before God presents you to him. In fact, the "one" will arrive in 2012 and trust me, he'll be worth the wait.

Everything will honestly be okay. There will be some intense rough patches, specifically pertaining to your family and even your own health. Stick to the scriptures because they will give you the faith to believe that you will get through it. I love you and pray that you will continue to mature into the woman I know you can be.

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Davis, age 31

ABOUT ME

Being a mom to my amazingly creative 8-year-old son is my first job. I'm a substitute teacher, and also a graduate student. My goal is to complete my Master's in Educational Counseling and become a high school counselor. I'm currently a counseling intern, which I absolutely love. I'm recently engaged and ready for this next chapter of my life.

I wanted to be a part of this project because of its potential to be a highly effective witnessing tool for people of all ages. When people are completely transparent about their own lives, it creates an atmosphere for healing others, which I think is pretty extraordinary.



Whose Plan Is It Anyway?

Yes, you are beautiful! No, your worth does not come from your achievements. Yes, you are more talented than you allow yourself to believe. No, you are not a nerd because you want to save your virginity for your husband. Yes, your mother loves you; she just doesn't know how to express it. No, you will not fail if you stay steadfast on the truth and continue to feed your spirit with God's word, the truest satisfaction!

From childhood I was always told exactly how my life was supposed to pan out.

Kira's Life Plan ~~To Do List~~

- Go to a private school
- Attend college prep high school
- Excel in every area (crusial for the prestigious university I will attend)
- Attend prestigious university with scholarship
- Continue to excel in academics and athletics
- Meet future husband.. :)
- Graduate with degree, job, and engagement ring
- Live a happy life
- Never retire..

Simple. Wait—could I rearrange a few things? Maybe substitute one activity for another?

Oh! Maybe I could do something I actually enjoy and am good at? You know, like use the gifts God gave me to ultimately minister His word? They told me when I got saved that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, so shouldn't He be at the center of it all? Shouldn't we be going to a church that actually talks about Jesus and incorporates God's word into every aspect of it?

And my parents would respond with, “Now, now, that is all lovely, but just smile and follow the plan sweetie.”

Oh...right...okay.

I grew up in a household that occasionally talked about God. You know, we did the same memorized prayer before meals and before bed. Not really talking to Jesus, just talking out loud and doing it because that’s what a good respectable family did. I knew the gist of God (Noah, Moses—all the cool stories), so I was fine really. We went to a church for Religious Science headed by some singer turned reverend. I never really understood what was going on, or why we never used Bibles like in the movies. We kind of prayed, I’m not sure what it really was. We spoke words of affirmation at the end of every service, but I always felt like we were just speaking at the same time.

Well, anyway, years passed and I attend this private Christian school. After some time the crust fell from my eyes and lo and behold I got saved! I was a legitimate Christian now. I closed my eyes when I sang, I quoted scripture, and I found out that the Bible was actually meant for us to read. Best of all, I entered into a relationship with Jesus that would come to be the best relationship of my entire life.

One small step for me, one giant step for Christians! They told me the angels had a party like no other when even one person accepted Jesus into his or her heart. I always found that seriously cool.

Now, when I say “small step,” I seriously mean “small, tiny, microscopic, puny little step,” at least in comparison to the giant leaps and bounds I would make later in life. Although, I was starting on this new journey with Jesus, there was still so much that I had to take in. Walking in my purpose was one of them.

As mentioned earlier, from my early days, I was always told exactly the path I would follow for success. It was the plan and I had to obey it. After all, the Bible did say to honor your father and mother, right? My parents always made sure to tell me this. It didn’t matter that I wanted to sing or play guitar or do design. According to my dad, all those professions lead to drugs so they were out of the question. So I pushed that desire to the back of my mind. I tucked

it away in a dark lonely corner that would get covered by cobwebs after being neglected for so many years. And I convinced myself that “the plan” was “it.”

But you see, the thing with Jesus is that He designed every single one of us specifically unique to carry out His Word. When we are truly in sync with Him and understand the purpose He has for us in life, things are that much more beautiful. Not because we won't experience hardships, those are inevitable and crucial in refining our character and aiding us in our growth, but because we are always able to find joy in the midst of it all and be at ultimate peace regardless of how we feel.

We all know, whether we admit it or not, what God has designed us to do and be. We are ambassadors of Christ each serving in a different department. The key is to walk in obedience and chase after Jesus and, ultimately, our goal—or more so the goal that is aligned with His.

Many obstacles and hurdles will get in the way, those are just opportunities in disguise. The devil wouldn't be the devil if he didn't attack us. When he sees greatness, he attacks with everything he has got. He'll try and tell you that you aren't pretty, that's because you're beautiful. He'll attempt to convince you that your worth comes from the success you achieve, that's because your worth comes from something even greater—the death and resurrection of Jesus! He will try to discourage you and tell you that you're really not that talented, that's because you are so gifted by Jesus that it scares him. The enemy will even go so far as to have your friends make fun of you because you want to save yourself for marriage, that's because deep down inside they wish they wanted to also. He'll try and whisper thoughts into your mind that your mother doesn't love you, that's because she adores you. And when he tries to tell you that you will fail, you will retort right back with the word of God that through Jesus you have already won!

Kira Alex, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am currently working with an at-risk youth as a prevention specialist against drugs, weed specifically, and alcohol. Our goal is to decrease the accessibility and access of drugs and alcohol to youth, specifically in the community of Covina and later hoping to reach surrounding areas.

While my current job is not exactly in line with my career, it still plays an instrumental role in what I want to do later in life. I am an aspiring designer hoping to one day be the creative director of my own fashion line, not limited to clothes. Once established, or at a certain level, I want to create an organization or foundation that specializes in empowering young women who have been victims of drugs, bullying, rape etc.

I truly have a heart for the youth and my current job is teaching me the ins and outs of how to facilitate a program. This is why I wanted to be involved in this project. The youth are our future. I feel that it is so important to reach out to them, to be a guide and support, and to take any chance we get to uplift them. When God has given us a chance to do so, I truly believe that we should run at the opportunity with the utmost gusto.



Dear Younger Self,

I look in the mirror...
 and sometimes wish I were you again.
 There are times I wish my life experiences were in erasable pencil,
 instead of permanent ink pen.
 I wish I had some profound bit of wisdom,
 that would give insight with knowledge nuggets...
 but from my lips, to your finger tips,
 on this letter all I can offer is my heart
 and hope you obtain something of value from it.

You're pretty much hardheaded,
 or shall I say, "Strong in your opinions?"
 So unless you hear wisdom,
 prepare for rough seasons.

I'd be lying to say being a Christian,
 will ensure you to not have any,
 but trust me,
 there will be plenty.

Some food for thought though,
 before you make the hard choices life will bring:
"Be quick to hear and slow to speak" — James 1:19.

God sends people in your life to impart to you and guide you.
 Don't shrug them off.
 Discern by the Holy Spirit what's being said,
 not over think it in your head—
 but apply it.

It's easier if you make this a habit early on.
 And although you're strong,
 your pride will try to get in the way.
 Believe me, listen now, and in the long run it'll pay.

I know how your heart hurts at times.
You pray secret prayers to God about not understanding,
almost as if for answers you are demanding,
to know why things are the way they are.
How you're trying to live right and seek His face,
but from Him still feel far.

I've recently labeled these spiritual fears and insecurities.
Recognize all of this is a world of your making,
creating, separating,
you from a loving Father who's waiting
for your self-surrender
and for you to allow self acceptance.

I know you feel far from Him, confused
because He said He'd never leave nor forsake you.
You try to figure things out when He simply said,
"Trust me."

But remember what I said previously,
"*Quick to hear, slow to speak.*"
It applies here as well.
This time it's "*Quick to hear His voice.*"
Listening to the words *He* has to tell

Okay, okay, I know you hear me.
I'm not trying to preach you something you've heard time and
again. But now actually *do* what you heard,
not just say it and pretend.

I'm trying to unveil your eyes, at the younger age you are
so that by the time you get to this phase,
you've already matured past it,
to lead those behind you because you've set a high bar.

Now there's going to be a point
when outwardly your insides will display.
Just make sure it's positive substance,
not trash, you convey.

You're gorgeous, amazing, talented, and filled with passion,
but it's useless if you don't first deem it true,
within you.

Keep the, "I don't care what anybody thinks about me"
attitude, that's fine, but keep in mind,
it's only attractive if it's God's image of your true core
that you thirst and strive for.

So furthermore,
with all that I've said,
with countless words you've read,
I have just one more piece of my heart
that I would like to impart...

That is, to never accept negativity
when it comes to your dreams.
It seems that it's something
you'll always have to face
I'm realizing
even now...

What's funny is somehow,
that the negativity doesn't come as much from those around me,
it comes from the reflection of me,
that I visit daily.
You will always be your biggest opposition,
so conquer yourself.

Someone I so respect once said this,
"I believe in you for who you are as God created you to be."
So now I speak the same to you as the younger me.
God has called you to accomplish great things
and touch the lives of many.

Don't run and hide,
because that is always the first reaction.
Take time, allow for your passion
to overtake and motivate every desire,
so that others you may inspire,
as well as the person you stare at in the mirror.
Don't doubt, don't fear.

Trust God and *do*.
I promise even in rough times He'll see you through.

I really hope I shared perspective
because it all truly were pieces of my heart.

I gave a vulnerable part
of a place I've grown to be
all because in you, there is me.

I want there to be a legacy worth following,
knowing that it is all to glorify my true friend,
known as the King of Kings.

You're one of the called from the chosen few,
what you do with that call is ultimately up to you.

Don't waste it.

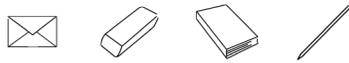
Sincerely,
Future You

Krystle Torres, age 26

ABOUT ME

I'm a dreamer with a passion for music/creative arts and a heart to see people chasing their God-given purpose so they can be all of the "Greatness" that has been placed inside of them (*1 Peter 2:9*). Professionally I'm an inventory control manager for an electrical engineering company, and superwoman. Outside of work, I volunteer at my church and assist in leading praise and worship there amongst other things. I am aspiring to be a Godly relevance and impact to the people I come in contact with, and ultimately on a greater scale, to my generation and culture through various means of music and creative arts.

I wanted to be involved in this project because I genuinely and whole-heartily believe in investing into the next generation. We as people should never be so self-indulgent and naive to think that we live for ourselves. Everything we say and/or do is affecting someone. If I can consciously pour my heart, thoughts, and perspective I may encourage the person who may one day be my governor, pastor, or school teacher to my children. I know then that I've made a difference. I pray that everyone has this desire.



August 5, 2005

Dear Lauren,

Today is your sixteenth birthday and I know your priority is on your sweet 16 party tonight. But I would like you to focus more on what God has placed on your heart to do when you woke up this morning. For this sacred covenant you are about to make between God and yourself to remain abstinent until marriage will become one the most important, life-changing decisions you will make.

I know you have struggled throughout your life to try to fit into this world and have been alienated by people who you thought were your true friends in the process. But you must remember that you are not of this world and God has called you to a higher standard, which is why you must take this covenant seriously. However, through this journey of remaining abstinent you will be tested greatly. The Devil will be sending you individuals disguised as “the one” in order to detour you from what God has for you. These individuals in the form of friends and boyfriends will try to use social, societal, and peer pressures to distract you from the greater goal of pleasing God. For example, you will hear, “Just have sex, everyone else is doing it. Your mom was a single parent and made it, so if you get pregnant you will be fine.” And the big one is, “If you love me, you would do it.” But, what the Devil meant for evil, God will turn it into something good. So here is the advice I want to give you that God has shown me over the years. I want you to grasp this early to help you overcome what you are about to face.

First, remember that friends will come and go, but they are placed in your life for a reason. You should always ask yourself, “Do my friends and I share common values in life?” I encourage you to begin to surround yourself with individuals who will help uplift you and encourage you as you embark on this new journey. Sadly, the friends that you currently surround yourself with will ridicule you and try to pressure you to have sex, do drugs, and partake in

underage drinking. It is up to you to choose which path you will embark on.

Regarding your boyfriends, guard your heart and remember your body is a temple of God. If any man places you in compromising situations knowing that you are waiting until you're married, he is not the one God has made specifically for you. Yes, you will be tempted because we're human, but keep the faith. And in those dark times when you question why you are even doing this and you want to give in, find your strength in Jesus and He will get you through.

Lastly, in order for this advice to actually work, it starts with you. You will need to love and appreciate the person God has made you. Stop comparing yourself to others around you and love the young lady staring back at you. God made you perfect in His image, and He has implanted big dreams and desires that you will one day fulfill. So be confident in who you are, know that you are beautiful (imperfections and all). And most importantly, remember you are a child of God and He didn't make a mistake when he created you.

Sincerely,

Lauren Kimble, the 23-Year-Old Virgin

ABOUT ME

I am a sinner saved by grace that found my confidence in God when I couldn't find it within myself. He has shown me the true meaning of love and self worth. I am forever grateful that he took a depressed and lonely individual with low self esteem, and turned me into a God fearing woman who is no longer haunted by the past. I recently decided to start my own event company. However, I aspire to use my company as a platform to travel throughout the world and plan events for various causes. Above all I aspire to be a positive and Godly role model for the younger generation. When asked to be involved with this project I was excited for the opportunity to share my story. Living in today's society, women are often degraded and feel the need to get attention by showing their skin. By sharing my story, I wanted to encourage young ladies to be different and save themselves for marriage. Our body is a temple and should be treated as such. By loving God we will learn how to love others and ourselves. I'm truly thankful that God has allowed me to take my testimony and share it with others.



