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—PHILLIP C. "DR. PHIL" MCGRAW, PhD, cofounder of Merit Street Media and
#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

A Psychologist's Thoughts on
Suffering, Miracles, Science, and Faith



Why I Believe

DR. HENRY CLOUD

New York Times Bestselling Author of *Boundaries*

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NASHVILLE NEW YORK

To all those who honestly seek

Preface

I have an issue . . . and this book is my attempt to solve it.

I have had this issue since I was about ten years old . . . and although it is better, it is still unresolved in my heart with so many of you . . . my friends. I won't name you by name here, but maybe you will find yourself in these pages. And for those who read this book whom I don't know, if you fit the description of how I describe my friends, then come along for the ride. We would probably be friends anyway. But, enough about you for a moment . . . I want to talk about me and my problem.

Here it is in a nutshell: I love God, and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is real. He has proven that to me for decades. That is not my problem.

My problem is that I love my friends, and many of them do not know God, at least in any way that they have told me about. So the problem is this: I want them to know Him and know that He is real. I want them to have a relationship with Him and know how incredible that is.

So why is that a problem? Simple . . . I often do not know how to tell them.

“Wait . . .” you might say. “You have told millions of people about God in talks and books and media, so how is it that you don't even know how to tell your own friends about Him?”

Here is the simple answer . . . the audiences sign up to hear what I think about God. My friends don't.

They sign up to just be my friend. And I love that. That is why I signed up with them as well. They rock . . . my friends are the coolest people in the world. They are smart, funny, talented . . . many of them do amazing things in some field of endeavor, in their families, or some other way. Others don't set any records at all . . . they are just normal folks, and awesome as people. But all of them have one thing in common: they have the greatest hearts. They are honest, caring, and real. I love hanging out with them. And for some strange reason, they like to hang out with me as well.

Which brings me to the point. When we do hang out together, they did not come to talk about God. They just came to be together . . . to play golf, have dinner, talk about life. And so, my problem is that I don't want to bug them or make them uncomfortable by telling them what I want them to know about God. And I especially don't want to make them feel so weird that they would not want to hang out anymore . . . thinking I am somehow trying to "convert them," as one of my good friends said one time. (We laugh about it now . . . but at a party one time, he told a group that when he met me twenty years ago, he googled me and all of this "faith" stuff came up along with my being an author and psychologist. He thought, "Oh no . . . He's *one of those*, and he's going to try to convert me.") But as he told that story to another friend at a party at my house recently, he said, "I finally figured out that he [meaning me] was sort of normal and wasn't trying to do that." He and I and the other people in the conversation just laughed.

That conversation was funny . . . and I would never want to put pressure on anyone, make them feel uneasy, or weird, or judged for their own beliefs. So, for those reasons I often have this problem: *Even though they do not want to feel weird, and I do not want to*

make them feel that way, I still want my friends to know that God is real, and I want them to meet Him.

And I struggle with that.

But that is not being a good friend, either . . . a good friend *does* share what they think their friend would love to know and have if they knew, right? But I often don't. And what do I know? They even might *want* to know what I think about God.

So, I decided to solve my problem. I am writing down some of my thoughts about God . . . for my friends. The stuff we never talked about.

Introduction

One night, as a ten-year-old at camp in North Carolina, I felt a pain and stirring in my soul that has never gone away. The night had been a regular camp night . . . with counselors and cabin mates at the big bonfire . . . doing camp-like things. One of them I do remember being a bit unusual . . . we ate a rattlesnake that some crazy counselor had killed, but other than that, just normal stuff, along with some kind of “devotional” time. It was a “lightly” Christian camp, but not an in-your-face overbearing type of religious camp. Mainly it was a sports and wildlife experience for four weeks of fun and some attempt by the counselors at spiritual and character development of who knows what kinds of kids had been sent there by parents wanting either a break or a better version of their kid. My parents probably hoped for both. ☺

That week had been one of a difficult-to-explain heightening of my love for God. I had always had a strong consciousness of God from early childhood . . . I somehow knew He was there. He showed Himself to me in ways I can't really explain . . . I just knew when I felt His presence and that it was real. But this particular camp experience that week led me to a little mountainside chapel as I was out for a hike, where I had an experience that I remember as if it were yesterday. I was tromping around in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina and suddenly felt drawn into that

little building. As I sat there in silence, I was overcome with a movement in my heart. I felt Him drawing me to Him . . . it was kind of overwhelming, in a good way. The love was so strong that I felt for Him. As I sat there, I told Him that I would do whatever He wanted me to do with my life. I had been moved by an Invisible Force that I knew was real and loving. I was sure of that.

