

CHARLES H METCALF III

**GOD
CHOSE
ME**



**UNTOUCHABLE CONFIDENCE
FOR THE UNSTOPPABLE CHRISTIAN**

Foreword by *New York Times* bestselling author Michael Todd



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A Letter from the Author

I wrote this book with extreme care and vulnerability. Its origin is a very painful and dark place for me, and that place serves as the opening for this book. For anyone struggling with anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts, I want you to know I've been there. Throughout these pages, I will share my journey. Please proceed with caution as I know some parts may be triggering. I pray that as I share some of these real struggles, you will find healing and hope to face the most painful parts of your life with the power and peace I found in the message "God chose me."

Foreword

There are certain people you can tell are special from the moment you meet them. You know they will change the world. When you hear them speak, you can tell they have something profound to say. When they talk about their future, you imagine great things for them. Or, in the case of Charles Henry Metcalf, III, you meet that one person who can take any assortment of clothes and make a fashion statement.

The beautiful thing about Charles is that he fulfills every category I just mentioned. He is a great man.

Let me tell you about how I met Charles.

It was 2017 and I had just finished preaching a sermon at the local church I lead, Transformation Church. I was tired but really excited about all the people who had come and experienced our little growing church. Part of my pastoral duties is to care for and love my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Part of my big brother duties is to care for and love my blood brothers.

After our church service was over that night, my youngest brother, Graceson, asked me to drive him to another church service. My initial thought was, *Another church service?* I mean, what church could he be going to after such a dynamic, magnificent spiritual gathering of the saints, where lives were forever transformed, being led to perfection by his older brother? But I tried to act unbothered and agreed to take him.

During the drive, I asked him about the church, called Eden. He told me about this amazing new church plant that was filled with creatives helping to change lives. He went on and on about how much he loved this new church and the cool, trendy pastors (Charles and Abby Metcalf) who preached so well—and *everybody* was going there.

I thought, I'm *not there*.

I knew I should be grateful that my brother wanted to go to church multiple times a day instead of not at all. But this experience had me wondering, *Who is this Charles Metcalf?* I tracked him down through social media and realized my little brother was right: Charles was cool. He was smart. And, more than anything else, he seemed to have a genuine understanding of God's Word and a love for God's people.

That intrigued me enough to invite Charles to breakfast. Before I met with him, I asked God to tell me what our relationship was supposed to look like. I felt God tell me to help Charles and give him whatever he needed. When we met, we had the most captivating conversation. We had so much in common—music, sports, fashion, God's Word, and more. Almost instantly, it felt like something special was happening.

I had this weird feeling that we were supposed to be connected.

I felt that connection so deeply that by the end of the meeting, I asked Charles if he would ever consider partnering to do ministry

together. I used this elaborate analogy about the Golden State Warriors when Stephen Curry, Kevin Durant, Draymond Green, and Klay Thompson played together, asking Charles if he wanted to do ministry as a team instead of separately. In the kindest, most amazing matter-of-fact way, Charles declined. And so, I decided to cheer him on from the sidelines.

Fast-forward several months as he and his wife prepared to open their church and my little brother was still asking me to drop him off at Eden each week. I felt God call me to attend a training for pastors in Dallas, Texas, and that I was supposed to pay for Charles to come as a future leader of Eden. I asked if he'd join me and he agreed, and we spent the next four days sharing meals, gaining understanding, and building camaraderie.

During our time together, I witnessed a life-altering moment for Charles. In an act of what I call **crazy faith**, Charles and his wife, Abby, decided to close the flourishing and life-giving church they were starting, in order to, in his own words, "serve and protect." This was a moment that I will refer to only as "Is he really crying on my shoulder in Neiman Marcus?" Maybe one day we'll share the entire story of how God brought two regular guys together to represent Him to the world.