Dear little brother Greg,

Hey, what's up man? I know it has been a while since I have written to you, but I was just checking in to give you some words of wisdom that could not only help out with the rest of your senior year of high school, but throughout your college years as well.

I know it has been a long and tough 4 years of high school, but throughout all of the trials God has kept you for a higher calling and bigger purpose in life. I know from previous conversations we have had that you felt as if nobody really noticed you or appreciated you for simply who you are. One thing I can tell you regarding this letter is that you are more important than you will ever know or imagine. God has called you a chosen generation and "*a royal priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:9)—pretty much meaning that you are royalty in His sight and He has high hopes and expectations for your life, brother.

I know that when you look at life right now it can be kind of scary and nerve-racking because you don't know everything out there. But as you embark upon this great journey of life, be prepared for some obstacles and know that you will be able to overcome them.

I know that it can seem easy to get caught up in the fast life of money, partying, and fun, but I am going to let you know right now that this road will not lead you anywhere in life (*Mark 8:6*). I can tell you confidently from experience that by following the standards and morals of the world, you will lose yourself in the process. I know what it is like to go out partying all night, to get home at three or four in the morning only to realize when you wake up that you have no idea how you got home. I had "friends" who often would seek to pressure me into being the one to buy the new clothes, buy the alcohol, buy the drugs, and the list goes on. I know what it is like to feel like you are in complete control, but when you try to give it up you realize that you are far from being in control of the situation at hand.

When you are placed in these predicaments, you are merely a pawn in the enemy's big game of chess. And he only seeks to steal your joy, kill your faith, and ultimately destroy who you are as a person and man of God (*John 10:10*). When the enemy is in control of your life, he wants you to feel as if you are the one in control, but he is using this against you.

I am giving you a fair warning that—regardless of how you may feel in the moment—your life is not your own. It is a gift from God and should be treated as such. You will have many opportunities in college to spread your wings and fly and find out who you really are, but your true identity should be found in Jesus Christ first. In *Matthew 6:33* it says:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

That statement of scripture should be what we base our lives around—not the parties, not the girls, not the money. Because once we give those things up and focus on Him first, He promises to add His righteousness to us.

God does not speak in suggestions and maybes. He speaks in commands (tells you what to do) and He speaks in promises. Please don't get side-tracked by the glamour of the world, but stay on God's path because in doing so you will be happier and find more success in what you truly want than you could have ever imagined.

Like I said earlier, I have been there and I have done these things and I know that it is in not just your best interest, but everybody's best interest to avoid these temptations of our adversary.

From an older brother,

Marcus G. Smith, age 23

ABOUT ME

Hello, my name is Marcus Smith. I am currently a student and a full-time worker, with aspirations and goals of being a small-business owner and future husband/dad. I wanted to be a part of this project because I felt like I have something to share with youth and other young adults about what I have been through—things that could not only inspire, but motivate people to grow in their walk with Christ.



Dear Matt,

17 man, and you couldn't feel like you were more alone. You have a good group around you, but still feel you're in this fight and do not know what it is. You discovered the most beautiful, expressive, amazingly wonderful creation you have ever encountered. And 'til this day you still have known nothing to compare to music, more specifically Hip Hop. So indulged in the culture you too become a part of it. From graffiti, to Djing, to rhymes, you are in love. You have found the best relationship you have ever had.

The elements allow you to escape and be free from a world you cannot stand, a world of disappointment. Hip Hop never fails you. Yes like everything, there are parts and portions you do not agree with or even like, but you accept her for who she is. She loves you and you love her, no matter how much she cheats on you with others. This is where you fall off. You start to get a skewed perception of reality, more so relationships and faith.

Hip Hop teaches you to put up with being in an unhealthy relationship. This will start to reflect in your actual relationships with females. Hip Hop becomes your religion, MC's become preachers, pastors, and priests. Rap becomes sermons, beats and CD players become pulpits, and zoning out to all of it becomes church services.

Let's talk about relationships first. You love Hip Hop. You care for her as if you were married to her. Here you learn to fight for what is yours. The problem is, she doesn't only belong to you. People use her, pervert her, pimp her, but your love is genuine towards her. You care for her because she has allowed you a platform through music and writing, to know more about you than anyone else has ever even tried to help you. As you idolize Hip Hop as your saving grace, you then will also idolize relationships.

I know about your vow Brotha..., "I pledge to not leave high school a virgin." Skipping your junior year, time is ticking. Let me tell you now, you're an idiot. You feel instant regret after, feeling like you wasted your virginity on a girl you never loved and at best, cared for. All your life, every relationship thus far and a few more in the future, you never pursue. They pursue you, and because you have no backbone, they kidnap you and run you. I'm telling you this because I know if someone told me about how much of a punk I was, even if I would have hated to hear it, I would have appreciated it.

It gets worse man, in a few years you meet a girl who you are no match for. You fall to some of the ugliest places of your life. You become distorted, stop pursuing what you were meant to, as lust and perversion consume you. You go broke more than once. And dog, you get pretty fat, like tipping over 200 lbs. of fat. Why? Because you don't know what you are doing as far as relationships go. Never fall for the girls who pursue you, know what you want first and go after it. The only way you know what you want, is to pray about it. What you think you want alters dramatically through this process.

Which brings me to my next point... Making Hip Hop your religion.

Growing up catholic, you feel religion has failed you. Your priest could not answer most of the questions you had and you found new standards to live by in music. You become socially aware and conscience to the world around you. What Hip Hop does is give you a platform and foundation, be thankful for that. Where you get lost is thinking all of these mixed doctrines permit you to create your own philosophy of life. You get lost. You become a public intellectual and because of the scene you are in, everyone thinks you smoke weed. You're a fraud, you lie and say you do to some to get them off your back, but you never really do. Your poison is alcohol, cigarettes, and cigars.

What God permitted though Matt, is a path. He created an avenue for you to find Him at any and every turn. Thinking back, He has always been there with you. He knew where you were all along. His love was patient with you. Through failed relationships and Hip Hop, you find a deeper need for God. The journey will suck,

but becomes worth it. So I write to you because you have a chance to really do better than what I have done so far. God is great and has restored time, but to learn what you have learned He will bless you regardless because He loves you. You don't have to go the hard way I did. The stress, the tears, the worry, the close calls, and the lack of peace can be avoided. You can actually be the man you are supposed to be early on. The choice is yours Brotha, but you need to act now. You have already started with this book and in this journey. I encourage you, read the prayer at the end of this book and allow God to move on your behalf.

Talk soon & God bless,

Matthew Garcia, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am a child of God and a disciple of Christ. Currently I am a student chasing this title God blessed me with of entrepreneur. This book, has been a huge step in that direction. God gave me this idea and it was so much bigger than me, He allowed me to invite many loved and appreciated people to be a part of it. I wanted to do this project because God trusted me to see it through and plain and simple, I never want to disappoint or let God down. I fear Him with all my heart. This fear, through love, not only motivates me, but drives me.



Dear Loved One,

SNAP OUT OF IT! You know you deserve better in a friend, so why stick around and be tossed like some rag doll? You know you deserve better in any relationship you have, so why stick around and be mistreated? You know you deserve better with love, and I know your relationship was with another woman. But don't beat yourself up for it, Jesus already died for that sin and it's a part of the plan He has for you; a part of your testimony.

You've been taken advantage of, been taken for granted, been hurt so badly, and God only knows what else. Now you may think no one understands you or your heart, but God does, and so do I, first hand. I know how you feel, so don't think for a second that I don't, but why not turn to God?

I know what it feels like to be treated like a sick dog or an alien. And the ignorance of people overrides their understanding of anything because they instantly forget where they have come from. You're quiet and you have a hard time trusting people, which is why you think it's necessary to keep this struggle that had you in bondage for a part of your life quiet. You remain quiet because you're ashamed of the past you came from and you cringe at the responses of "Christians" who show nothing but ignorance. Sounds a little something like, "I don't understand how someone can like the same sex, I just don't, it's disgusting!" They are blinded by the fact that another's struggle can be far different than theirs.

But you still walk in love and brush it off like that comment didn't do anything to you – except it did. You know, shoving things onto that shelf in the back of your head doesn't get rid of it. It begins to form dust which adds to your hurts and memories. That dust will start off light and you will not have side effects. But that dust will begin to build and build, and topple over making you sick. In actuality that means forming bitterness, unforgiveness, or hurt.

If you have not, you need to cut that friendship off for good because bitterness and unforgiveness will consume you. I know that connection is something that you've had for some time now and it's hard to let go. But would you rather stay attached to that connection with someone who doesn't care about you or give yourself to God? He loves everything about you except sin. You need to remove that sin from your life completely and trust that God has a plan for you and your story because I know it was one heck of a ride. You took the right step in stopping the relationship to run to Christ, but don't keep that door opened for anything to come through it. You need to shut that door, lock it, and give the keys to God so He can now use you.

You're gonna have your days where you feel like you made the wrong decision with letting your story out. You're gonna have days where you feel like giving up. Heck! You're gonna have days where you miss that person and that connection. And you're gonna have those days when you feel bitter and angry at yourself for missing that person. But you need to say "NO!" to your flesh because it's out to get the best of you and your spirit. Rebuke those thoughts and call on Jesus because He saved you from that situation, and He will come through again, trust in that. Don't trip off of the people who leave you hanging or do you wrong, that's in the plan too, but for the greater good.

I know this struggle is not one you can even accept, but accept that you are weak without God and let Him accept you as you are. Allow Him to put you back together again and build you up like I know that He can. Don't be ashamed of your story and testimony, it was placed with you for a reason. I believe in you and I know you can do this. I have faith that God is still coming through because He was already there before you were even created. He loves you, so take those steps toward Him and no one else. I love you kiddo. Stay up.

With love and a better me,

Megan Reed, age 18

ABOUT ME

I am a young adult trying to make the best out of my life and pushing to never let my dreams or imagination die. I am a college student. I write until the sun sets, I admire musicianship, I fancy dance, and I'm just head over heels for all art forms. Did I mention I partake in these things?

I wanted to be a part of this project because I desire to see hearts changed by the glory of God. I wanted to join in and accept this wonderful invitation because I was uncomfortable, in a good way. It sounds weird and seems like a contradiction, but being uncomfortable in a good way is allowing God to do the moving through us because we are not in a comfortable place. God told me I would be sharing my testimony, I just had no idea it would be in a book, and I trust that He knows what He is doing.



Dear 19 year old Melissa,

This letter is coming from your future self at the age of 24. Wow, a lot has changed in the past 4 ½ years. Although it doesn't seem like it, it wasn't that long ago when I was sneaking into my parents' house at 3:00 AM buzzed, only to wake up in a couple of hours for work. Oh how things have changed. Right now you think you know how your life is going to turn out, but I'm here to tell you that God has a different plan for you.

Within the past 4 ½ years I have definitely grown up a lot and God has shaped me and molded me into the person I am today. The most important decision I made was re-committing my life to God. Since then everything changed. I know you are at a vital stage in your life right now where you have strayed away from God and you're trying to figure out who you are. You're clinging to things and people to make you feel like you belong. I know what you're going through because I've experienced it first hand and I just want to share the wisdom I've gained over these past years. The things I want to share with you may save you from a lot of heartache and pain.

Be very cautious of the people you surround yourself with. I know you really don't want to hear anything your parents are telling you about your friends, and especially about your current boyfriend. But listen to them, a lot of their statements end up being very true. Surround yourself with people who are going to inspire you and challenge you to grow. Never allow anyone to strip you of your identity or your self-esteem.

You are going to face some tough situations that can possibly compromise your morals and your faith, don't give in! Be strong and stand up for what you believe in. Don't worry about what people think about you. You've wasted too much of your life caring about other people's opinions, don't waste your time and energy. Half of the people that are currently in your life right now won't be there in

a couple years. Understand that there are people that are meant to be in your life for a season and some for a lifetime.

Don't mistake love for lust. I know when you love, you love hard. But I want to challenge you to evaluate the relationship you're in. Are you in this relationship for the right reasons? If things don't work out, don't chase him. God has an amazing man chosen for you already. You don't know it yet, but he will soon become your best friend and your husband.

Lastly, stop putting God on the back burner. I know you're still young and you want to experience the party life and enjoy life right now, but God has a purpose for you. A purpose that is far greater than anything you can plan for yourself. Open your heart to Him again and allow Him to lead you and guide you. Be an example to your family and those around you. Enjoy every moment of every day. Regardless of the decisions you make remember, everything happens for a reason. Look upon everything you do, whether good or bad, as a learning experience and use it as a part of your testimony. God is going to use you in amazing ways.

With Love,

Melissa Dorn, age 24

ABOUT ME

Currently, I work as an administrative associate. However, my heart and passion is to work in full-time ministry with young girls and youth in general. My husband and I have an organization called The Heart of a Lion that focuses on children in the foster care system. I am currently working on a clothing line for young women to promote self-esteem and encourage embracing beauty just as God created. I wanted to be involved in this project to share some insight on situations that I went through, to minister to someone who may be going through something similar. I've had many people sow into me without even knowing the impact they made on my life and I think this is the perfect opportunity to do the same.



Melody,

I know you've been hurting. It's been some time now and life still does not make sense to you. You make sure to put on your smile as you put on your makeup, while inside your soul is deteriorating. Your heart seems to be in a coma—partially unresponsive—and there is no doctor in sight. I wonder if anyone sees the emptiness pressed against the very inside of your being. Those undeniable and unforgettable feelings of loneliness—they haunt you.