Which brought me to that night . . . I had heard it before, the “gospel” message that was conveyed, that God loved all of us and Jesus had died to pay the penalty for everything we had ever done wrong, securing forgiveness for any of us for all time. I had believed it before as a child but probably didn’t understand it as well as I did that night. For some reason, this time it pierced me more deeply.

I don’t remember all of the details of the message, but I vividly remember the gist. The counselor said that the gospel was a simple message that was like this: Think of if you committed a crime, and went to court, and were found guilty by the judge. You are standing in front of the bench, and he pronounces the verdict: guilty as charged. And then he pronounces the penalty, the fine. You know that you cannot pay it or endure it, but it stands as true and real. You are guilty, and you are convicted. You must pay the fine. And you also realize that you cannot afford the price.

Then, right at that moment, the judge says, “I will come down from the bench and stand in your place and pay the fine for you if you want me to. You may go free if you want to accept my offer.” The counselor then said, “That is what Jesus did for us. He paid our fine, and if we accept His payment, his death on the cross for us, we can go free and be pronounced ‘not guilty.’” We can be forever forgiven by God for everything we have ever done, or ever will do. It has been paid for, if we accept it.

Somehow the simplicity of that moved me in a different way than it had ever before. I realized that the love that I had felt from

God was from a loving Father, not mad at me for being “bad,” and not ready to zap me for any mistake. It came together in a much deeper way.

So, with all of that good news, why the pain that night?

I felt the pain of knowing that my best friend did not know God . . . did not know that there was Someone who loved him this much and that he could have a relationship with . . . and I wanted him to know it, too. But I felt squeamish about how to tell him. After all, we were much more concerned with being cool and tough and winning games and trophies than being one of those weird religious types. So, I had never talked to him about it. And that night, I cried with my counselor in front of the fireplace back at the lodge. I needed to know how to get out of this dilemma . . . the dilemma of carrying around such an incredible Reality that I knew he would want to know, and at the same time being too afraid to talk about it.

Well, since that time, a lot has happened. A lot. And I have seen way, way more of how real God is, and what He can do. And this book is my attempt to put my journey with God into words . . . for one purpose: I want my friends to know that God is real. And although I have discussed God with many of my friends since that time, I want to write it all down for them and others I have not talked to, in one place: “You might think I am crazy, but this is why I believe, and why I want you to have a relationship with Him, too.” And before you read on, I can pretty much guarantee that you will find some of it to sound very crazy. But it is all true.

But there are a lot of obstacles to faith. I had them myself after I decided to get more serious about my faith later in life, so it is easy for me to understand when others have those questions. I had to struggle with finding answers that satisfied me, because I could not be a believer and put my brain in a lockbox in order to do that.

So, the first purpose of this book is to share with you my story of God's reality in my life, and the second is to share how those hard questions were resolved in my own soul and brain. I want to share the answers I found that put it all to rest.

Life has so many dilemmas that make it so hard to believe in a good God at times, and the people who sell the God message can sometimes be so weird and crazy and obnoxious that we just feel like "If this faith were true, then all of that crap would not exist that surrounds it, and Christians would not be so undesirable and such a turn-off." As I used to think when I was a kid, "I like God; I just don't like His friends."

Of course, not all Christians are "that kind." So, so many are awesome people who do truly incredible things. They give of their time, talents, and resources to make the world a much better place, alleviating poverty, suffering, and much more. And they are people of stellar character. I know this to be true over and over, all around the world. But as I talk to people who do not share my faith, the experiences that they have had with some believers are often a big part of the obstacle to God. But the fascinating thing I have found is this: the religious people that you and I both struggle with and can't stand are the same ones that Jesus didn't get along with, either. I will show you what He actually says about certain types of judgmental, narrow-minded, narcissistic, and controlling religious types. I will hopefully help you discover something I learned . . . that "they" are not what He or the faith is about at all, and those people often do exactly the opposite of what He told us to do, even doing those things "in His name."