As I watched Charles navigate, sacrifice, and submit to the process that God was inviting him into, I realized I had never seen such resolute faith at such a young age. He did not waver in what God had asked of him. He obeyed, and it was almost as if God was marking him for a special assignment not just for him but for his entire generation and other generations as well. It was as if God had *chosen* him. Throughout history, God has marked people. Throughout Scripture, God marked people. Today, God marks people. In fact, I believe God marks everybody. The question is not whether God marked you, but rather, Will you answer the call?

I believe that through Charles's wisdom, creativity, illustrations, and lifestyle, you will learn principles that are practical as well as profound. These principles will help you step into all the possibilities that align with your God-given purpose and recognize the greatness that God has placed in you to touch the world.

I have watched Charles preach and write this message, which is a feat all by itself. But I have also watched him live this message. If you apply just half of the godly gold that is shared on the forthcoming pages, you will inevitably be transformed.

Charles, I am proud of you for you. I am for you. I will stand with you. I love you—and not because of anything that you'd done, written, said, or shown me. But simply because I love you.

Oh, and by the way, God chose you.

—Michael Todd

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Prologue

THE BOOK STARTS NOW

I feel the faint buzzing of flying at thirty thousand feet. Ambient music hums through my corded headphones, and the inside of my eyelids start to sparkle with a rainbow of fireworks after being closed for too long. My fingers are on the laptop keyboard, and my wife sits next to me, the smell of her perfume drifting into my nostrils, the most comforting scent on the planet. My heart thuds as recycled air brushes my shoulder. Deep breath in . . . and out. *You can do this. Just calm down and write.*

I have written and rewritten this first paragraph too many times to count. Word documents, journals, scribbles, napkins, iPhone notes, even on the outside of a Starbucks cup—all filled with attempts at the opening of this book as I search for a way to do this idea justice. I sense it so clearly. I know in my heart how reading this book should *feel*, but it's all stuck in my head. I can sense the emotion deep within my bones. There's only one problem: *You can't feel what I feel. You can't see what I see. And so I find myself*

struggling to convey my message with words that will make sense. Time and again I type, write, delete, scribble, rewrite, and adjust. Over and over.

Why?

I care. I care at a depth that is difficult to relate. I wish I could say I couldn't care less whether you like this book, but that wouldn't be true. I care deeply.

I am keenly aware that I have only a short period of time to grab your attention. That pressure is heightened because the fire with which this message burns in my bones cannot be contained. I feel a holy conviction to share the message of this book—a message that I believe has the potential to change your life. At the same time, I feel an unreasonable pressure to prove myself—to you, to the publisher, to your friends and my friends, to the people who didn't believe in me . . . to the world. I feel I must prove that this message is worth all the hard work.

Out of all the pressure, there is one person's gaze that weighs heaviest. I hear his comments, expectations, judgments, critiques, criticisms. I feel his scrutiny as it pierces my very soul, as if to say, "Come on, let's see it." I restart a sentence, and he rolls his eyes. He scoffs every time I misspell a word. He's been with me as long as I can remember. He's quick to point out my flaws, quirks, and brokenness. Even at my best, there's always *something* I could've done different or better. It is this person, most of all, whom I must prove wrong. I must show him I am not who he has said I am. Who he has seen.

This person . . . is me.

It's not the pressure from others that has me writing and re-writing. It's my own thoughts, my own insecurities, fears, deficiencies, my own ideas of what my first book should sound like. But more than that, I want this book to matter. To make an im-

pact. To make a difference and to be of value. I didn't spend all this time and energy just to scribble nonsense. I did it because I believe this book has the potential to change your life. The question is, Do I have what it takes to help you see that?

Sometimes I am filled with an overwhelming sense of confidence to trust that the God of the universe is inspiring and empowering me to write these words. Other times I feel a paralyzing uncertainty.

And that's the point.

That internal battle, that perpetual conflict, that all-out *war*—that is why I am writing this book.

We have all felt it at different times. That internal pressure that randomly surfaces, even in your greatest moments. The questions that pop up just as you're drifting into peaceful sleep. Questions of the soul and pressures of existence—these are the seeds of this book.

Do I have what it takes?

Will I fail again?

How can I harness the potential that lies dormant within?

What is the source of my confidence and reassurance?