You and I know that the wound that hurts you the most is the one inflicted by your father. That word alone causes you to feel anxiety. His addiction to alcohol paved a road for you that you did not desire to travel. As a young girl, your heart told you something was not right, and even though your father lives in the same house, it is as if you live with a stranger. On occasion, you feel like you're living with an enemy.

No longer are you a little girl. You're growing older and his behavior can no longer be covered up as easily. You are well-acquainted with the smell of alcohol; the scent is more familiar than his cologne. Your tears, heartache, inconsistencies, and wishful thinking have piled up. You are tired, exhausted, and ready to give up.

However, you are now able to make some of your own choices. And so you have chosen to fill this void with a boyfriend who makes it a little bit more clear to you—that you are worthless. Let's add to your pile of tears, heartache, inconsistencies, and wishful thinking. His hot temper and yelling is comfortable to you. His ability to not care if you are hurting feels like home.

Love has not been properly painted out. You are gathering all the wrong destructive colors, trying to paint a picture of love, by hurtfully imagining from your heart what it could possibly look like. But the problem is that both your heart and love have been

darkened. This is a picture you are incapable of painting. Everything is caving in now, and you're just about tired from your attempts. This frustrating and hopeless task has defeated you.

So you've begun to think, "If this is what life is, then it is not worth living."

Melody, I wish I could have been there with you as suicidal thoughts consumed you and you decided to take hold of that knife. Strategies began to occur of how you could kill yourself, thinking of a way that would hurt the least, be the quickest, and be the most effective. You held that knife close to you as you wept, contemplating whether you were ready to go through with this.

I know you may not understand this yet, but you were being watched over even in that moment. Your best friend felt that knife as she hugged you, and you were rescued. There is a reason why your plans did not succeed and it is because the One who created you had other plans in mind.

Please be willing to listen. I am desperate to explain to you that the color of Love is red. There is a Man who died for you on a cross.

I know you're probably wondering, "Why does this even matter to you when chaos is going on in your life?"

Please do not shut me out yet. It is easy to see the ugliness in the people who have hurt you, but I need you to understand that you are also sinful. This means that you have made mistakes of your own. You have been unforgiving, prideful, deceitful, sexually immoral—along with a list that can be made from the moment you were born. These sins have separated you from a holy God. But by believing in Jesus, the One who chose to die for you, that list is erased. You see, the color of Love is red because it is Jesus' blood that allows you to have forgiveness and a relationship with Him—a relationship that He wants to give you.

It probably does not make sense to you that the essence of love is sacrificial, that it is capable of healing, and restoring you.

But I promise you that you can, and will be healed and restored if you believe.

It will continue to be a long journey and there will be moments of pain. But with Jesus, that loneliness will no longer overcome you; in fact, nothing will. Your Father is a King, and you are His princess. Your heart was meant to be taken care of, and no one can fulfill that position better than Him. You did not know Him before, but now you have a choice of whether you want to let Him in or continue to try to save yourself.

I pray that you choose Him.

You are desperate, you are lost, and you are broken. So tell me, what more do you have to lose? He will give you the ability to forgive the men in your life. Most importantly, you will be able to forgive your dad. Jesus will repaint the image of what a father is supposed to be, and He will show you what love looks like.

You were made for a specific purpose that your Father wants to reveal to you. Do not question your worth anymore. Don't you see? You are worth everything to Him—you were worth His life.

Choose Him.

Lastly Melody, when it comes time to share your story, do not be ashamed. Your scars are beautiful, they will be your evidence that your Father can heal.

Melody Paez, age 22

ABOUT ME

By God's grace, I was able to finish my Bachelor's degree this past June, and I'm currently working at a Christian school. In September, I will be going back to school to get my teaching credential so that I can teach Special Education. I desire to teach within low socioeconomic status communities where students' opportunities and resources are limited. I also serve at my home church, teaching sixth-grade girls.

My heart has always been with the youth, and I believe this is an area where the Lord has called me. I also have a passion to minister to women who are broken and in need of God's love. Ultimately, I'm excited to see what the Lord is going to do with my life. I know that He has a specific purpose for me, and I trust that His plans are always far greater than my own.

I wanted to be involved with this project because if the Lord can reach out to just one person through my testimony, than everything was worth it. My testimony is for the broken person who feels like giving up. My prayer is that you would know there is a God who knows exactly what you're going through and is ready to rescue you too. Let Him save you.



Nate,

I know it feels good to not have a worry in the world, huh? I know you probably would like to know how you are living in about 10 years. All I can say is, *“God is amazing!”*

I know one of the main things on your mind is being accepted by friends and peers at school. Trust me, it may seem like a big deal now, but being accepted by your peers doesn’t mean a thing going into the future. I know you’re probably thinking, *“If only I had more kicks or my own car, I would get way more attention.”* Honestly, all of that stuff is cool for a season, and then it gets old. If you chase that stuff, you will never be satisfied.

You’ll see in the future that being fresh and getting attention doesn’t leave you satisfied, you’re still going to be empty inside. Trust me, those girls that you think are so fine now, aren’t even going to be attractive to you in the future. Most of the “cool kids” you look up to at school and want to be like are going to fall off after high school. 10 years from now, if you stay on the right path, you’re going to be the one they look up to. You don’t need anyone’s approval, just be yourself. Who cares if people don’t consider you to be the cool kid? That’s just an illusion that doesn’t carry any real value.

Also, I need you to understand that the decisions you make now with school, friends, and sports are going to shape the rest of your life. What that means is this: *the decisions you make now are ultimately going to affect how you live in the future.* Who you will marry, where you will live, how much money you will make, and whether or not you will enjoy your job, are just some of examples of what your decisions will change. *Take care of your business! Laziness will definitely cost you in the future!*

Last, but definitely not least, I need you to really consider allowing Jesus Christ to really take over your life—*now!* I know being a Christian is very hard to do in high school, but you really

need to let go of what other people think of you. God wants to do some amazing things through you, if only you would let Him in your heart for real. No time to be ashamed of Jesus. God is definitely pulling on your heart, so stop being stubborn and truly let Him in.

You are going to do some amazing things in the future! Stay up and keep swimming!

Nathan Harding, age 26

P.S. Only when you surrender to Christ are you truly going to be free from the thoughts and opinions of everyone else.

ABOUT ME

I am currently a swim and water polo coach. I desire to impact the youth and young adults for Christ through the many gifts God has graced me with. I desired to be involved in this project because it was a rare and unique opportunity to reach the young people of this generation through testimonies and growing pains. It is definitely an artistic way to pass down much needed knowledge to this generation. We all have the “if someone would have told me this” stories. The project will have a unique balance of perspectives and experiences that everyone can relate to.



September 20, 2012

Dear Olga,

The person writing this letter is you, Olga. Except that at this point in my life, I am 27 years old. Also, at this point in my life, I am going through things I could never have imagined. Some very difficult trials are testing me in ways and areas in my life I thought up to this point were on solid ground. Yet, God always manages to find ways to bless my life and meet my every need. He and only He is getting me through from one place in my life to another—all with a point and all with a purpose. Just how it says in *Romans 8:28*:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

I know that at this point you have no idea what that means. But in time that will soon change!

With that said, I want to inform you of the purpose of this letter. I am trying to impart some words of wisdom to a younger me. So the younger me, I decided to write to is the teenager, you. Whatever age in your teen years, this letter should be pertinent and definitely relevant, especially during the years of 15 through 19. It's during this time that you suffer through some issues that are really not meant to be issues at all.

You think life has no purpose, that you are completely lost and confused, alone and not loved. There is an emptiness that you try to fill with everything and everyone. But nothing ever satisfies that longing, that hunger, that need for real life, and the need to love and to be loved. And I mean absolutely nothing. Not the weed. Not the late night, alcohol binge parties. Not being the center of attention at parties or with your friends. Not even the friends you think will always be there for you. All of this in time will show its true colors.

None of these things have any value or worth. The only thing these prove to show is how much you need God!

That's where I come in now, to tell you that Jesus Christ is the only One and way you and me right now feel peace, comfort, and loved. Know that you and I have a life worth living! You have not yet learned that He is the only One who can give you purpose, who has given you purpose already in the midst of your self-deprecation, in the midst of your loneliness, in the midst of your low self-esteem. Before you were even born, you were thought about and longed for by the King of Kings Himself, Jesus Christ!

So now that you are here in this point of your life, your enemy known as Satan has filled your mind with the nonsense things you literally waste your time focusing on. Like how unworthy you are for someone's affection, how your looks will never be good enough, and how you will not amount to much, let alone live to see 25! These are all things/ideas that he puts in your mind, and because you don't know any better, you listen; and what is worse, you believe.

I am here to tell you, those things are all lies! You have no idea how much time you spend thinking, dwelling, and stressing over these things. This is time wasted! And life is only a short amount of time! Stop stressing out over what you look like, over who likes you or not, whether they accept you or not. Stop worrying about proving yourself to be a good person and worthy to be in people's lives. These things only hurt you, suck the life out of you (literally), and rob you of all the blessings God already has given and put in your life.

Every time you worry about any one of those things, every time you feel like life is not worth much, every time you question why you are here and for what—that is when God is trying to get your attention. He is trying to tell you, to show you how much He loves you. What kinds of things He has in store for you. That there truly is a purpose for your life, for your hurt, for your anger, for your fears. And that is another thing, fear.

At this point in your life, fear is the leading and motivating cause of all of those insecurities. Fears are meant to be overcome, yet you let so many of yours stop and overcome you! They stop you from

going after things like jobs, like letting someone care about you, and going after your dreams. Don't allow fear to stay in your life. This will literally cut short your dreams, gifts, talents, and life. And I know at this point you know God is real, even though you don't know him. So believe the words of this scripture:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

This means that fear is not derived from God, but from Satan himself. This also means that through Christ you have the power to overcome fears, trials, and anguish. The ability to love others and let others love you are things that come from God. And lastly, God can give you confidence in your thoughts and in your abilities.

So with all of this said, I leave you with this: *Learn to trust God, and He will teach you to trust yourself and others.* However, learning to trust Him is a lifelong process. Don't be so hard on yourself when you fail, just know that this life is a learning process. Only God can really show us how to get ourselves up the right way after we have fallen. Love Him without regret, read His word daily and pray, pray, pray! Prayer is the way you communicate with God and reading His word is the way He communicates with us. So be encouraged, be happy, and make good decisions and in everything (even the small things), let God lead you. These are all within your grasp and means to do, and no one else can do this for you!

Blessings,

Olga Luna, age 27

ABOUT ME

I am a woman who desires to serve God in deeds, words, attitude, and demeanor. I wish my love for Him to transpire in every role of life that the Lord allows me to take on. Right now I care for my mom who is battling a cancerous brain tumor, and I also care for my nieces and nephews. In the future I would like to take my Bachelor's degree and all the things I have learned over the years and become a parole agent. I wanted to be involved in this project because I was asked to, first of all. However, when I was asked to, it was completely a God thing. The individual who approached me was completely sent, and it encouraged me to think that perhaps a bit of my story will encourage another person. But this is something I will completely leave up to God!



Dear Osahon,

It has been a while since our last correspondence. My apologies for not staying in contact with you, my friend. Well, from what I hear, you are doing quite well. Your schooling is going well, you are active in the church, and a leader in your youth ministry.

I'm sorry to hear about your season-ending injury at the tail end of the track and field season. However, I see that has had no effect on your physical fitness. I see you are growing into a handsome and well-rounded young man.

I know you have heard people my age and older say, "If I knew then what I know now, life would be different." Well, I am going to give you an opportunity to know. You may be wondering why I would choose to share my insights and experiences with you. The answer is simple: Not only are you a young man with unlimited potential, but you possess many of the same qualities that I had at your age. Hopefully you will be able to avoid the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that I encountered.

You are about to enter a major transition in life. Within the next year you will be leaving the halls of high school and entering the world of higher education. Before you make that transition, there are three major pearls I want to leave you with.

First, keep God first and the focus and center of your life. I know this might sound like a cliché, especially given your spiritual background. But trust me, just because you have grown up in the church doesn't necessarily mean the God of the church is in you. Your mother told me that you went on a mission trip this past summer and came back on fire. Don't let that spiritual high cause you to drop your guard. It is during these times of the mountain top experience that we must stay alert. Many tend to let their guard down during such a time and end up open to falling off the straight and narrow path. This will only come by keeping God first and as your primary

focus. Why keep God at the center? Remember in previous centuries that many thought the solar system revolved around the earth, but later research found that the solar system revolves around the sun. Your life and your world must revolve around the Son, Jesus. When you do this, everything will fall into proper place and alignment.

My second charge to you is to stay away from women. You are only 17. There are a time and place for everything. I know you have a girl that you have been involved with off and on for the past two years. She is a beautiful young woman, but you are too immature to maintain this relationship and keep God first. Remember, anyone or anything that you give more attention to than you give to God becomes an idol. You are an intelligent young man, an old soul with wisdom beyond your years. Many say that experience teaches wisdom; however, learning from the experiences of others is when you truly can call yourself wise. I speak to you from my own experience. When I was your age, I had a young lady that I had been dating off and on for several years. We were involved till the halfway point of our first year in college, a total of three and a half years. She was a beautiful young lady; however, she was the right person at the wrong time, and consequently I failed morally in the relationship. Remember, the right person at the wrong time is still the wrong person. You have years to live and experience without the weight and complications of a relationship with the opposite sex. Remember there is a proverb by King Solomon (the very same Solomon who had 700 wives and 300 concubines) that says:

*Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not be burned?
Proverbs 6:27*

Do you think you can take the fire of passion and lust and not be burned from it? My friend, be wise and learn from my experience.