More about that later.

So, come along with me as I share my experience, my questions, and the answers that I have found that have satisfied my doubts. One disclaimer: I do not mean that my answers are even

the best ones out there; they are only my heartfelt attempt to tell my own story about how they got answered for me. They come from many areas of science, and other fields, and as I studied those disciplines, I discovered something. There are brilliant people on both sides of faith and non-faith, and it told me that intelligence, IQ, science, philosophy or any other discipline is not standing in the way of whether or not someone believes. But for someone who does believe, the science supports faith, and as I will share with you, many of the most brilliant physicists, biologists, astronomers, and others who attest to that.

So, let's hop in. First my journey to faith and its experiences, and then how some tough questions got answered.

Part I

***How I Came to
Believe in God***



One

Small Spiritual Beginnings

I am not trying to write a memoir of my life . . . that would be much too boring and trivial for anyone to spend time reading. What I do want to do, however, is to write the story of my *spiritual life* in a way that you can walk through some of the key experiences and learnings with me . . . and understand where I am coming from when I think about God.

I grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a small city on the Mississippi River. It was a great place to grow up, with all of the positives of a small town. Kind of a combination of what was a city, yet close to all things rural and country, at the base of the Mississippi Delta—one of the world’s fertile places for both creativity and suffering. Great outdoors activities such as hunting, fishing, water-skiing, horseback riding, golf, and the like were a regular menu of life there, as well as all kinds of other sports. The town was a close community of families and friends. My parents owned and operated a small business there for over forty years, and I grew up in a family that was very engaged in that local community.

My parents introduced me to faith early in life, and they were active in a local Methodist church. They gave much of their time

and service to the poor. They also taught me that life was always lived before God, but they did so in a pretty low-key traditional way of attending church on Sunday, and showing one's faith through service to others, and being good citizens. Sunday school from early on, and overall, trying to be a good neighbor was what faith looked like in our house. Not too intrusive, mind you, but quietly meaningful. A good Southern Methodist clan, they were. But I never got the feeling that we had a "religious" home . . . it was just a normal Southern home where faith was the guiding, but not oppressive or overbearing, background.

My mother would say bedtime prayers with me each night, in the tradition of "Now I lay me down to sleep." My father could be seen reading his Bible and attending church regularly, but we had nothing like family devotions or that kind of overt "faith" training. That was left to the Sunday school teachers. Faith wasn't spoken about as much as just lived and assumed.

My father was a very regular "guy's guy," a lot more fun than some of the more "religious" parents of my friends. A World War II first sergeant, Daddy was pretty tough, but he was also loving and really, really funny. He always brought laughter to the moment or situation. Yet you always knew that he stood for things; he had strong principles, and one of those was his faith. He was serious about it, just not very loud about it. And he had friends from all walks of life. I really loved that about him. He loved having barbecues with laborers as much as hanging out in boardrooms, probably even more.

So, in that way, I did grow up in a Christian family, just not in an over-the-top way.

Our home was a gathering place for people of all kinds. My parents were really good people, and everyone loved them. It was not unusual for them to be lauded for their work in the community. I looked up to them in those ways, and just assumed that everyone

was like them. It was normal in our small town for people to serve others and take care of them.

They volunteered for Meals on Wheels. My dad was chairman of the board of the Salvation Army and used his business to be very involved in helping the Black community in various ways at a time of clear segregation in the Deep South. He was older when I was born and had grown up in the Great Depression . . . so he always had a heart for the poor and people who were disadvantaged in some way. He came from poverty, built a very good business, and always used his business to help support our community. He was dedicated to taking unskilled young men off the street, training them in the trades around construction, and building careers for them. Many of his employees worked for him for over thirty years. Many of them he had taken from illiteracy to reading blueprints and being foremen on construction jobs. It was a skill he learned in life and the Army . . . having been a poor kid on the streets himself, taken in by an organization and being trained by them, then doing the same for others. When he retired in his sixties, instead of selling the business or leaving it to my sisters and me, he gave the company and all of its equipment to his employees, many of whom he had taken from the streets and helped them build careers as I mentioned. Both of my parents worked in the business, and I always felt like they were as much social workers as they were business owners.