Will I make it?

Will my family be okay?

Am I enough?

What will happen to my children?

Will I always be alone?

Do I have good ideas?

Will people read my book?

Can I do this?

How do I find my way in this world of opinions, deception, pressure, and anxiety? In a world where bad news seems to be the only news, fear is common, and hope is a distant memory? How do I muster up the courage and confidence to be who I was created to be?

The words and chapters that follow are born from the same place that my opening paragraph was written: a place of humility, openness, and transparency. But let me be clear—this is not because humble, open, and transparent is who I've always been. Rather, it is the version of myself I have learned to be. This book is about learning to believe the deepest truth about ourselves, the truth that is the only real and lasting answer to the fears, insecurities, and pressures we face every day.

My hope is that within these pages, you'll discover the supernatural source that has radically changed my life. I pray that you will feel the transformational power of a God who strengthens the weak and gives hope to the weary. That ultimately you would unlock an untouchable confidence to live as an unstoppable Christian.

It is my deep conviction that the Spirit of God can empower any believer to live a life full of confidence and contentment. A life where they are not shaken by circumstance or opinion but live with a fire that cannot be extinguished.

I believe that as you step into this supernatural confidence, you will become an unstoppable force in the world.

On this journey, you'll experience trials, joy, fear, laughter, and

much more. But I am confident you have *everything* you need within you to reach this reality.

My goal is not to conjure up some self-helped, self-willed self-acceptance that comes from *you*, as amazing as that is and as strong as your self-will might be. History has proven that humans are far too fickle to be trusted. My hope is to give you a source of confidence that transcends race and religion, gender and class, political party, 401(k) plans, and education. I want to impart to you something extraordinarily simple yet with extravagant implications: a source of true confidence that is not dependent on circumstance, praise, or approval and a lasting contentment that goes beyond momentary happiness to a deep inner joy and hope.

Just imagine for a moment: a life free of the worry about what other people think about you. A day where you wake up extremely confident in who you are and what you were placed on this planet to do. Where the opinions of others do not keep you bound to the safety of what you know. Where you are not hindered by a second-guessing gait. Where you wake up full of vision, hope, and a sense of eternal destiny. Where the fear of failing does not paralyze you, but rather you run free and full of the God-given power within you. What would that life be like? How would you talk and walk? What would that version of you do? It is this version that lies on the other side of the decision to believe “God Chose Me.”

As we journey together, I want to ask you a question that will take a lot of courage to answer. (Only a few pages in and I am already requiring something from you! But the people who love me most always ask something of me. And *I love you.*)

But first, close your eyes.

Take a deep breath: Four seconds in . . . hold for four . . . release for four. (Go ahead, I’ll wait.)

Here’s my request: Be present and be patient.

I have been a speaker, teacher, and preacher of the message of Jesus for a little more than a decade now. My journey has had some hilariously embarrassing moments and a few special highlights. During my time as a communicator, I have always been a learner. I've read more books, listened to more podcasts, and borrowed more techniques than I can count. One of the most helpful pieces of advice I've heard was from a speaker. Judah Smith said, "The greatest thing you can do before you speak to an audience of any size is to fall in love with the moment and fall in love with the people. You speak differently in a moment you love and to a people you love."

More than any other words of advice, that piece of wisdom has shaped me. Falling in love with right now allows me to forget my fears, worries, and ideas about what *should* happen. It takes the pressure off.

That's really what I want to say to you.

Take the pressure off.

Whatever you are hoping to get or change about yourself from reading this book is not nearly as important as being present in and to this moment. If you're anything like me, you have spent a significant portion of your life stuck in negative thought patterns that have sabotaged your self-worth and confidence. As you begin to rewire your thoughts, it will take time to become the version of yourself that does not default to these broken systems. However, I am confident that with time and commitment and the help of a gracious God you will be surprised at how this journey transforms not only you but the way you see the world.

So, let us begin what I hope will be one of the most transformative and powerful journeys of your life—the journey to an unshakable confidence for an unstoppable Christian.