The third and final charge that I shall give you is to prioritize. There is a proverb that they say in my parent's city, "You can't put the cart before the horse." The horse has to do the work to pull the cart. You are a young, sociable individual. I know school bores you; however, you must remain focused. Your top five priorities, in descending order should be as follows: God, family, school, ministry, and social life. From my observation you have a tendency

to place social life after family. You can get away with this now in high school; however, in college and your future endeavors, this will cost you unless you reform your habits now. Replace your wrong prioritization with right priorities and watch your life blossom. Sow your seeds now and reap the benefits later. Put the horse and cart in their proper places.

Remember, my friend, you are a leader of leaders. Keep your goals clear and your focus clearer. Live a life according to *First Corinthians 11:1*, a life that screams:

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

This life is too short to waste on vanity and fulfillment of selfish desires. What you do in the name of Jesus is the only thing that people will remember. So remain humble my friend. I hope you will reply to this correspondence soon.

Grace and peace,

Osahan J.O. Obazuaye, age 25

ABOUT ME

Currently I am a college student majoring in Business Management. My goal is to be a management consultant and own my own consulting firm. I want to have a nonprofit wing of the firm that deals with supplying micro loans to aspiring entrepreneurs in developing countries, starting in the sub-Sahara region of Africa.

I wanted to be involved with this project because it was a reminder for me of how much I've grown in this life. In my church I am heavily involved with mentoring children and youth. This letter was a good way to encapsulate the wisdom and advice that I provide on a regular basis, particularly to young men. Lastly, this letter was a reminder to me of the scripture that I live by:

O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, do not forsake me; until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come. Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. Psalm 71:17–21



Dear 11-Year-Old Me,
Prayerfully I write to thee:

Your father's in jail because of your lie.
Be honest, have courage, please don't make him cry.
It's not your fault, your mother's not right.
Talk to the judge and fight the good fight.

Before or after I can't recall,
but you see Jesus Christ and He sees it all.

You see Him sitting on your roof.
And you, through your pain and abuse,
keep focus on His face.
His hands, as He points towards Heaven
as He gives you resilience, patience, and grace.

Don't doubt. He's there. You're not on your own.
He watches over you as tears run down.
It's not an empty prayer each night
your hope is in Jesus Christ.

I know you think love is nonexistent,
a "fake out" for manipulation and selfish sin.
You're messin' with the incarcerated.
Trust... This soul tie's soon to be liberated.

Little do you know God loves you so.
He will deliver you!
Safe and sound,
from all that's underground.

And for your brother recognize self-sacrifice.
For him you'll fight, you'll work three jobs, you'll strategize.
That's love, and you deserve it too.
Don't worry precious one, God truly does love you.

You feel it now.
It's vague and subtle,
but you're young and dumb.
Don't give a rebuttal.

In His good time, His perfect will behold:
every painful moment, an ever-rising threshold.
Time to train, be resilient and bold
for God knows what your future holds.

Do you?

Didn't think it would ever come,
grounding for things much too grand for imagination.

You cry for help and hear no response,
but you feel at ease.
Flesh hurts, heart's broken,
but your soul is at peace.

It's your loving Father,
King of Kings!
It's His arms around you,
His angels' wings.

I'm living proof of all you read,
one-of-a-kind, 28-year-old you from a tiny seed.
Who would have thought I'd sit in this spot
writing myself these crazy thoughts?

It's a frame of mind, a way to unwind.
Rest in the Lord as I carry His sword.
Prayed in the dark for the tiniest spark,
now I fan into flames His spiritual art.

I worship my Lord that we've already won
through the blood of the Lamb, His only son.

To all the world I felt I was nothing.
But how's it possible
to the Lord my God I am worthy?
I ask myself this all the time.
Can't think of reason or rhyme
that explains in a logical way
how a sinner like me is delivered and saved.

It may be because
we're human, we're silly, we're limited.
Our logic is only as God has permitted.

Satan is here and really alive,
and multiple times tries taking your life.
With glitter and lust, disgrace and disgust
perverting your heart, he'll tear you apart.

But don't lose faith, little one!
For against man's odds but through God's grace
I've rendered him helpless, I've seen God's face.

Dear Jesus,
Thank you Lord.
You gave me the words to speak unto life
my very own birth with a soul of white.
I conclude this letter praising His name,
dear almighty God,
Your beautiful Son, and Your spiritual flame.

Patricia J. Mucino, age 28

ABOUT ME

In the midst of emotional, mental, and physical abuse, I fled my family right around 16 only to run into boys and weed and a couple of things in between. Through God's grace and without application, I was offered a place in higher education. In the middle of mother's depression, cancer, and tormented soul, I worked three jobs and survived family and school. With a Bachelor's degree in hand and a fully laid plan, I waited on mom till her next suicide attempt/hospital can. With big brother's insight and love, we took the bravest one from our mother's glove.

He was to live with me in my little apartment with little food, little money, in a tiny compartment. Surviving was tough though money was present. The killer was spiritual: anger, sadness, resentment. Stayed behind to care for his kin, Lord and I know this intelligent boy has greatness inside him. Now fearless and fighting, he's making the trip beyond drugs and depression, anxiety's grip. Big brother and wife are a gift from God, taking him in when my season had gone. Great strides, my little bro's made, since the day I let go of control and just prayed.

This shows what's important: I completely forgot—in the middle of this, my master's I got. Over a decade of tears and sweat from working and crying over emotional debt, now saving and searching for my next big purchase as I think of a family in need of a fortress! The moral in here is to try to reach kids out there, who feel responsible for more than they bargained for. Trying to make up for an absent husband and wife while they and their siblings are just trying to survive. As for me the story is simple: I'm a counselor by trade and Christian at heart. I take myself out of the equation and let God give the revelation.

*Rays of sunshine, a rainbow, a promise:
God never left me
in Him I've found solace.*



Dear Randy,

Congratulations on accomplishing junior high school! Your family is so proud of your hard work. Throughout your life, God's mighty favor has already been on your life—in ways you have yet to comprehend. This letter is meant to present you with strong advice for high school which begins in September. There are some fundamentals that you must understand as a newly born again Christian.

Until now, you have grown accustomed to a Christian educational environment where your teachers genuinely care about molding you into an intelligent God-fearing man. These teachers have presented the saving grace of Christ in addition to math, science, history, etc. Your elementary and junior high experience has consisted of this, and it's all you have ever known.

High school will definitely be a challenge because Christ will not be Lord and Savior to everyone there. People will ridicule and tease you, claiming that you're not "black enough" because of your good grades and proper speech. The teachers may care about you somewhat, but their paycheck does most of the talking. Your high school teachers certainly won't be talking about Christ, unfortunately, and you'll even detect some unhappiness in their lives.

Amongst your classmates you'll experience kids being expelled, indulging in drugs/alcohol, boasting about sexual immorality, cursing, gossiping, back biting, and even a few suicides. As a 14-year-old, you might be wondering if God has taken a vacation. Although I don't worry about you caving into peer pressure (you won't), I strongly encourage you to stay focused on Christ. When you trusted and accepted Jesus as your personal savior, He promised to accompany you wherever you go. He hasn't taken a vacation at all.

Daily prayer, scripture reading, worship, fellowshiping with other believers, and attending church are not negotiable. The harsh

reality is that once you become a child of God, you also become a despised enemy of Satan. Satan daily throws things at you (mentally, physically, emotionally, etc.) hoping that you'll lose focus of Jesus as Lord. This is called spiritual warfare and you cannot be ignorant of this. He's the ruler of this world and has the hearts of so many, including at your high school. You must remember *1 John 4: 4* which says: "...greater is He who is in you [the Holy Spirit] than he who is in the world." Since you are a child of God, devote yourself to memorizing who He says you are—and lovingly dismiss and reprove the negative, racial, stereotypical opinions of others.

The last thing I'll mention is your greatest area of struggle: unforgiveness. As a teenager, you now understand that your parents are regular people with flaws like anyone else. Their divorce had nothing to do with you and was never meant to hurt you. People make mistakes. You have felt misunderstood and rejected, hoping that someone could pay. No retaliation could help you overcome the pain, but Christ can remove the pain from your heart. Your inability to forgive your parents and stepmother hurts them much more than you realize.

Jesus has to forgive you daily for your sins and quickly does so immediately when we repent. He equips us to forgive others and expects us to do so. Your unforgiveness will be a stumbling block between you and your parents and also you and God. I know it's so painful sometimes, but I plead with you to surrender your hurt and anger to Christ. He can take it away from you and give you grace. Grace means having a kindness toward someone despite what they've done. Please turn to Him whenever you feel emotionally hurt and He'll provide the comfort and assurance of His love and graciousness to you.

Following Jesus requires work. He's done the work regarding your salvation, but He leaves it to you to daily seek/obey Him. As the Lord told Joshua:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 (New International Version)

Always pray for God to speak to your heart and fully obey whatever He tells you. Do these things, and you'll avoid low self-esteem, depression, negative thoughts etc., and the Lord will strengthen your fellowship with Him.

Sincerely,

Randy Taylor, Your 23-Year-Old Self

ABOUT ME

I am a member of Abundant Living Family Church (ALFC) and am currently working toward receiving an MBA. I aspire to have a musical career, producing, performing, etc. I decided to participate because adolescents/teenagers have so much on their minds. Frequently, the enemy attempts to pollute our minds with lies about ourselves, "We're not good enough, unforgiveness is okay, We'll never amount to anything."



Dear Ronnie,

Life's great ain't it? You got your gym membership to make your body look good for the females, and your easy job to make that spending money for the newest flyest attire you can find. You look in the mirror and can't help but smile because you already know the ladies are going to be sneaking a peak at your freshness every time you walk by. Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night are all reserved for celebrating something! You never really care about the occasion, just like to go out and have the most fun, stay out the latest, and create the coolest memories to pass on to friends and make them jealous of the adventures! This is the life!

I know, you were raised a Christian. You pray sometimes, you don't drink. So that automatically puts you in a little better standing than everybody else, huh? You proudly say, "No thanks, I don't drink," when offered a beer, and look forward to her replying with a compliment. "Aww," the girls say, "You seem like a really good guy!" Your plan is already in progress! Just give it a little time, she'll be tugging your hand to join her on the dance floor. She pulls your body tight against hers, rubbing body parts against each other. She places her hand over yours, guiding you to caress every one of her insecurities.

This is amazing! All you had to do was give her a wink and a smile. Her cup full of lies did the rest for you! A couple more dances and she'll be ready to take this relationship to the next level. "Can you walk with me to get something out of my car?" She asks you to be her escort, getting you two alone so you can get down to business. You give her the best night she's ever had, take down her number, and leave with your friends. You get in the car, pop your collar in front of your friends, and delete her number because you have no intention of talking to her ever again. You did it! You won! Let's do it again tomorrow!

Listen here young man, the life you're living never satisfies! You think life doesn't get any better than this, but you're doing so much damage that you'll never realize until you find the one you want to spend the rest of your life with. You think you're living like a king, but you're actually a slave. Lust has you addicted to a sexual desire that no woman could ever satisfy. There are many debates in the world about the most addictive drug, but none traps you like this.

One day, you're going to meet a beautiful, loving, caring woman of God. She is going to be very gorgeous inside and out. She is the woman of your dreams! But wait, she wants to be married before having sex. How are you ever going to deal with this? This will be the hardest thing you'll ever have to deal with. How can you ever love her the right way when your lustful desires are so powerful that all you want is for her to give in to your soft kisses and comforting hands? How can you devote yourself to the one girl who deserves your sacrificial love when you can't remove the images of other women's bodies from your brain? You'll keep pushing your limits and urging her to just give in. You won't even realize how much you hurt her until she can't hold back the tears anymore. She won't be able to be near you anymore because she loves you, but loves Jesus more. How will you express how much you're in love/lust with her?

Lust is not love. You were raised to know God, so it's about time you reintroduce yourself. You've drifted so far, but there is no distance He can't reach. Stop now. The life you're living leads to so much pain and emptiness.

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
Psalms 37:5-6

This is the only way to save yourself, the women you'll hurt, and the lady you'll love. Society has this life so backwards. So please dust off your Bible, look up the directions to church, and have a much needed talk with the Man who misses you and loves you so much He sacrificed His life so you don't have to be enslaved to sin anymore! I bet you're wondering how you'll be able to follow Jesus in this world,

in front of your young friends who know that it's all about being young, wild, and free.

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:12

Be a leader. Set the standard. Some will make fun of you, but some will follow in your footsteps, and you will have assisted in saving others!

Grace and Peace,

Ronnie Gomez, age 26

ABOUT ME

I grew up in Southern California. I was raised Catholic in my younger years, then my family converted to Christianity. We fell back as a family, but then I rededicated my life at the age of 23. My walk with the Lord was still shaky for about a year until I met someone who encouraged me to take my walk with the Lord more seriously. It's been a crazy, yet a fulfilling and beautiful experience ever since!

I work as a correctional officer for the State of California and I plan to pursue this career with the state until I retire. There are several promotions I'd like to see, and different departments I'd like to explore along the way.

I wanted to be part of this project because I believe the Lord has called us men to grow up! He has called us to be leaders, responsible, loving, sacrificing men. I also know how hard it is to grow up in this society with all the influences to be drawn into the party life, temptations with women, and drinking. I just hope God will use my testimony to speak to a young man (or woman) and encourage him/her to pursue holiness in all aspects of his/her life. Jesus is the perfect example, so let's follow His footsteps!



God Is In Control

It is said that wisdom arises from great individuals. I say, "Wisdom arises from individuals that have made countless mistakes!"

