

## Example 1

This is the story of how Joshua Page is being restored to God's design.

I grew up in a Christian home and heard the message of the Bible often. When I was 9 years old, I had a growing conviction of my need for God. I sat down with my father one evening and he explained to me verses from Romans about how we earn death because of our disobedience to God's ways but that Jesus died on the cross in our place. Jesus then rose on the third day that we too might have eternal life. I believed this message, turned from my disobedience to God, and was baptized. I walked faithfully with Jesus through my teenage years by serving in the church, studying the Bible often, and teaching others about Jesus.

Unfortunately, when I entered my college years, I began building my life on many other things. My greatest desire was to be successful in my career. I worked hard to produce results and was quickly advancing within businesses. On the weekends, I chased girls and partied with friends. My relationships were built on the pleasures of sports, alcohol, and sex. I never rejected my profession of Jesus, but there was no need or time for God in my life. I found satisfaction in created things rather than in the creator.

While I found fulfillment from these pursuits, they did not last. A relationship with a girl I had built my life around ended painfully. A high school friend visited with me in my hurting and pointed me back to Jesus. The Spirit of God broke my heart that night as I saw my unfaithfulness to God my heavenly father. I wept knowing that I had disregarded the gift of forgiveness Jesus had given his life to purchase to pursue temporary gains. But my tears that night were also met with joy as I realized how God had not given up on me. That Sunday I attended a church for the first time in many years.

Over that year, God relit a passion within me to study the Bible and serve in the church. I met Angela and we committed to build our relationship on Jesus from the beginning. Before we got married, we denied ourselves pleasures for the sake of doing things God's way. After marriage, we used our home to serve others in our community. I also began losing my passion to advance in my career and growing in a passion to advance the kingdom of heaven. I used my job to tell my coworkers about Jesus and my days off to serve in the church. My pastors pressed me to know God more and trained me to teach and lead within the church. This developed into the opportunity to abandon my career in the business world and serve full-time at our church.

I have learned through my journey that God has created us to work hard and enjoy pleasures in relationships but that he should be the one receiving the honor and fame for these gifts, not just using them for our own gain. I praise God for his faithfulness to me while I was unfaithful to him and commit every part of my life to serving his purposes.

## Example 2

This is the story of how Angela Page is being restored to God's design.

Growing up I would consider myself a people pleaser, someone who would seek other people's approval and love. I grew up in a family that would only go to church when my mom needed something from God. I knew there was a God but always thought of Him as someone far too great for me and someone you go to when you needed something and maybe if you were good, he would give it to you. I always tried hard at everything I did in the hopes that I would gain others' approval, specifically my parents. I knew from an early age that I was not my mom's favorite and I spent years working to impress her and do things for her love. When I was in High school, I had some friends that were Christians, and they would invite me to their youth groups, but I only went when it was a fun night or there was something in it for me.

Fast forward to college, I was a mess. I found out that if you dress a certain way, act a certain way, or drink certain things you would gain peoples approval and attention, especially guys. I liked the attention at first, but it wasn't as fulfilling as I had thought it would be, the desire for love and approval were still there. I knew that I deserved more than how I was living my life, but I didn't know what it was or what I needed. Everything in my life was struggling, friendships, academics, finances, my emotional and mental state.

After a few traumatic experiences when I was 23, I found myself at the lowest part of my life. I didn't know who I was at this point or what my worth was. My sister, who had been a Christian for a few years lovingly cared for me and shared the best hope of all, the Gospel of Jesus. I heard this message that day, not for the first time, but for the first time with ears willing to listen and a heart ready to respond. I eventually trusted in the truth that Jesus came and died for sinners like me. That on the cross He took all my sin, shame and guilt and paid for it in full. He loves me and there isn't anything I have to do for His love, it's a free gift. I trusted in this sweet hope and felt a weight being lifted off my shoulders.

I started reading the bible, attending a bible study, and growing in my love and knowledge of Jesus. I will always follow Jesus because He is where life, peace and love are. Now I strive to be like Jesus in my daily life. No longer do I work daily for love and approval, for I know I am loved, accepted, wanted and valued. I am not perfect, but thankfully Jesus is.

## Example 3

This is the story of how George Hillstrom is being restored to God's design.