Chapter 1

YOU ARE LOVED AT YOUR LOWEST

This is the end. It's over. Your time has come. The plane is going down and no one else is to blame. There is nothing left to do. You are going down, this is it. This is the end of your story.

—Personal journal, April 2020

My body physically remembers the hopelessness I felt when I wrote those words. I was curled underneath my desk at work, writing what I believed would be the final journal entry and letter to those I left behind. I felt alone, hopeless and helpless. My soul felt as dark as the ocean floor, and the pressure was crushing me. I felt like I couldn't breathe. No matter how much I wanted things to be different, this was it. This was my reality. At the age of twenty-six, I was going to take my own life.

I found myself stuck in the tension of who I was, who I could be, and who I wanted to be. For as long as I can remember, there has been a war going on inside of me. A quiet yet tumultuous war between two stories. In one story I was happy, full of life. I made the best choices for my life, lived joyfully, and stayed committed to my values. In the other story, I cast off all responsibility. I gave up trying to achieve and essentially said forget it. I did what I wanted, when I wanted. Why, because I didn't want the pressure

of who I “could be.” I don’t know the genesis of this war; however, this internal battle had ravaged my soul so much that the idea of giving up felt far more realistic than continuing to fight. I believed that something was broken or missing in me and that there was no chance I would ever find the missing pieces that everyone else seemed to have.

I grew up going to church, so I know the Bible. The Scriptures contain a book of songs, titled Psalms, primarily written by a man named David. The 150 songs found in this book convey the whole gamut of human emotion—from the beauty and joy of victory to even anguish and deep frustration with God. I titled what I thought was my last journal entry “Psalm 151.” This was my last hope and appeal to God. The pain, turmoil, and emptiness had become so overwhelming, and I saw no other option but to end my life. The letter I wrote reflects how far I felt from God, from hope, from living. I saw no light at the end of my tunnel. Let me give you a little backstory to help you understand how I got here.

2020: “THE YEAR THAT CHANGED THE WORLD”

It was 2020 and, like everyone else, I was having a typical year.

Until I wasn’t.

The fabric of the earth, society, media, health, truth—everything—seemed to split wide-open with no hope or help in sight in March of 2020. We plunged into a global pandemic that shut down our world in an unparalleled manner. Physical sickness turned political as people grasped for power over the virus. The debate of mask-or-no-mask became the divider of households. Racial tensions spun out of control. George Floyd cried out to his mother. There were riots in the streets in response to the many instances where police had shot black men and women over the

years. It seemed as if every evil, twisted, dark plan had been unleashed simultaneously and we were all caught in this tornado, not knowing which way was up or down. No matter your “side,” there was a general sense of chaos that seemed to cut through the safety and sense of security we all desperately cling to.

Like for many others during this time, my place of work moved to my home. The only problem? I didn’t have a home. Or rather, I had a roof over my head; it just wasn’t mine. I was currently living in the bonus room of my in-laws’ house with my fifteen-month-old son and eight-months-pregnant wife. My in-laws’ offer to let us stay with them at this time was one of the kindest acts of generosity toward our growing family. (Thank you, Mom and BC!)

I was navigating the waters of being stuck in one place, a complete lack of socialization, and worries about whether my family would be safe. During this time, while I was practicing social distancing to protect myself and my family, I failed to realize I was also growing distant from something else: God. I am not sure when or how it happened, but His voice drifted into the background and all the other worries of life took over. I could no longer see His hand or feel His love. I grew cold, empty, and hopeless, becoming a shell of the joy and laughter I once carried. My once boisterous spirit slowly began to fade into a deep depression. It was as though I had a slow leak in my tire. I found myself stranded in a place I did not recognize, with no clear way out.