Growing up, I never recognized I held onto a great amount of pain from my past. I didn't understand why I was led to make certain choices. And why no matter how successful I was, I never felt worthy enough. Growing up in a divorced home transformed my view on love, not puppy love, but the kind of love a parent has for their child. I know you're wondering why this lady is talking about love. Just like the song goes, "What's love got to do, got to do with it." Well, love has everything to do with it, from how you treat others to how you feel deep down about yourself.

In the bible, God states in *John 15:12*, "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" You're probably thinking, "What's so special about God loving us?" It's easy, someone has to lead so we know what to follow. Our parents are a huge example of how we define love. We learned as children to share and be nice and most importantly, how to love others. Sounds like the regular fairy tale family right. Well, mine was far from a fairy tale.

I mentioned wisdom and I know you're wondering why I brought up mistakes and love. Most of my childhood was made up of mistakes and poor choices. I have learned that wisdom comes from the faults in one's life. My childhood caused me to have low self-esteem, and it was hard to believe I was beautiful. I grew up seeking love in all of the wrong places areas.

Two months before I turned 16, I lost my virginity to a boy I barely knew. I thought of love as something I had seen on television and heard in a love song. I made a poor decision based off of what everyone was doing. I never knew until I was in my 20's, how much of my heart was packed with regret, hurt, and pain from that one

decision I made when I was 15. I felt myself consistently running away from my past and all of the mistakes I had made. A few months before I turned 19 years old, my mother passed away very suddenly and it shocked my world. I could not make sense of the bad choices I had made over the years. When you lose someone very close, you remember all the things you took for granted. Since then I have experienced close friends and family members passing away, and I wanted my life to be filled with meaning, not packed with regret.

I realized I was wasting the time God was freely giving me, while others were praying for one more second. I needed more than this world could ever give me, I needed a savior. I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life and forgive all of my wrongs. God began to show me I was not a reflection of my mistakes, and that He loved me regardless of all of the bad choices I had made.

God has allowed me to see that all of my pain, regret and brokenness had been placed in my life for something great one day. I know you're thinking how can pain be great? Well, in order to help someone, you need substance, better known as life experiences. God has allowed me to see that He placed every piece of pain in my life for a greater purpose. It says in *Ephesians 2:10*, "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" All of my past regrets and pains allow me to see life with a different pair of glasses. I am now able to help others get through tough times and not let the past weigh me down, but help someone get up. God has given me wisdom through the pain and a smile from the heart ache.

I started believing what God was telling me rather than my own negative opinions of myself. It was hard to accept that God loved me for who I was, because I felt like my own parents found it hard to love me. I had to forgive my parents for not being there for me as a child and let God show me what real love was.

Without the regret and mistakes, I would have never known God's true grace. Without pain, I would have never known how much God truly loved me and gave me wisdom to give others. Without my past, I would have never known my purpose here on earth. Knowing your purpose is important because it allows you to

understand why certain experiences happened in your life. Do you know your purpose?

Samantha Ellert, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am a believer and follower of Christ. A warrior. A Godly woman. I am a spiritual sister. An imperfect person. I work part-time, am a full-time student in college, and a volunteer in the Youth Ministry at Abundant Living Family Church. I am currently aspiring to finish college with a Biblical degree in Counseling.

I wanted to be a part of this project to share with people that God never wastes our pain. I wanted people to know that we don't have to let our past determine our future. We are not victims but strong warriors. By the grace and power of God, any fool could be changed into a Godly man or women. *Ephesians 2:10* says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." All of our mistakes are actually tools God gave us to help the broken, lost, and abused. *Romans 8:28* states, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." God has a plan for each and every one of us, nothing is too big for God to handle. By Jesus dying on the cross for our mistakes and our sins, you can be changed you just like he changed me.



Selena,

First, I want to let you know that you are beautiful, smart, and your worth is priceless. Never let anyone have the power over you to tell you differently or allow someone to make you think anything different. I know that you have been keeping all of your feelings bottled up since you were 13 years old. Being that you are 26 now, you need to let go of the pain, anger, and regret from the hurtful memories. The pain will only get worse if you don't. You will understand once I share this with you.

I just want to share some things that I would share with my daughter, cousin, aunt, mother or friend—especially with you. I really hope you pay attention because I know that so many times you have looked for love in the wrong places. You needed an outlet because the love you were seeking from family just wasn't there. I know that when you hurt so bad inside and keep it all in, it feels like death coming for you. You yearn for a place to call home, but nowhere can you find that comfort. Your soul feels like it's gone, like you're empty. I want you to know that it doesn't have to be that way.

When I was around your age, maybe a year or so older, I woke up one morning in my friend's den with my 2 kids in my arms. I prayed that the night before was just a nightmare. My eyes were puffy from crying. I had the biggest headache I have ever had in my life. My head was hurting from getting kicked and socked. The inside of my eye was bloodshot red, almost a deep shade of burgundy. The outside of my eye was already bruised purple and blue. My lower lip was busted and swollen.

It wasn't just an argument this time. I don't even know what I did or said to make him do this to me. I somehow just knew that it was my fault. When he came in, I heard the door slam. I immediately tried to pretend I was asleep. He came into the room and began yelling, mumbling. The aroma of weed and alcohol filled our bedroom. It

really seems like a big blur with flashes of a swing coming toward me, his boot coming toward me.

At first I tried to fight back, but I couldn't. All I could do was curl up into a ball. My kids were ages 3 and 1. All I could think about was them. I didn't want them to see this, but it was better he was hitting me and not them. After all was said and done, he took my car and parked in front of our apartment to make sure I didn't leave.

I threw some things in a backpack and a diaper bag. As soon as I saw the car drive away, I put my kids' shoes on. I took them and ran down the alley to get to a bus stop. I hid behind the bench at the bus stop. When I got on the bus, I went to a friend's house.

I stayed away for just 2 days. Just 2 days.... Not long enough.

When I returned home, I found a letter full of empty promises of how it will never happen again and how he didn't know what he was doing because he was under the influence of weed and alcohol. I read about how he had never done this before to anyone and that he will never do it again. He expressed his sorrow and said that he prayed that I can forgive him. Tears poured out of my eyes when I read about how sorry he was and I was all he had. He begged me not to take my kids and leave. I didn't know if I was crying because I had never endured this kind of pain before. Or if I felt sorry for him because he had no one else. Or if it was because if I left him, I didn't have anyone else either. I think it was all three reasons.

As I looked around, I felt like my world was shattered. This should have been a red flag to run! Tears streamed down as I stared at the hole in my 50-inch projection TV that he kicked in, my kids' Xbox smashed on the floor, and my cell phone smashed in the middle of the street. It wasn't the material things I was crying over, but how much destruction he just did to our lives that we tried to build together. I remember thinking to myself and wondering why I came back, why I was here.

Then he walked in. He came and hugged me. I began sobbing uncontrollably and allowed him to hold me. I needed the comfort, but from him it was bittersweet.

I stayed with him way too long. Years of mostly emotional and mental abuse continued, some physical. I know now that none of that was my fault. Never did I ask for him to call me names, belittle me, treat me badly, keep money from me, cheat on me, or hit me. I was too scared to leave. He was very intimidating. His goal was to make me scared so he could control me. He did a very good job because he was successful. He made me do a lot of things I knew I shouldn't have done and I took the fall.

I was depressed for a very long time, but the majority of the time I wore my "happy mask." I allowed myself to gain so much weight and I began to believe all of the negative things he said about me. I know now that I am worth so much more. I am left dealing with and sorting out my feelings all on my own, as well as my children's feelings. At least that's what I thought until I found a man.

This man is very different from all of the men who have been in my life before. He wakes up beside me and goes to sleep next to me. He makes me feel good about myself. He supports me every day and shows me compassion. He talks to me every day and he listens to my dreams, concerns, desires, wants, needs, and cares. He has taught me that love is supposed to be unconditional. He has shown me that love is not supposed to hurt at all—not emotionally, mentally, financially, or physically. He has the tenderest touch and has begun a restoration project on my heart. He is patient with me and is teaching me to forgive others as well as myself. He is teaching me how to love not only myself, but my kids, my family, and most importantly my enemies. No man has ever done that for me. He is restoring my faith in love and has shown me that I am capable of giving and receiving love. He has made the ultimate sacrifice for me and my kids. He died for us. This man's name is Jesus.

I don't know where I would be without Him. Selena, you need Him now more than ever. Your life is going to hit some lows that will make you contemplate suicide, leaving your kids, and just being deleted from this horrible thing you know as your life. At times, you would never imagine that things could get any lower. Even when you feel like you have no one else to turn to and no one will care, just know that Jesus can take all of your pain. He can endure it for you

so you no longer have to carry that burden. He loves you and will forgive all your past sins.

All you need to do is one simple thing: Believe. Believe that by accepting Him as your savior that all of your sins will be erased along with the pain, anger, rage, hate, hurt, depression, feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, and any and all fears you have. Please take my advice and at least try Him. He loves you. He will never hurt you, lie to you, cheat on you, deceive you, belittle you, or get you into trouble. He will always protect you and will never leave you. Just ask Him to enter your heart. He will be there now and forever.

With all my love, prayers, and positive thoughts,

Selena Garcia, age 32

ABOUT ME

I am 32 years young. I am a beautiful, strong, single mother of three beautiful children. I have a son who is 8-and-a-half, two daughters ages 6-and-a-half and 4. I wear many hats as a single mom of three kids. Some of which include chef, nurse, housekeeper, accountant, referee, counselor, and teacher. I have many responsibilities that I have learned, and am still learning to juggle by myself. I also have a new job that I just began recently. I am also a poet and I am currently in the process of publishing a few projects. With all of those things to consider, you can only imagine how a day in my life can become overwhelming. Not every day is the easiest, but it's a lot easier from the situation I just came from: I am a survivor of domestic violence.

The reason I wanted to be involved in this project is because I want people of all ages, races, and gender to know that it is not okay to accept any type of violence in any relationship. I was in an abusive relationship for a long time and not one of my family or friends knew. I was too scared to tell anyone. Once I was able to leave that relationship, I found God again. I rejected Him for a while and thought I could do things on my own. I was wrong. I chose to write about this certain topic because it means a lot to me to be able to reach and help one person in this situation to gain the courage to leave before it's too late. I couldn't have done it without God. I now realize what comes before all of these other things going on in my life, the most important aspect of who I am is this: I am a child of God.



I am currently 20 years old, and have experienced a great journey thus far throughout my life. If I were able to write to my younger self, it would be a challenge to decide exactly what age I would like to write to. One issue I did have to face a lot as I grew throughout my teenage years, was remaining confident in who God had created me to be and the joyful spirit He placed in me. If ever given the opportunity, my letter would read as follows:

Dear Shamarra!

I would like to first start by saying never lose that joyful spirit the Lord has given you! It may not be something that is easily accepted by many, but God has given it to you for a reason. He wants you to share that smile and joyful spirit with many people. So never allow what others may say or think dictate your appreciation and use of it, because you'll soon see that it can be a true blessing to many people. It has turned a frown upside down, bring joy where there is sadness, and bring reassurance that God is still with them.

God has blessed you with a gift and you must treasure it; don't let anyone take it away. God has many great things in store for you, and He will begin to reveal them to you as time continues. But just remember that through it all, He always comes first! Find confidence in who He has created you to be for He is your best friend—the one who is with you through good and bad, sunshine and storms. He is your rock, and you must never forget that!

A chapter I have grown to love so far is *Psalms 139*. As I read it I begin to see how beautiful God is, and what it means and feels like to have such a beautiful relationship with Him. *Psalms 139:15–16* speaks of how God knew you even before you were born:

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

He knew you in that secret place, when no one else could see you or who you would grow to be. He saw you every day of your life. You mean so much to Him and are a precious jewel that not everyone may understand. But just remember, He has crafted you to fit His hand. Be proud of who He has called you to be, and hold your head up high with confidence because you know you hold a special place in His heart.

Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. Psalm 20:6–8

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. Psalm 17:8–9

I love you, but even greater—God loves you!

Shamarra Scott, age 20

ABOUT ME

I am a full-time college student and am currently studying Political Science in my senior year. After graduation, I plan to continue on to law school. Throughout my life, every generation has always captured a portion of my heart in different ways. To hear the idea Matthew had in helping the younger generations throughout their journey of development, I saw it as a true blessing to be a part of this project. But overall, if this letter can reach just one person, it will still fill my heart with great joy! I believe that every generation has a great purpose, and to be a part of helping our younger ones is truly an honor.



Dear TaTiana,

I wanted to write to you because I know 16 is a vital age at this moment. A lot of the decisions you make now will carry over to your adult years, and if I knew then what I know now, things would be a lot different in my life. I would have avoided a lot of pitfalls that, honestly, I set up without my knowledge. I often times put myself through things that were hurtful and unnecessary.

Let's begin with your current relationship. Sometimes love can be very blind. I know you care deeply for your boyfriend. There is no one that can tell you any different and I understand, but you shouldn't invest everything you have into this person at such a young age. You can't see an end to this relationship, but no one is perfect, including him. When everything is all said and done, you will regret putting everything you have—all your time, patience, energy, money, and emotions—into him. Trust me, I remember. It's not worth the heartache, or depression.

I know it is cliché, but your focus should be on school. Don't let friends and a boyfriend distract you from the attention you need to put toward your classes. Good grades and more school pride will get you further than your imagination. If you do that now, by the time you are 24, you will be set in a career, living wherever the Lord takes you, and more stable than I currently am.

Modeling is something that's important to you, and I know that is where your heart lies. But you can still go to school full-time either in Los Angeles, Atlanta, or New York. You would be in a city that you want to be in, studying photography, architecture or interior design, and during school you could still model too! You don't have to choose between school and modeling; there are plenty of art schools in each of those states. I know that it seems like a long time now, but four more years of college will help put you further in life than you think. Be proactive. Take time out to study a little harder, don't procrastinate, and research schools to find which is

best for you. Then find all the ways that you can get scholarships and financial aid.