I grew up in the Catholic Church, but as I grew older my relationship with God faded, I moved to college and my life changed. My greatest desire was to become a professional musician and I was very career focused. I wanted to be the ruler of my own kingdom, eventually doubting the existence of God himself. I was focusing entirely on myself, my career, and momentary pleasures.

Because I couldn't find fulfillment in music and career success, I felt empty, scared, lonely and lost. I was completely dead in sin and deserving of God's judgment. This led to drinking too much, parting hard, experimenting with drugs. I was prideful and had broken relationships and friendships.

But then God intervened in my life. A friend asked me to go to church with her, but I declined the offer. I was skeptical about the idea of coming back to church. With her persistence, I decided to come to church on Easter Sunday 2018. When I entered, I felt out of place, but I sat and listened. As the year went on, I started to meet more with her family, who were God-loving and caring. They showed me Christ's love in many ways. We had many talks about God and they shared the gospel with me, but I still resisted God's will for my life. After some time, I started questioning my beliefs and started to seek God. I started coming to Renaissance more frequently and began reading books by CS Lewis. My heart started to soften and Jesus started to transform me.

Eventually I began talking to the pastor at Renaissance Church and told him that I wanted to seek God. We met and discussed the gospel. After reading through some of the scripture he showed me, I gave up my resistance and realized that I wanted to become a disciple of Jesus and give up my old life of sin. I was still scared of the future and my faith was little, but now I had a new hope and that was in Christ. I believed that Jesus was the lamb of God, who lived the perfect life, died on the cross for my sins, rose from the dead, and I would be united with him in eternity.

The more I sought the Lord, the more grace he gave me and the more faithful I became. The more I gathered with God loving community and dove into God's word, the more I was transformed and the more I am satisfied by Jesus rather than momentary pleasures or career aspirations. This journey brought me from doubting him, to being transformed by him. I am so thankful for all the people in my life and for God who led me to these new friends and great fellowship.

## Example 4

This is the story of how Becca Bailey is being restored to God's design.

I have always been a perfectionist. Not type A, but definitely someone who didn't want to try something unless I could be truly good at it. Anyone like me will know that perfectionism is crippling. It's a fear filled, self absorbed existence. I've danced and sang my whole life but have rarely performed because my mantra has been, "I just don't measure up". The mindset of perfectionism has stripped me of things that should have just brought me joy. Striving for perfectionism in my life has come with pains of eating disorders, self hatred, depression, anxiety and a tendency to isolate. It's exhausting trying to be a perfect person.

I was living in this when our neighbors invited Brad and me to their church. I'd been burned from church in the past and I was hyper critical about EVERYTHING. My attendance was super spotty and I'd often leave the service fuming from perceived misogyny and narrow mindedness. Why did I ever go back? I thought that I liked Jesus and just didn't like organized religion. I thought I could learn from him, even if I didn't really think that he was God.

The next part of my journey took a glacial pace. Cornerstone Bible church used expository preaching- slowly working through a book of the bible, dissecting every verse. It was a small congregation, nothing very showy ever happened and I wouldn't characterize the pastor as being a charismatic leader. It was exactly what I needed to get over the hurdle of hating church. Because it was less of a church and more like a seminary. I could encounter God's word without being bombarded with hype- or in my mind consumer psychology that is trying to trick me into believing garbage. When I started respecting the pastor and the people, I was much more open to giving the concepts a chance.

I started attending more often and every time I heard the gospel: I am not and never will be perfect. That I need a savior from myself and from this world. That Jesus died and then defeated death through his resurrection. In the center of this was an answer to my question of perfectionism that I have struggled with my whole life. I don't have to be perfect anymore because He has been perfect for me. He is making me perfect through His grace and it's not for my own glory. It's to glorify God.

Faith in this has not been easy for me. My conversion was not a single moment of accepting Jesus. It's more like I have tried over and over to run away and deny that I need God to save me. Still, He has softened my heart and pursued me. I am not a perfect person but I am certainly transformed. Living for Jesus is filled with so much more joy and contentment than living for myself ever did. I don't have to have all the answers to all the problems because I have the answer to the biggest problem of brokenness in this world and in myself. This is a God who says the right posture before him is knowing that you are not perfect. The pressure is off.