One story that shows how he lived out faith more than talked about it is my favorite. He was in his twenties when World War II started, and he had enlisted in the National Guard. They gave him an IQ test, and he scored in the genius level, even though he had dropped out of school to support his family in the eighth grade. His father had died, and they were very poor. But the lack of schooling had not destroyed his natural intelligence, so the Army began to train him in leadership. They moved him to be head of

an intelligence group that built the models for General Patton and others to fight their campaigns in Europe.

The interesting thing about that group, though, is that his men were all artists, sculptors, and set designers from Hollywood . . . non-soldiers who had been recruited to build the models that the generals used to plan battles, generals like Patton. They built rooms of mountain ranges, cities, and other topography so that the strategies could be formed, since back then there was no computer modeling.

So my dad found himself in the first part of his tenure in Europe as a young sergeant turning moviemakers into soldiers. These young men he led were displaced in England, away from home, separated from their families, lonely, and often just feeling lost. They were in the real throes of war and, not being soldiers, probably feeling pretty scared in the midst of all the bombings and destruction in Europe. And my dad, who had been in the military since he was eighteen, had compassion for them. He was tough, sometimes even harsh, but he had a heart.

One night my father went into town and got into a craps game (as I said, he was Christian but not overly religious), and after a few early wins, got in with some heavy hitters. He kept playing, and won what amounted to a lot of money that night. So he devised a plan for what he was going to do with it.

As someone who loved to eat and was very sick of army food in England and who at the same time felt sorry for his young soldiers who were away from home and also without good food . . . he went out and secretly, under the radar, bought a restaurant the next week in Henley-on-Thames, the town where they were stationed. He paid in cash.

Since this was not permissible for him as a foreign serviceman to own a business or property in England, he found an older couple to run the place and agree to act like they owned it while

they operated it so no one would know it was his. This set him up to execute his secret plan.

Tea and other foods had been rationed in parts of England, and he had a lot of these provisions from the base that he could use it as barter with the farmers in the countryside. So, each week, he would drive into the country and trade tea to farmers for chickens and potatoes. Then, he would bring them back to the older couple and tell them to close the restaurant on Saturday night and throw a party for the US soldiers with fried chicken and french fries. It was all free, and they could bring their dates. Just a gift of appreciation from an old English couple to the American soldiers. And no one ever knew who was actually behind it all, my father the illegal restaurateur. And the kicker? When he left England to go to join the liberation of France, he gave the restaurant to the old couple as a gift to them for all they had done.

I had heard this story many times from him and his war buddies over my childhood, and later, when I graduated from college, he took me there and showed me the town, the yacht club where the Cambridge-Oxford regatta was held that had been their headquarters, and the restaurant itself. I will never forget it. I have a painting of the yacht club in my study.

This story exemplifies the way that faith was shown to me by my parents as a kid. It was real, present but lived out much more in giving and caring for others than being overtly religious. My mother was the same way. She was *always* doing for others . . . the elderly people who were shut ins could always depend on her dropping by to check on them. She had two widows whom she cared for until they died in their nineties. She was always making sure that I went to visit them at least once a week or more, just to check in and make sure they had some company. It was not a suggestion . . . it was a *requirement*.

She tutored poor children in reading, delivered meals, and kept the nursery and toddlers in the Sunday school hour of our church for twenty years. My mother was always doing something for people who were struggling. And there were countless other good deeds I saw my parents do over my entire childhood—real expressions of their goodness and faith—not efforts to seem religious.

This kind of faith was pretty normal in our small Southern town. Faith was pretty private and social, yet real. At our house, probably the most overt practice of spirituality other than being regular churchgoers was just saying grace before meals and my father's Tuesday morning men's breakfast club at the church, which he would take me to.

So, for much of my early life, my faith was pretty much like that too . . . private and silent, but still real to me. I always believed in God. Sunday school helped reinforce a lot of it . . . learning about God and a little bit of the Bible, and just accepting it all as true. Sunday school was way more social than theologically grounding, but at least it reminded us that we were all there because of God in some way that we probably never even fully understood.