Last, I understand you have been raised in church. I know you go to church twice a week. But I want you to understand that you are not living your life to the fullest until you truly know Jesus, although everyone else would tell you opposite. Currently church is somewhere you go because you feel that is the right thing to do. Don't run from God. Don't try to take your life in your own hands and do what you want to do with it. This will be your main downfall.

Slowly, you will play with fire, and not realize you are being burned. It's hard to understand now, but I don't want you to go through what I had to go through. Now that I have truly found the love, grace, and forgiveness of Christ I am changed.

But if I would have put things into perspective at your age, honestly the heavens would be my limit. This life is not your own. Think about it, why are you here? You believe in God, so I'm sure He didn't place you on this earth to just live, have fun, and die. There has to be more meaning to your life. Begin with being a good Christian role model and that will take you far. The only way you can be like Christ is if you know Christ. So take the time to get to know Him. He will bring you more love than you are seeking from your boyfriend, or even dad (whom you should also respect and listen to more). Dad's rules in the house are hard to deal with, but if you don't listen to him you will make things worse—not only for you and him, but the whole household.

Find a group of friends who are doing the same thing when it comes to living for Christ. They are out there, some of whom you already know. Some churches make the gospel complicated so to finish this letter I want to give you a few verses to read so you can understand a little clearer. Keep in mind, the Bible is a letter just like this one that I am writing you. The letters in the Bible are from God, and they are love letters to you specifically. You can forget everything I said, but don't forget this: *God wrote love letters to you.* Some are letters of forgiveness, some are even poems! But they were meant for you. How awesome is that? All God wants is for you to love Him back. Read the Bible, and you will see what I mean.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 (King James Version)

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23 (King James Version)

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God had raised him from the dead, you will be saved; For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9-10 (World English Bible)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6 (New King James Version)

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalms 37:4 (English Standard Version)

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:26 (New International Version '84)

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body; Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (New International Version)

The last verse I listed is something that you aren't currently into yet, but in about 2 years it will be an issue you struggle with. Continue to read that verse, and refrain from sex no matter how much you feel like you love that person. Because if you do have sex, it will be extremely hard to stop. You will hurt yourself in more ways than you can think. It is not just physical.

I know this letter is long, but what I'm really trying to show you is to think long term. Think of the short-term sacrifices that will result in long-term investments. Go to www.buckheadchurch.org and watch some of the messages. You will really enjoy them.

I really hope you take to heart the things that I have said. What's in this letter will change your life for the better. You don't want to go through what I went through. I love you with all my heart and want the best for you!

Love,

TaTiana Chari, age 24

ABOUT ME

I grew up aspiring to be a model, actress, and singer. I am currently pursuing all of those things and am trusting in God to allow me to be a ministering light to anyone I meet on my path. I am also in the Queen of the Universe Pageant, proudly representing the country of my ancestors, Ethiopia.

I did this project because I wanted to give the wisdom I have learned from experience to generations younger than me. So that they can gain the same wisdom without going through the sometimes unfortunate experiences that I put myself through. Any opportunities I have to be used for God's kingdom and to be a light to someone, I will gladly accept. It is, in fact, the least that I can do since Jesus has brought me so far from the troubles in my past; which is now meant to be my testimony to help so many other people make the right choice and put their faith in Christ.



Dear Tiana,

I want to start off by reminding you that you are *beautiful*, you were created in the imagine of God, and never let anybody tell you otherwise. I know right now you are enjoying all that's going on in your life—popular girl at school, everybody loves Tiana. You're sweet, kind, and generous. I see why because you have the best personality, and all you want to do is help people. Please remember Tiana that's great, and that's all you know to do, but I know you feel like you wish you had someone who could be there for you too. Just somebody to talk to. Somebody who can pour into your life and share with you the amazing truths and how to navigate through this thing we call life.

Well, I have some great news for you, Tiana. It'll be the best news you'll ever receive. I want to introduce you to the One who created us all, plus heaven and earth. I know you were brought up and raised as a Catholic, so religion is what you know. I am here to share the amazing news that it's not about *religion*, it's about *relationship*. You were created for a reason, and that is to serve, worship, and obey God—but to also share the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I want you to know that God loves us so much that *He gave His one and only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16)*.

I know you stopped attending that Catholic Church your grandma always forced you to go to, and you now go to Abundant Living Family Church. But Tiana, please at your age of 16, you need to sit in the youth service, not the main sanctuary services. I tell you this because you need to get fed spiritually and experience what God wants you to hear. I am not saying this can't happen in the main service; I am just saying that, due to your age and where you are in your walk with Christ, you should be around other teenagers like yourself. Plus the service is geared and structured for teenagers just like you. So please don't just go to church to say you went, and sit in

an hour-and-a-half service walking out not understanding anything the pastor just talked about.

Tiana, I know you're trying, and you're wondering who this amazing God is you hear about on Sundays during service. So I have some pointers for you that I know will help you get through.

First, read that cool devotional Bible you got. It'll introduce you to the word of God. It's cool because God already knew we would need His word to stand on and be strong in while living in this world. The Bible reveals it all. Anything that you may be facing and going through at school, home, etc.—if you open that Bible and read it, it'll give you all the answers that you need to make it through.

Secondly, pray. Keep praying, Tiana. I know from time to time you'll pray over your food, but it's so much more than that! Pray for *everything*—whatever is in your mind, in your heart. Just pray. Prayer is a conversation with God, and trust me He hears all that you pray to Him. What's even better is our Father knows what we need even before we ask. He just wants us to come to Him and build a relationship. So please Tiana, pray like your life depended on it because it'll really help you and you'll grow closer and closer to your Father. There is no right or wrong way to pray. Just do it, Tiana, and see how God reveals Himself and begins to answer your prayers.

I know in school it may seem like God isn't in the mix. It's so unfortunate that the school system tries more and more to operate without God; however, He's there. He's with you all the time. So even if it's not the "norm" to follow God and talk about Him, do it Tiana. Be different. You don't have to do what you think is "normal." You actually have the ability to change lives for God. A lot of girls look up to you. So by you taking a stand for God, living and following Jesus Christ, and not doing the things you may think are "normal," you can truly make a big impact on those around you.

Just think about it for a second, let those words sink in. Let them sink deep, deep down.

I am praying for you. I know how hard it may seem to be the different one in the crowd, but you have a light that shines so bright

and God has blessed you with an amazing, God-given talent. Please use it. Be the leader that God created you to be. Keep going to church, reading your Bible, and praying. Even if you have to do it alone (because I know even your family doesn't have a relationship or know the Lord).

Don't get discouraged, Tiana. You do it on your own, and know that God is always with you. Run to Him all day every day. Build a relationship with the Lord; He's all you'll ever need. The Bible tells us:

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

What an amazing promise! God will give you His peace which neither me nor you can even understand, but you'll feel and experience it and it's so good I can't even put it into words.

But keep this in mind, as you go through life on the road less traveled: God will never leave you. He's always with you.

I am praying for you. I love you, and I know you're going to do some wonderful things for God and His Kingdom. Hold true to His words, and obey his commandments.

I'll see you in Heaven.

Tiana Palmer, age 24

ABOUT ME

I am a young woman after God's heart, seeking to grow closer and closer in a relationship with my creator each and every day—all while trying to make Jesus famous to a dying, sick, sad world. I have a 4-year-old daughter named SahMya, and I know that sharing my testimony will help young girls all around the world.

Currently I'm an assistant to an associate pastor at Abundant Living Family Church. I am currently aspiring to open up my own non-profit organization to help God's children all over the world who are currently living homeless. My goal is to not only provide a helping hand to them, but to also let them know there is hope and His name is Jesus Christ. I wanted to be involved in this project so that I can share my story, in the hope that it'll reach young girls around the world and, if they don't know Jesus, introduce them to Him through my testimony. I am also very humbled and grateful that my brother in Christ, Matt, reached out to me to be a part of this. So to help him in any way possible, I thank God for using me.



Dear Young Leader,

I start this letter off with laughter because I just finished watching *Men in Black 3*, where Agent J goes back in time to save Agent K's life. He gets information from the future, takes it back to the past, and utilizes all he knows in order to save Agent K. Though his mission was subjectively focused on saving Agent K's life, his mission has a more universal impact and he ends up saving the world. It is with this same premise that I would like your attention for the brief moments I have with you.

At this point in your life you have just been called into ministry and you've preached your first sermon. Filled with personality and the clinching title appropriate for that time was, "Are you R.E.A.L. (Righteously Enriching All Lives)." The crowd laughs at your jokes and ponders greatly on the revelation that you drop, people applaud you, and the senior pastor awards you with a minister's license at the ripe age of 17. Life *SHOULD* Be Good....

Although this is one of the *MAJOR* accomplishments in your life, regret and disappointment set in because along with this public success, there is a private failure that takes place in your life. You don't really know how you met her, but this friend entered your life at a young elementary age. She would come over rather slyly, unannounced, and certainly unaware to your parents. This old friend has been in your life for some time now, taking care of you when you feel lonely, worthless, and even helpless. This old friend shows up *FAITHFULLY* when your mind is filled with unanswered questions about your father and the uncertainty of the future. There is a part of you that feels a great sense of mission, purpose, and destiny. But it is quickly strangled by feelings of loneliness, desolation, and disqualification due to the presence this old friend has in your life.

You grew up on the principles of the Word of God and you know the hot scriptures such as, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers them out of them all; and A Righteous man falls seven*

times. And your favorite, *“If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness”*. But in the midst of these prayers and confessions there still is a crater-like void in your soul because you feel in your heart that you should know better, by all means you’re called into ministry! Words like, *“How can God USE YOU of ALL People! You don’t have the physical, tangible, present love of your biological father, how can you amount to anything? You’re not as ‘athletic’ as the other guys around you, you can’t sing, your good, but you’re not that good.”* These thoughts bombard you and just like a drug, old faithful comes and pays you a visit shielding you from the wretched world with her sweet elixir. She intoxicates you with her charm to drown out your sorrows in fantasy for the height of a moment, only to bring you crashing down in despair, even lower than you were before. She’s a seductress and a serpent at the same time. But she is the only one that has been faithful...so you think.

There will come a time where you will travel off to a Christian college that stands for righteousness and integrity. This will be a place where you will find out who you *REALLY* are. You are elated because surely the old friend that you acquainted with was no longer invited to hang out, especially on this campus. Her tactics would be frowned upon. But in your first year you will find that she comes knocking at your window, you let her in, just for the night. A few weeks go by and she’s there again to stay for a few more weeks. A few months go by and she’s pretty regular so it seems rude not to allow her to keep a few belongings at your place so she won’t have to pack a bag each time she visits. She moves in slowly, but surely. Now that she has set up residence, you and your roommate have yet a third roommate in whom you both enjoy. Unlike you two, she is not an undergraduate but has a PhD in destruction.

You will have this affair for months on end, day after day, week after week until you try and pray. You try to imagine different things, you try to dream beyond your means, but like crimson dye in a pure cup of water, her images and tactics plague your mind and heart until it’s darkened...you have been overtaken by this lust. You grab the phone and call your youth pastor, she’s busy and doesn’t return you call until weeks later. During this time, desperation is growing because you feel at any moment you could slip off into

eternity, unrepentant, because of your love for this lust...The youth pastor calls you back and in a culmination of feelings, anxiety, worry, and fear, the words fail you. Your youth pastor will speak soothing words that act like rivers of living water running through your soul, purifying it of impurities, and flushing it of all obscenities. You will begin to weep what seems like hours because the love of God will fill your heart like never before and with it comes forgiveness, love, peace, and acceptance.

Over the next few months you will cut off every tie to the women you selfishly played, but most of all, this friend you've found in lust. The scales were removed from your eyes and you finally realize that she was stealing your passion, your intimacy with God, and your self-confidence. You realized that if you *TRULY* belonged to God that the sin that so easily beset you, the vomit that you spewed up, and that thorn in your flesh was *NO* competition for the *FORCE* of God. His love, mercy, and forgiveness would be granted to you if you'd only give him *ALL* of your heart. So you did, and oh what *JOY* God would bring you into, what blessings, what peace to know that you *BELONG* to *HIM* and no one else.

So I write this letter to let you know that this seductress of pornography really had no hold on you in the first place. She knocked but you had every ounce of strength in you to not answer. But you allowed her access through your ignorance of who you were, but most importantly who *GOD* is. You thought that you needed her, but you didn't. She left you thinking you are worthless, but I'm here to tell you that you are not a loser, you are not weak, you are not a quitter, and you are not just a follower. You are redeemed, forgiven, loved, and accepted by God who is love. His love covers a *MULTITUDE* of sins, His blood blotted out your iniquities, and His mercy is *NEW* every morning.

There is vision, grace, and mercy that God has placed over your life. And even though in yours and others' eyes you have failed and in their opinion won't amount to anything, God has *FAITH* in you! That is why He's forgiven you of so much and that is why He favors you. He is more concerned about you fulfilling His purpose in your life. So it is with the realization of this love that you are drawn to repentance, never to return to that serpent of seduction, but to *RUN*

into the arms of the Almighty, for it is *HE* who has your destiny in your hands!

So RUN and Keep RUNNING After Destiny.™

Torrian Scott, age 29

ABOUT ME

I am a man who has a passion for God and a passion for people! I believe that God has called me to inspire, impact, and influence my generation to discover their God-given purpose, release their God-given potential, and live out their God-assigned destiny! I got involved with this project because I knew that it would be something that would motivate and inspire countless people across the globe! The vision of this book is eccentric and because of that, its impact will be dynamic!