The combination of all these feelings manifested as unpredictable panic attacks. I didn’t realize it at the time, but my soul was screaming for help like a hostage tied up in the darkest room. No one could hear, no one could see, and I was too unaware to ask for the help I needed. What started as a fuzzy feeling in my mind grew to an unceasing hurricane of fear and whirling thoughts. Thinking that maybe I just needed more sleep, I took sleep medicine—

but that was useless. My body was tired, but my mind kept on racing. This storm turned into a heaviness in my chest, a weight on my shoulders, a heat behind my ears, and a tingle in my hands. Every six hours or so, I would suddenly be propelled onto what felt like my last roller-coaster ride. I would shake, struggle to breathe, fall to my knees, and cry out for my wife, who would come running to hold me until I stopped trembling. It was the first time in my life of experiencing the humiliation and debilitation of a panic attack.

I vividly remember one night in particular.

FOUR A.M. FRIENDS

I had been fighting demons all day, on the verge of a panic attack throughout meetings and calls, and I finally made it home to my safe place. I had dinner with my family and a laugh with my son. Then I walked into our bedroom closet, and it hit—the spinning at the front of my mind, the pounding of my heart, the weight on my neck. My legs gave out and I fell to the floor. Yelling for help as though I were getting mugged, I curled into a ball and waited for my wife, Abby. She came and hugged me, brought me a cold rag, and rubbed my neck, but it wouldn't stop. My mind kept spinning, I couldn't breathe, and my vision was blurry. It was terrifying. She helped me stumble to our bed, where I curled into the fetal position, shaking and crying uncontrollably. In an effort to end the terror, I closed my eyes and drifted into a panicked sleep.

I awoke to voices whispering in the background. It was 2 A.M. I felt a strong hand on the back of my neck. "Charles, we're all here." I immediately felt relief—and shame. It was my friends. My wife had called them in the middle of the night. They had gotten out of bed, loaded up their children, and were now in my bedroom. Aaron was standing at the foot of the bed. Mike was to my

left, sitting on my nightstand. Natalie was behind him. Abby was sitting by me, and on my left was Brie.

I have the strongest and most incredible friends ever. They are each influential and powerful in their own way. Each has their own set of divinely contracted superpowers. I love them, and they love me. But I also *admire* them. And truthfully, I wanted them to admire me too. I wanted them to think I was impressive, to feel that I could handle whatever life threw at me. And yet here I was, falling apart in my own house. I felt insignificant, embarrassed, and small.

This can't be happening, I thought to myself. *What if I lose my job, my title, my leadership?* “See I told you . . . you aren’t enough. You can’t handle it” said my internal critic. *What if people start to second-guess whether I’m cut out for this role and ministry altogether? What is wrong with me?*

Just as I uttered those silent words in my head, Brie said aloud, “Charles, there is *nothing* wrong with you.”

I broke. Salty tears began to stream down my face as my body slowly stopped its tremor. It wasn’t Brie who was talking to me. I mean, it was—but I knew it also wasn’t. There is only one man who has a track record of knowing our thoughts. There is only one person kind enough to hear our cries and answer through a friend. Jesus spoke to me. He comforted my broken heart and lifted my weary head. He was the deep breath I couldn’t take and the strength I needed to see another day. In that one moment He looked past my hurt and saw my pain. He validated and valued who I was, just as I was. For the next two hours, my friends comforted and encouraged me. They spoke life-giving words over me and left notes all over my house, encouraging me toward light and hope.

There is much more to this story. More panic attacks. Many

more fears. A long journey of counseling, accountability, rest, and finding out who I really was. But what I want to highlight is this: I was loved at my lowest. When I felt the least worthy, the least capable, the least qualified, and least likely to be chosen, it was at that very moment I realized I am still loved. At my lowest. At my worst. When the pain hits like a ton of bricks. When my talent is of no use. When money has no value and when it seems I have nothing to offer but myself.

That's the moment I found out I am loved. That's when I knew God Chose Me.

The words "there is nothing wrong with you" planted a seed of hope. A seed I desperately needed, one that would grow into the garden of words that you read on this page! Maybe there could be a different ending to my story. Maybe this wasn't all life held for me. Maybe God did have something more for me than living in fear of panic attacks. Maybe I would make it through this season, and maybe life was worth living.

YOU ARE LOVED AT YOUR LOWEST

At your lowest, you are loved.