The gift of this is that from early on, I just somehow knew God was there . . . I even felt Him at various times. He seemed pretty constant and close. Sometimes too close, I thought, in terms of how I would see Him when I was "bad." I remember specifically one time getting into trouble when I was pretty little and going into our basement telling Him, "God I know I am bad, but You made me. So you are the one Who made me bad . . . but I am the one getting in trouble for it. That's not fair." And it really didn't seem fair to me at all, but I just accepted it and would move on. Still, being "bad" and getting into trouble for various childhood misdemeanors, and trying to be "good" at the same time, not ever really knowing which side was winning.

I was always confused in that way, not sure if I were a “good boy” or a “bad” one. That had a lot to do with trying to be good and at the same time frequently dipping into forbidden waters. Such was the early life of faith. Later, when I became a psychologist, I learned that much of that guilt and judgment was coming from voices other than God . . . in some ways my mother . . . who could expertly use guilt and shame as a parenting tool, and in other ways my World War II first sergeant father whose tough correction could sometimes scare the crap out of me.

Suffice it to say that I had a strong God consciousness from early on, along with an unhealthy dose of confusion at times about our relationship. A lot of this also had to do with my friends and the people I preferred to be with. I identified much more with the “normal” gang than the “church” types. Even though I would not always do all the things some of them did, they were the ones I liked the most (later, I discovered that Jesus and I had that in common . . . He hung around the fun crowd, it seemed, more than the religious ones).

I talked to Him a lot . . . I saw Him in everything, especially the beauty of nature and creation. It always made sense to me that Someone made the beauty of the dark woods I hunted and rode horses in; of the lakes I swam, fished, and water-skied in; and of the smells of spring, especially the grass after a downpour. I was a golfer from early in life, and I will always have the smell of fresh green grass deep in my soul, especially after a rain. I knew God made that. And the thunderstorms. No doubt the scary thunder was His, and it probably kept me in line at times.

I spent a lot of time talking to Him when I was alone, and I had a lot of alone time. My mother worked in the family business, and many of my days as a kid were spent alone when I was not engaged in sports or play. In the woods, horseback riding, on my

bike, hunting or fishing, or especially on the golf course. I spent a lot of time alone and with God, talking to Him about life. Some of my most spiritual times were as a kid, riding my horse alone through the woods, just talking to God.

I remember as a very small child, sitting alone in the yard, playing in the grass, or digging with my little shovel. Then, if a bird would fly by, or I would notice a car that would suddenly divert my attention away from what I had been doing, immediately I would be baffled by an early spiritual dilemma: free will versus external determinants. When the bird caught my glance, and I looked up at it, realizing that I was now focusing on something in a different direction that I had been looking before the bird diverted me . . . it left me with a quandary: if that bird had not flown by, I would not be looking here. I would be looking in a different direction altogether, and the rest of my day would have followed that direction and would have been different as a result. One action that I did not cause had started a chain of events that had the potential to alter my life forever.

And I would ask God, “Okay, if I had not seen that bird, or that car, I would still be looking at the shovel. And now I am doing something totally different, down a completely different path, looking at trees or the sky and no longer playing in the dirt. My course of life has changed because of that bird. *Am I in control of my life or not?* Did *You* cause that? Are *You* in control of my life, or me? Or the bird or the car? That wasn’t *my* choice . . . it just happened, and now, here I am.” This was a pretty daunting question that I recall often asking God to help me understand. Who controls what happens and where we end up? I guess I was getting prepared for being a psychologist, but the point is that those kinds of discussions with God were frequent. He was always in my awareness, and we were always in relationship. I just knew it was real. Not like I know now, as it had never been tested, but it just felt real from an early age.

Another spiritual question I always struggled with was the existence of time and my place in it. I would be sitting in the yard, noticing what I was doing in the “now,” and then I could remember what I had done before, say, that morning. And then I could remember breakfast, and even yesterday. But before that, it would get fuzzy. Why couldn’t I remember my whole life all the way back to the beginning if I could remember what occurred that morning? And how did this moment of “now” move into something as lost as my “past”? Why wasn’t all of my life all present and available to be now? It would be many years later, studying neuroscience, NDEs, quantum physics, and relativity, when I understood just how complicated these questions were, but it was just another example of ongoing conversations with God. Somehow, I always thought He must have an answer for even my most complex questions, and I talked to him a lot about my early dilemmas.