Dear Victoria,

This is Victoria; I am older now! I have experienced the journey you are embarking on, everything you are about to go through, and I have some things I would like to share with you. Please heed the words I speak to you and listen, take it to heart.

I am writing to you because the journey that you are going to go through is a unique one, it is specially created by the Lord. When you doubt His love for you, remember that He promises in *Jeremiah 1:4*:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet of the nations. (New King James Version)

How beautiful and amazing is it that the Lord absolutely knew everything about us when He formed us. There is no shame that we can hide from Him. Always remember that when you doubt and fear. You see, I know your faith in God is newly established. You have so much growing and maturing to do.

I know you are only 16 years old, and have already endured a rough and rocky road. At this time, you think that things will never get better, that the Lord has forgotten you. You have surpassed many surgeries, accepting yourself as different because you have Marfan syndrome. Living in a broken family, being self-destructive through eating disorders, and cutting has not been an easy and light road.

But I can promise you that things will improve, and the things to come will amaze you. I can make this promise to you because we are 22 years old now, and couldn't be happier in the Lord. We are amazingly blessed and favored by the Lord our God. There will come a time when you go through the inevitable heart surgery we both have been dreading and expecting all our lives since we were young. I cannot tell you all that will occur; however, during that time, cling

to God more than ever. Learn to grow closer to our family: Jenni, Ale, Alfredo, Ma and Daddy. Strengthen those relationships. For through them, you will be strengthened.

I know that you are a very mature young lady, but I made a few mistakes during this time. I pushed those around me away, including all our close friends and family. Due to that I have a hard time opening up to close friends, and especially with our family. When it is hardest to love those around you because you are hurt, angry, and upset at the world, love them the most because the Lord will be manifested there.

During this time I made a terrible mistake and got even angrier with God. I pushed Him away and left the church for good after the surgery occurred. I was 18 when this happened. Yes, we made it back to the Lord, into His kingdom (so don't worry). However, I made our journey that much harder. I experienced things that the Lord did not want for us. I practically rejected the Word of God, did not know of His love for me, and decided to live in the world. I literally told God one day, "I am leaving God, and I will not attend church so as to not stray anyone from their path and your ways, and I will do as I please. I do not believe in Your promises anymore because I look around at all I've gone through! And yet You let me continue going through hard things that most teenagers never experience. Look at all the evil, bad, and hardships in the world and where are You?"

How naïve and inconsiderate I was, that I did not understand the will of the Lord and that He owes me no explanation at all, yet He loves you and I nonetheless. How dare I say that to the creator of all things? God is extremely creative, glorious, and loving. He gave you every characteristic that you have, made everything from blood cells and vessels to our personalities. Each of us are intricately made with characteristics, emotions, body organs, a spirit, and a soul. He made millions and billions of galaxies and gave caterpillars the ability to transform into beautiful butterflies. He made dinosaurs (which I do plan to ask the Lord, "What happened to the dinosaurs?"), animals, birds, insects, plants, flowers, seas, creatures, and mountains. He made the stars, the sun, the clouds, and the moon you will gaze at every night.

He loved you so much that He blessed each hardship for His glory and He protected us each day that we lived far from Him. He loved you so much that He made a way for you to restore a relationship with Him through the sacrifice of His one and only son, Jesus on the cross for salvation from your sins!

When the time comes and you will know, seek God the hardest at that time. Do not let the world (and everything you go through) lie to you, telling you God is not there—because He will be.

When it felt that there was no love for me in our family (especially because so much occurred that we moved in search of a better life and a closer knit family), I searched for love in the world. I must warn you that it will destroy your heart to do so. It changed us from the kind, sweetheart girl we were into a woman with a hardened heart that the Lord had to heal and be extremely gentle with. As God tells me now, I will tell you also:

*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.
Song of Solomon 3:5*

I sought romantic relationships, one after the other, until I thought I had found what I wanted. Only that relationship left me more broken than anything I had surpassed. This man and I tore each other apart until we could no longer carry a friendship, conversation, or relationship without being aggressive and arguing about everything. God's grace covers this and the relationships I carry to his family. However, God has something so much more worthy of you. Remember, a relationship is not about satisfying your need to be loved nor loneliness, but to fulfill a calling and purpose that the Lord has for you both through your marriage. It is to serve and love your spouse, not to be selfish and think only of yourself, but to cover the person God entrusts you with in love such as the Father loves us. I am not married (laugh out loud), but I understand the Lord's promise now. Instead:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added for you. Matthew 6:33

I know that this is a lot to take in, but I hope it will guide you. Instead of focusing on following this world by partying, drinking, sex, lies, and unholy living, focus on His kingdom and doing the things that the Lord has for you. Focus on doing well in college.

I encourage you while you are young to learn to ask the Lord what He has in store for you and what He wants you to do. I am finally following our dreams (yours, mine, and the Lord's) for a career. But this came after letting our parents decide for us for many years what type of career we would have. It made me unhappy for so long, until I stood for what God had placed in my heart, what the Lord has blessed you and me in. Do not limit yourself because I see now that the Lord gives everyone unique gifts and He will confirm to you later on that you are on the right path by blessing this career and revealing to you slowly what He has planned.

So to end this letter, I will leave you with these pieces of His Word. Bury yourself in your faith so that when you go through the hardships that will try to make you stray, you will grow closer to the Lord instead of far from Him. God told you and me:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the whiles of the devil. Ephesians 6:10–11

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 23:37–39

God is love. Always remember that, and learn to accept it and nourish His love for you.

Victoria C. Barillas, age 22

ABOUT ME

I am a Christian woman still seeking my call from God and I am also a Latina. I am an aspiring pastry chef, still identifying my passion for the culinary field. One of my many aspirations is to open a family-owned pastry shop and bakery. I wanted to be a part of this project because to share a testimony of what God has done in my life with others is an honor, but also to inspire others that their walk with God isn't the only struggle. Many of us face hardships and at times it is helpful knowing we are not alone in them.



Dear William (BJ) Walker age 13,

“I love you right where you are, I just love you too much to leave you there.” Your future mentor Dr. William Franklin or just uncle Will to you, will say this one day. This quote is important because it’s vital that you know you are loved. But more importantly, you’re loved enough to be put first in a lot of situations. You’re loved enough to be believed in, you’re loved enough to be an inspirer, and you’re certainly loved enough for God to give his life for you. Unfortunately it may not always feel that way because of your father not being around and you not having the love and support you felt you deserved at this time. It is extremely difficult for parents and elders to understand 13-year-olds and what changes you go through at this age. So it will be rough for you if you don’t understand you’re worth the world and loved beyond measure. Therefore you should always keep in mind Romans 8:28. It will come in handy when life seems rocky. Above all you are called to be great! You are called to inspire and encourage. The talents and gifts God has blessed you with are meant to make an impact on your community, your friends, your family, and especially the youth you will encounter as you grow up.

Something else you must take more seriously is your school work. Although it may not seem like it is for you, although it may be a little difficult at times, it will be one of your biggest assets to your life and to the greatness you aspire to have. So do whatever it takes to succeed in that area, use every resource available to you to excel in school at the highest level. Great grades will be your key to playing sports to the level you want to play, it will keep you from searching for unnecessary nonsense to indulge in, and it will be a stepping stone into life at its best. So many people you encounter down the road will respect how hard you work in the classroom and will be encouraged to strive as hard as you do, but this will take you giving your all and not selling yourself short!

On a bit of a lighter note some other things you will encounter during your teen years and growing up is the need to be tough and

accepted. Although everyone wants to be accepted and wants to feel like they're loved, you can't allow that desire to turn you into people you're not. I say people because there will be so many different types of people you hope to be accepted by. But it certainly isn't worth loosing yourself over, which is exactly what will happen if your focus is to be accepted by everyone you encounter just to be called "Cool." God made you cool enough just as you are so there is no extra need to seek to impress others or anything of that sort, especially in high school when girls become a focal point for you. It will be increasingly hard as your hormones grow and you see so many beautiful girls wanting attention, but you can't allow yourself to be distracted by them at this point in your life. At this point in your life these girls have nothing to offer you that will help build you into the man you need to become.

So be patient young man. God has set aside an ultra-special woman just for you, because you will need an ultra-special one seeing that you're so complicated LOL. You're definitely one of a kind and the world wouldn't be the same without your vibrant and unique sense of style. Keep striving for excellence, remember to have the passion to help others pursue excellence, and don't let anything or anyone hold you back! It is your destiny to create change. You are a revolutionary apprentice, a warrior-scholar, a young man of God, and a blessing to all those for whom you have the resources to provide. So please stay fearless, stay hungry, and trust in God because by no means will he ever leave or forsake you, therefore you have no worries when you're on his side.

William Walker, age 21

ABOUT ME

I am currently a student at a local community college, I plan to transfer in the next year to a California State University. I am a member of Abundant Living Family Church. I volunteer in our youth department mainly focusing on our middle school ministry Ground Zero. I am also a volunteer coach to high school and junior high students in football and basketball, as well as a personal trainer. I am currently aspiring to be a youth mentor and counselor so I can reach out and spark change and love in our younger generation.

The reason I wanted to be involved in the letter project was to be able to inspire anyone that comes across my letter, I pray that some junior high and high school kids are able to read and be inspired or encouraged by my letter. I want this generation and the ones to come to know that they are loved no matter what life is giving them. And they must stay strong because every test they endure that doesn't kill them will make them stronger and will be a great testimony that someone can connect to.

Let me take a brief moment to introduce the dynamic duo of Eva Long and Teri Watanabe. These two ladies played a major role in seeing this book through to completion. Providing many hours of consultation, editing and design services, their expertise is ingrained in the DNA of this book. I am thankful God was faithful in sending them our way.

Both of these ladies were moved by the concept of the book and felt it was on their hearts to get involved. I am sure glad and thankful they did. As subject matter experts, their knowledge and counsel secured success for this project; for that I am truly thankful.

I did not let them off the hook though. In order to fully understand the process the authors went through, I asked them to also share their stories. I present to you letters written by Eva and Teri.



Girl Unsure, Confused, and Afraid—age 12:

I know you are confused and bewildered by the life into which you have been born. Your feelings move swiftly like dramatic changes in the weather, your body is a constant betrayal. Your family is noisy, in conflict, and chaotic. As the oldest of your siblings you have far too much responsibility and seriousness for your age. You have very little understanding of what you are supposed to do and who you are supposed to be. You try to do everything you can think of to be the good daughter to your parents—to be a steady source of help to a troubled mother and a burdened father. You can't succeed at this, and you don't know why.

You worry about catastrophic events that may occur and how it will be your responsibility to save your family. You feel alone and helpless, yet you cope by hiding behind a pre-adolescent's imitation of adult maturity and calm. This appears to fool everyone. No one knows you and you feel wretchedly alone.

But I can tell you now that you are not alone. How I wish I could reach back through the veil of time and give you these beautiful jewels to carry with you on your life's journey:

You are not alone. You are loved.

You are beautiful.

You are enough just as you are.

You are a gift to the world.

These are your blessings from the One who knows you, the Source of boundless Love. He who came for you.

If I could show you the map of where you will walk in the years ahead, you will see that you will travel an often unseen path, but one guided by the deepest care, compassion, and forgiveness—though you will not experience these for many years. The challenges you will face will be immense and often seem cruel, but your path is your

own. You will find your answers, yet you will be privileged to know more of the Mystery.

Such big thoughts to send such a young girl, I know.

Do your best.

Have faith.

Follow your star.

You are a child of God. You don't know this now, but you'll come to believe this later.

Love,

Eva Long, age 68

ABOUT ME

I am more awake to life now than I was when I was 20! I am blessed to make my living in publishing because every author I work with inspires and touches me in remarkable and significant ways. I am also a part of the Rhythm of Peace Project in Oregon, a non-profit grassroots organization that invites women and men of all ages, races, and religious beliefs worldwide to make peace a daily priority (www.rhythmofpeace.org).

It takes great courage to write about one's life honestly so that a deeply personal expression encourages, calms, heals, motivates, affects, resonates, and allows us readers to know we are not alone with the challenges we face. I am honored to be part of bringing The Letter Project to everyone who will receive the gifts of these extraordinary authors.



Dear Teenage Teri,

Dad said he would die. He didn't know it would be on New Year's Day during your senior year of high school, but he had been fairly certain about the risk of heart attack. Quitting smoking hadn't saved him from a triple bypass at age 45. His health had declined since he became the head girls' basketball coach, to coach you and help you win a basketball scholarship to Willamette University, his alma mater.

In a lot of ways, Dad died for you when your sister was born. As unexpected a blessing as she was, Dad knew that he wasn't going to be able to give her what he should. Even before she was born, he told you that she was going to be your responsibility because he wasn't always going to be around for her. And then when she was born, he constantly reminded you that you had to take care of her because you didn't know if he was going to be there the next day.

Honey, that's a lot of responsibility for a nine-year-old to shoulder. Maybe too much.

Dad was trying to prep you in his way—that forceful, no bull\$#!+ way that he had. He just never knew how much you took it to heart or how seriously you would try to honor his wishes throughout the years. He would never know how much it hurt to see him spend so much more time with your sister and to have him call her his favorite. You never had the courage to say to him, “What about me? I'm not going to have you around much longer either.”

You quietly prayed that you would have the strength to be the person your father wanted you to be.

So much of who you are is shaped by the whirlwind of your Dad's personality. He was truly a force of nature—competitive, humorous, generous, engaging, magnetic. That was Dad. Everybody loved and respected him. He cared so deeply for “his boys,” investing

so much in the kids he coached in basketball, football, baseball, and track. You saw firsthand how he impacted lives and changed them forever.