I don't know your story. I don't know the details of your journey. I know neither the demons you fight nor the struggles you face. I don't know the names of those who have left you or the trauma that has plagued you. You very well may have experienced such darkness and hopelessness that even my suggestion that something different is possible feels insulting. Or perhaps your life seems fine—great job, great friends, great future—but if you were honest, you still struggle to love yourself for who you really are. Regardless of who or how old you are, I know the human experience unites us all. We have each at one point felt the fear and darkness that cannot be answered with a quick fix. A pain that takes us

to the pit we cannot see past. It is this pit and this pain where I found hope. The very hope I want to give you.

If God can find me curled up in my bed with my life spinning out of control and speak to me through my friend, He can use me to speak life into you.

YOU ARE WORTH IT

You are worthy of being chosen not because you are perfect but because you are a person. And you're not just any person—you are His. God is madly in love with you, and He has a plan for your life. No matter how dark it may seem, no matter how far gone you may feel, there is no place God will not go to find those He loves. He specializes in finding, choosing, and restoring those who are lost. And you are no different.

There's a story in the Bible about a man named Hosea. It illustrates how God continues to chase and choose those who are broken and undeserving. Hosea, a leader and a prophet, was commanded by God to marry Gomer, a prostitute (see Hosea 1:1–3). Yes, you read that right. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. (Who says the Bible is boring? People who have never read it.) Despite Hosea's best effort to love her and create a safe home for her, Gomer repeatedly left Hosea to return to the illicit life she knew. Yet, somehow, in all this turmoil and pain, Hosea never lost his love for her. At one point, Gomer fell into such degradation that she is sold as a sex slave. Hosea, in his deep love and adoration, searched the city to find her. (I wonder how far he had to go. What rooms did he have to search? What did he see and who did he have to ask, "Have you seen my wife?") He finally found her, bought her back, and restored her as his beloved wife.

Friend, this is a picture of our God. There is no place too dark, no area too dirty, where God will not go to find you.

YOU ARE LOVED JUST AS YOU ARE

Wherever you are, you are loved at that place. God's love knows no bounds.

With the bottle in your hand—you are loved.

With the needle in your arm—you are loved.

Lying in their bed—you are loved.

With hate in your heart—you are loved.

After the divorce—you are loved.

After they left—you are loved.

After the public failure—you are loved.

At the very bottom of the bottom—you are loved.

Perhaps the most famous scripture of all time, John 3:16, says that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (NIV). You need to know you are “so loved.” Not for anything you have done or can do but simply for who you are. This world often tells us that our value comes from what we have done—the money we have earned or the success we have achieved. But none of those things are strong enough to anchor our soul. People, power, positions, and paper are weak counterfeits that let us down every time. They serve as artificial anchors that often break when we need them most. Above all, we need to know that we are loved and chosen without any of these things.

Do not give in to the lie that there is nothing to live for. There is beauty, there is light—there is a life where you know you are loved and are able to love yourself. No matter where you may be, there is

a better day ahead. A day when confidence is your primary operating system. A day when you're willing to trust people and lean into relationships. A day when the hurt of the past does not keep you from the possibility of the future. A day when you speak your mind and don't back down. And that day is closer than you think.

Before you try to dig yourself out of this hole, before you try to power yourself away from this brokenness, before you move, know this:

If you never leave this place, you will still be loved.

You may think this sounds crazy. Perhaps it doesn't make sense. But it's true. You are loved—where you are, who you are, how you are. If you never beat the addiction, if you never do “the right thing,” if you stay in this exact spot, you will still be loved. This love is unexplainable. It defies reason. That is because it is not an earthly love but one that finds its source in *the* source of all light and love. It is not yours to earn. It can only be accepted.

This is the gospel message: The gift of grace was purchased by the death of God's only Son, Jesus Christ. You are loved unconditionally and have been given an opportunity at a fresh start in life. A life where you do not carry the shame and burden of your mistakes. A life where, at the moment of surrender, you can experience a joy and forgiveness that frees you to move forward. As you accept this love, you will begin to see who you really are. You will discover the most valuable and special parts of how God made you. Only when you accept and see that you are loved can you stand up and stand out in this world.