These experiences—watching my parents live their lives in our community and hanging out with God as a companion and recipient of my many existential questions—represented the extent of my “spiritual life” as a child. As I grew older, I became aware of something that troubled me: there were two groups of people with whom my spiritual life did not align.

First, there were the hard-core church people, with whom I did not identify at all, and they were very different from my family. They seemed to have a *lot* of rules . . . like not being able to go to dances or movies, or play poker, or bet on rounds of golf. Or, for some, even playing golf on Sunday. Ouch! I always felt a bit bad around them and judged by them . . . and at the same time, felt like I was sort of like them, as we both believed in God. Kind of like I was in their club, sort of, and not, at the same time. I think I was like my dad . . . he loved God but kind of poked fun at some of the overly religious types. He used to say if the Baptists moved

out of town, the liquor stores would all go broke. But . . . we were like them, too.

Second, there were the people who did not have anything to do with God that I could see, nor did their families. In some ways, I could relate to them, too, and in some ways, even more. They did all the activities that I loved and were much more chill. They would even go water-skiing on Sunday! But especially as I got older, these folks would also engage in other pursuits that I knew my parents wouldn't approve of and some of which I didn't either—although frequently, I might be present and along for the ride, so to speak. I loved being with them, listening to the Allman Brothers or Led Zeppelin, just not getting high like they were.

So as I grew older, I began to feel like I did not totally belong to either group. It seemed like I was not as “bad” as they were sometimes and not as “good” as the church crowd. “Lost in the middle” was how I would spiritually classify my personal denomination. That feeling continued for a long time . . . and remains in some ways still today.

The dilemma of being spiritual deep in my heart and at the same time not at being able to fully identify with “religion” or “church types” was the predominant theme of my early years. I wanted to talk to my best friend, who was a pretty wild kid, about God, and yet I feared he would see me as “one of them.” I didn't know what to do with friends like him, and as I have told you, sometimes I still don't. I held on to my secret spiritual life, unable to be one of those religious types, and so I felt like I had no place to land, like a spiritual wanderer without a true home. So, it was pretty much just me and God. And that was pretty much the path of my spiritual life until college. I had a relationship with God and always felt like I was not as spiritual as I should have been.

But there was one overt “God event” in my early years that has become important to my understanding of my spiritual evolution and became some sort of anchor for me to know that God was in my life. One Sunday morning, when I was almost four years old, I was sitting on the floor at Sunday school when my left leg began to hurt badly. It got worse until my parents had to be called in. I remember they took me home, and there was a flurry of activity going on in the house as they were calling doctors, trying to figure out what to do. I vividly remember a very ominous dark feeling that day. I was outside sitting on the grass waiting for the doctors and decisions to be made, in pain, and I had a strong realization that life had changed somehow. It felt really dark.

I did not realize who true that was.

Later that day I was hospitalized, and the doctors began working to find out what was wrong with me. My parents would tell me later that I would scream in pain for many nights, and how frightened they were. I was in agony, and they felt helpless. The doctors did every test they knew to do, and I remained in the hospital for some time, around a month, I think. I vaguely remember people coming to visit, lots of blood tests, x-ray machines, doctors in white coats, people poking me, and a lot of fear surrounding that time. I remember nights in the hospital with sitters I didn’t know at times and feeling very scared and alone. I think that was some of the toughest parts of it . . . feeling alone.

So, the God moment: at some point, the doctors were considering amputation of my leg, and my mother had taken me to the appointment with her best friend, Emmett, accompanying her. Emmett was like my second mother and the mother of my best young childhood friend, Ike. They were a second family to me, and she was walking through this whole crisis with us, as well as her

husband, who was a local physician and chief of staff at the hospital where I was being treated. The doctor was late to the appointment, and we waited there for him for a long time. As we waited, my mother heard a voice, saying, "Leave here, and take him to Oschner in New Orleans." Oschner was the big training hospital of the South, sort of like the Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic of the South at that time. It was the place you went when all else failed.

Mama turned to Emmett and said, "Come on. We are leaving." I am sure that Emmett was confused, but my mother was certain because of the Voice she had clearly heard. She took me home and somehow convinced my otherwise levelheaded father to obey a voice telling them to drive 225 miles with no doctor, no plan, no referral . . . just a direction straight "from God."