You also struggled with seeing the side of Dad that “his boys” and those in the community never saw—the eruption of temper, the swearing rants in Japanese, the simmering tension during the days he and mom fought, the silent nights he slept on the couch. You took him at his word when he said that if you didn’t behave he would either kick you out of the house or leave and go find another family. After all, that’s what he had done to his first family, he had left them.

You be the best daughter you can be and you quietly pray that he will stay.

Then he dies.

You turn to the Lord in prayer because He has been the constant for you. You know that He will never leave you. You know that only He can be there to give you the strength to deal with the arrangements at the hospital, at the funeral home, at school where Dad will no longer be.

Dad’s death is your darkest night. At school, you have to deal with the girl who threatens to beat you up every day all on your own now. Dad can’t save you; he’s not there.

And I warn you, darker days are coming. You will go to Dad’s college in the fall, become ill, and lose the basketball scholarship you and he worked so hard to win. Over the next months, you will lose your half brother to AIDS and your grandfather to the same heart attack that killed your father. Your sister—the sister you left—will struggle with mourning the loss of a family forever broken and fight against the new family your mother is trying to make.

There it really is. After Dad dies, you leave her. You leave your sister when he told you that she was the only thing that mattered to him, that her wellbeing is your responsibility. You can’t even help her find God in her grief.

The weight of years of guilt stifle your soul, but I'm here to tell you that it's a burden you don't need to bear. Your quiet prayers will be heard by a loving Heavenly Father who will never give up on finding your sister and opening her soul to finally hear Him. Your plaintive prayers asking whether Dad went to heaven will finally be answered.

Later, you will realize that Dad loved you enough to coach you. He saw the basketball court as the ultimate proving ground—for life as well as the game. Dad believed in the integrity of hard work and the blood, sweat, and tears you had to sacrifice to compete. As much as he taught through his coaching that life is more than just winning, he also encouraged countless kids that playing was winning. He believed that if you play the game of life right, you will win. If you don't give up in the fourth quarter, you can stand tall because you gave it your all.

Dad never played to lose and he never gave up on anyone he ever coached. That includes you.

As the Lord's Prayer says: *"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

Forgive, Teri. Forgive yourself for wanting Dad to spend as much time with you as he did with your sister and as he did with other kids. He knew that they needed him. Forgive him for laying too much responsibility on an overly sensitive girl who would be chained by sadness for years to come.

Forgive him for being right: You have been alright all along. You don't need your father any more to be strong; you are already strong. You don't need your father to say, "Good job"; you do your best every day. You've stepped onto the court, played a hard game, and won.

I'm writing to you now from a place of peace and knowledge that will take you almost two decades to reach. Have faith.

You're in the first quarter of life, just finding the rhythm of the game. Remember the drills; have faith in your skills. God is your coach now. Dad was His assistant coach warming you up, getting

you ready for the game. Know that because you're playing now, the momentum is shifting. You are already on your way to winning.

Shared with the love of our father and our Heavenly Father,

Teri Watanabe, age 40

ABOUT ME

I am the owner of A Word's Worth, LLC, a company that provides writing and editing services. As a writer of science fiction and fantasy, my current project is a 21-book fantasy series for young adults titled "*Horse Heaven*." As for this project, God made it clear that He wanted me involved. At first I thought it was as an editor. It wasn't long before He showed me the journey that I had yet to take personally as a writer of one of the letters—a step of faith to explore an inner wound I had long thought stitched, if not healed. I thank God for bringing this endeavor into my life. I have finally found the healing born of true forgiveness, the forgiveness I needed to extend. The Holy Spirit has breathed peace into my heart and I want to share the tangible presence of God's love through His gift to me—my story.

Congratulations!

Either you have finished this book or have been moved enough to go forward in your decision to live a new life with fresh perspective.

The gift I have to offer you is the one gift that helped all these people make it through what they went through. The same man that helped all these authors can help here and now. That man is Jesus. It is your decision to make though. We spoke of options at the beginning of this book and this is an option I would like to present to you.

The option is making Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior. All I can do is offer this to you, it is by your choice, your free will if you choose to accept. You have seen the letters and stories of people who have credited this man to allowing them to grow, develop, find purpose, and at times even save their lives. I encourage you not to wait, especially if you have been seeking an answer, this could be what you were looking for. There is no guarantee you will have this option after this.

What's next?

The gift of officially receiving or rededicating your life to Christ is next. Something has changed, you feel different, and you feel relieved. If that is you, let's pray. Please read this prayer out loud:

Dear Heavenly Father, I praise you, and thank you for showing me, revealing to me, who you are. I thank you for loving me unconditionally. I repent Father, for any and all wrong doings and sin I committed, knowing or unknowing. I ask now for Jesus Christ, to come into my life and my heart as my Lord, as my savior.

I acknowledge the work He has committed on the cross for my sins and thank you for this beautiful sacrifice. I ask that you come into my life and seal me with the Holy Spirit. Show me the path necessary to live a life I am intended to live and that is pleasing to you.

I love you and thank you Father, and I pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now What?

1. Tell someone you trust about your decision to give your life to God, preferably someone who is also a believer.
2. Start to do some homework on churches that can teach you about the word of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ.
3. Continue to pray. Talk with God every day just like you would anyone else. Share with Him, ask Him, love Him, and allow yourself to be loved.
4. Purchase a student Bible that can teach you how to read the Word of God.
5. Journal. Start to journal about your experiences now that Christ is Lord in your life. Entries do not have to be long but make some time to write when possible.
6. Visit our website for additional resources to help you grow and stay connected. (*SincerelyMe.com*)
7. E-mail us and tell us about your experience. Who knows, your letter could be one that changes someone's life.
SincerelyMe@RespectTheArt.com

I thank you for reading this book, but also for letting God move in your life. I pray boldness, courageousness, strength, and endurance to fight the good fight that is ahead of you.

Remember this love you feel right now. Never lose this zeal! When times get hard, remember this journey and be encouraged. From all of us here, we love you, are praying for you, and speak many blessings over your life. Go in peace to serve the Lord! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!



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The Vision of *Sincerely, Me*

Now, I know not everyone hears from God in the same way. There are times when I feel like I hear Him as clear as day, and sometimes I cannot hear Him at all. During the time I was blessed with this vision, I could hear Him clearly. The best way I can describe it is in the form of a dialogue.

Even though the voice was not audible, below is a replay of what I believe occurred to create this vision. I am cautious about claiming, "God said this... God said that." So I will not put God as the other person in this dialogue. I do believe though this conversation was blessed and inspired by God. And for any good that comes from this vision, I give Him full credit.

Matthew: *Okay God, I see you cleaning me up... What's this all for?*

Inner Voice: *What is it that you want to do?*

Matthew: *I want to provide opportunity for people.*

Inner Voice: *If you could go back and talk to the younger you, what age would you talk to yourself?*

Matthew: *Ummmm.... 17. That's right before I started acting up.*

Inner Voice: *Write a letter to yourself and share that letter.*

Matthew: *Wow... That's such an amazing idea. Ok, but my experiences are limited. Only a few would be able to connect.*

Inner Voice: *Invite them...*

Thus the book was born. In all fairness, I thought it was going to be a website at first. Development toward the idea of a book still needed to take place. The vision of the book did not become finalized until after I started inviting people to join me in writing their own letters.

I first started with a list of 33 people. I thought that was good enough. Until I went back to pray over the 33 and I believe I was instructed to get 52 letters. This would serve the purpose of being

able to read one letter per week, beginning the yearly journey whenever the book was picked up.

This is not to say the first 52 people I asked said, "Yes." I had some say, "No." I had some agree, but then not deliver. And then I had some people say, "Yes," and follow through with writing their letter. I share this because I love every person the same. They are all my friends and family, and I am thankful I was even allowed to meet them. The way I see it, an opportunity was presented and God permitted the letters you, the reader, need to read.

When seeking God, do not stop after the vision is planted. Constant communication is important in order to fulfill the vision. I encourage you to spend time asking God this question, "What is it that I am supposed to do?" And be patient...vision will follow. It may be in the form of an inner voice, a dream, a sign, a message, a person, a book, or a whisper. Be still, the vision will come. It's already in you .

SPECIAL THANKS

I first and foremost would like to thank Jesus Christ. Without You, there is no destiny, vision, or dream to chase. Thank you for your eternal love and patience.

I would like to thank my family for their love and support. Thank you for believing in me and being patient while I keep on fighting to convert my dreams to reality, #CreatingReality.

To the team that put this project together, I would like to thank each person involved and all their families for their love and support. Without your involvement, none of this would be possible.

I would like to thank all 51 authors for saying “Yes” to God and honoring your “Yes” with a commitment to follow through. Lives will be transformed because you decided to step out in faith and share the gift of life as well as the journey God has guided you down. From the bottom of my heart, thank you Letter Project Family.

I would like to thank Abundant Living Family Church, the staff and mentors. I have been privileged and honored for the learning and training I have received through the life giving programs that equipped me to fulfill my ministry.

I would like to thank Life Pacific College for sound study in Leadership. Many of the business avenues would not have been possible without the study of biblical disciplines and ethics.

Last but not least, I would like to thank you the reader. This book was a gift for you always. I am thankful you have been born with a purpose and are continuing to fight daily. I pray this is a resource that will increase your knowledge and wisdom. Life is waiting for you, go live it, and give God honor in all that you do!

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Andrea Ma Gee

1. Ephesians 2:4-5 New International Version (NIV)
But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

Anthony Rojas

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 New King James Version (NKJV)
For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
2. Jeremiah 1:5 The Message Bible
Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations - that's what I had in mind for you.
3. Jeremiah 29:11-13 The Message Bible
I know what I am doing. I have it all planned out-plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I will listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I will make sure you won't be disappointed.
4. Jeremiah 33:3 New King James Version (NKJV)
Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

Camille B.

1. Galatians 5:19-26 New International Version (NIV)
The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who

belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Christina Clara Juarez

1. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 New International Version (NIV)
Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2. James 4:8 New King James Version (NKJV)
Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
3. Jeremiah 29:11 New King James Version (NKJV)
For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.
4. John 10:10 New King James Version (NKJV)
The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly.

Donald E. "LyricalGent" Montgomery

1. Proverbs 3:5-6 Good News Translation (GNT)
Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way.
2. Joshua 1:5 God's Word Translation (GW)
No one will be able to oppose you successfully as long as you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will never neglect you or abandon you.

Gilberto M. Wilson, Jr.

1. Romans 8:28 New English Translation (NET)
And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Jeffery A. Davis II

1. 1 Timothy 1:7 New International Version (NIV)
For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Jeni Watanabe

1. 1 Timothy 6:12 New International Version (NIV)
Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
2. Romans 12:12 New International Version (NIV)
Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.

Marcus G. Smith

1. Matthew 6:33 English Standard Version (ESV)
But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Samantha Ellert

1. John 15:12 New King James Version (NKJV)
This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
2. Ephesians 2:10 New King James Version (NKJV)
For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
3. Romans 8:28 English Standard Version (ESV)
And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

TaTiana Chari

1. Proverbs 3:5-6 New King James Version (NKJV)
Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.
2. Psalm 37:4 English Standard Version (ESV)
Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

3. Matthew 16:26 New International Version (NIV84)
What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?
4. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 New International Version (NIV)
Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Teri Watanabe

1. Matthew 6:12 Tyndale Bible
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Torrian Scott

1. Psalm 34:19 English Standard Version (ESV)
Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers them out of them all.
2. Proverbs 24:16 New International Version (NIV)
Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.
3. 1 John 1:9 New King James Version (NKJV)
If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Victoria C. Barillas

1. Jeremiah 1:5 New King James Version (NKJV)
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.
2. Song of Solomon 3:5 New King James Version (NKJV)
I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles or by the does of the field, Do not stir up nor awaken love Until it pleases.
3. Matthew 6:33 New King James Version (NKJV)
But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added for you.

4. Ephesians 6:10-11 New King James Version (NKJV)
Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the whiles of the devil.
5. Matthew 22:37-39 New King James Version (NKJV)
Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

What would you do if you knew then, what you know now?

Remember on the playground of your elementary school when someone would yell out, "Reeeedo!" Or how in Hollywood multiple takes of the same scene are shot in order to select the best one? And now you can also snap endless pictures of yourself before you post the perfect #Selfie you want everyone to "like." Life however, is not lived in this way.

Oftentimes soon after a mistake is made or an experience is lived, we feel we could have done things differently or better. We wish for a redo. But what if you could go back? What if you could take the knowledge you have now and share it with yourself at a younger age? Would you have done things the same?

Matthew Garcia, founder and owner of Respect The Art Media, set out on a quest to collect a series of letters written by one generation to the next generation. Writing to younger versions of themselves, the authors share insights from their life experiences conveyed in a way that the younger versions of themselves would have actually listened. This book is a chance for the current and next generation to read their stories and learn from their trials and victories.

"Three words to describe this book: wonderful, relatable, and powerful. This book helped me to discover my purpose in life!"

- Janice Lozano, age 18

"I felt the stories in this book were incredible testimonies that will help today's generation. It will help many gain confidence within themselves to get through anything they might be facing."

-Zinna Gonzales, age 16



Heavily influenced by art, Matthew Garcia produces a work of heart with originality in content, structure, and design. *Sincerely, Me* is a collaboration between artistic expression and personal development that supports Matthew's determination to create the reality he is most inspired to live on this earth.
(www.IAmMatthewGarcia.com)

Cover Design:
Matthew Garcia for
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