I BELIEVE, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO

It's important that I pause here and address those of you who still have questions about God, the church, Christians, or all of the

above. I wrestled with a deep tension while writing this book. When I first began, I wanted to ensure this book would not exclude anyone who wanted to read it. I wanted the title, subtitle, and even the language throughout to be as inclusive as possible. As I worded and reworded the subtitle, I came to a decision that changed the course of my life and this book.

WE DIED FOR THIS WORD

I was sitting in a coffee shop, on the phone with a dear friend. As I worked through my ideology and theology for the subtitle of this book, I shared how I had received feedback that using the word *Christian* might keep some people from reading it. I know many people have legitimate pain and trauma associated with that word. As I contemplated whether to include it, I was struck with a soul-jarring reality that came in the form of five words: *We died for this word.*

And as I sat there in my corner booth, I began to cry. I thought of the early church. I imagined the family whose door was being beaten down by Roman soldiers. I pictured the father sweeping his children and wife behind him as he opened the door to the soldier's shout: "Are you a Christian? Do you follow this Jesus from Nazareth and the message of His radical followers?"

The man's quiet but bold reply: "Yes, yes I do. I believe He rose from the grave and that He is the way. I follow Him. Yes, I am a Christian.

And then I imagined the Roman sword piercing through his chest. His lifeless body falling to the ground as his wife and children scream at what they'd just witnessed. His body dragged into the street as an example to the community.

The message? Professing this word could cost you your life.

To be clear, untold number of martyrs in the early church and all of church history did not die for a word. They died for their belief in the man behind the word. They died for rejecting human authority and embracing Jesus as their king. This word being uttered by members of the early church was no small thing. They knew what it meant. Yet they did not back down from the likely consequence of confessing it.

I realize that I am not at great risk for becoming a martyr for the gospel. As a follower of Jesus in America, I have never experienced persecution at the level I just described—persecution that many across the globe still face today. However, I do share their conviction that I will not shy away from this word. I understand it may be offensive, harsh, or hurtful to some. But I am a Christian. I am a follower of Jesus Christ, and I believe He is who He says He is.

I don't know where you are in your relationship with God, faith, or religion. Considering how many people are frustrated or disappointed with Christianity and the church, you might have a complicated and conflicted past when it comes to God. However, I want to make two things clear.

First, as stated earlier, I believe in Jesus. I believe He is the Son of God and *the* way to eternal life. I believe that His Word is true, that it is the ultimate authority on life, and that it was written with love and clarity to promote human flourishing. This doesn't mean I don't have questions or that following Jesus has solved all my problems. In fact, I have found that following Him has a clear and sometimes frustrating cost. But I cannot deny what He has done in my life. And for that, I trust Him.

Second, even if you do not believe in Christ, you can benefit from reading this book. This book is written from the conviction that truth is truth, whether it is observed or acknowledged. Whether or not you believe in God, you can still have something

to gain from the idea that He chose you. That He cares for you. That out of all the people on the planet, He sees *you*. I have never met anyone who did not benefit from being seen and loved. (Especially when He happens to be the creator of the universe.) If you question His existence or the validity of the Bible, I invite you to table your skepticism for a moment. Give yourself the space to ponder the implications and impact that this truth—that God sees you and chooses you—could have on your life. If you get to the end of this book and determine that this message is not useful to your flourishing, we can happily part ways and I will still love you and believe the best for you. Deal?

I have learned that it is extremely difficult to believe that you are chosen if you do not first grasp that you are loved. Loved because of who you are and not what you do. It is from this place of vulnerability that God can begin His most beautiful work in your soul. As my friend Tobe would say, “Try Jesus.” Jesus is a great friend and a better savior. If you are at the end of yourself, you just might find the beginning of Him. He is kind, He is gracious, and He can save you and your situation. It’s what He does. He picks the worst and does His best.

Still don’t believe me? Let me introduce you to some friends.