They took me to Oschner and checked me in, and I was "randomly" assigned to a new orthopedic surgeon named Dr. Mary Sherman. It turned out that this assignment was not so random.

I went in to see her and vividly remember her examining me, sending me for X-rays, and calling me and my parents back in. She seemed larger than life to me . . . very outgoing, very pretty, so confident, and so kind. She looked at them and said, "There will be no amputation. I know exactly what this is and how to treat it." She went on to explain the disease in my hip and the treatment protocol that would ensue. I would be in a wheelchair for a while, then on leg braces and crutches for a longer time, up to two years. And then, "He will be fine."

Amazingly, Dr. Sherman had moved to New Orleans from Chicago, where she had been trained specifically in the newest treatment of this disorder by the ones who had developed it, and she was one of the most heralded international bone specialists in the entire world at the time. As it turns out, there was no one anywhere who would have been better. As my parents understood

and always told me, the voice my mother had heard was God leading them and answering their prayers to help them know what to do when they had no options. Hitting the end of the road, hearing a voice, standing up to the experts they were trusting, getting specific instructions to go to a specific hospital, and a “random” assignment to one of many possible doctors I could have gotten at such a large training hospital. And the only one who could know what she knew. Just the right one . . . not a coincidence.

Looking back, I can’t tell you specifically how this event figured in my early faith. I just knew from my parents that God had intervened in my life, and His care became part of my life narrative—that God was there and looks out for us in hard times. We can turn to Him. I had learned early what trauma was like . . . going from an active almost four-year-old to one day suddenly being told I could not walk anymore and would be in a wheelchair! It happened out of nowhere. Screaming “Why can’t I walk?? Let me walk!” I remember the chaos of it all and the angry fits.

It was a really difficult time, for close to two years. I remember getting disciplined if I ever put one ounce of weight on that leg. I remember being in severe pain. Being disabled and not allowed to play like I could before, I was left out of many of the childhood activities that my friends would engage in. I remember sitting on the sidelines at birthday parties while the other children rode the pony, feeling like something was wrong with me. I was different somehow . . . flawed. Ashamed. I remember walking down stairs on my crutches and leg braces and tripping and falling down flights of stairs, stabbed by my crutches as they broke, bleeding on the steps of the post office. I remember the looks as I got on the bus with my crutches and people asking my nanny “What is wrong with the sick child?” I remember being called “Crip” and later having flashbacks of big, scary x-ray machines and medical procedures.

It was a difficult period for me and for our family and one that would have other psychological and emotional ramifications in my life. But the spiritual imprinting on me was powerful . . . that when there is tragedy and life is no longer like it was before, He is there.

I got well a couple of years later and returned to normal life. I put it all out of my head. Not wanting to be “crippled” anymore, I jumped headlong into the exact opposite: becoming a sports nut. I guess I was making up for lost time and trying to overcompensate for my physical insecurity, but I played every possible sport. I had to prove I was not “inferior” or just a “crippled” child. Football, baseball, basketball, golf, diving, karate, and more. At age eleven or twelve I won the Mississippi state diving championship, placed third in the Three State Southern Competition, and was asked to begin further training by Olympic coaches to prepare for becoming an Olympic diver one day. Later, I placed third in a karate championship from ten states. I was abnormally driven. But slowly, as I was too short for basketball and too small for football, golf was emerging as my sport, my passion, and soon it became my total life.

By age twelve, I knew that I loved golf more than anything else. I played all the tournaments, did well, and slowly gave up all other sports to pursue my passion. I was also involved in all the other activities of school, social life, the Southern life of hunting and fishing and water-skiing, and of course, pursuing girls. Over time the pain and trauma and the spiritual lesson I had learned through my earlier illness was all faded. It was another life. I had put being the “crippled” child very far in the past.

And as I moved on in life’s pursuits, I kept God very private and personal—God was my friend, but I was not very involved with faith in a public way. I talked to God a lot, tried to stay close to Him, and pretty much kept that from everyone else.

Until I had no choice.

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Worthy
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
worthypublishing.com
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First Edition: June 2024

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2024932964

ISBNs: 9781546003410 (hardcover), 9781546003434 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

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