

# ALIVE AGAIN!

*Mini-Magazine*

**Riding  
the  
Waves**

**The  
Wake  
Up  
Call**

**Dear  
Younger  
Me**



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# Riding *the* Waves



Since the tender age of two or three, while most of us were graduating peek-a-boo and going through potty training, Bethany Hamilton was learning to surf. By the age of eight, she had entered her first major surfing competition, winning first place in her age group. This was her first in a series of ongoing victories, paving the road before her as a professional surfer. Young, talented, and with a promising career ahead of her, the future looked bright for Bethany. And for a moment, it seemed as if nothing could go wrong.

Perhaps you know the feeling. Good job, the grades are good, and you're in love. Everything is smooth, but as life typically goes, on the horizon looms dark clouds. For you, maybe it was a breakup. For Bethany, it was a shark attack.

On the morning of October 31, 2004, Bethany and two of her friends woke up early to go to Tunnels each, a popular surfing spot, to practice surfing. It was a beautiful morning, and they hit the beach just as the sun was beginning to rise over the water. Everything was perfect, but as they paddled

out into the ocean, lying belly down on their boards, Bethany put her hand in the water when a fourteen-foot Tiger Shark swept by and took her arm off, along with a chunk of her board, leaving her bleeding to death one mile from shore in the presence of a hungry shark.

While you have likely never been victim of a shark attack, you can empathize. Like Bethany, you too have felt like you were helplessly struggling to survive under the waves of some tragedy. You can relate to the words of the Psalmist, who said, “You have afflicted me with all your waves” (Ps. 88:7). The waves of heartache, pain, and disappointment sweep through all of our lives. Tragedy doesn’t discriminate. It comes to us all in many different forms. Breakups. Abuse. Divorce. Loneliness. Disaster. Death. Disease. Like Bethany, you too may have been afflicted by a terrible pain that has left a scar on you that will forever remind you of the

incident, and while you try to forget, you cannot seem to let go.

You and I know all too well that life is full of trials. Pain and heartache are a natural part of life on this earth. But why? The Bible gives us the answer to this age-old dilemma. These waves of life are the terrible result of sin. The Bible describes those who persist in sinful lifestyles as “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame” (Jude 1:13). Sin is deadly in its nature. You and I have been afflicted, and like Bethany, our only hope is to rise above it. The Bible says, “sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen. 4:7). Above the waves of sin, there is safety. Your only safety rests above the waves.

One of the various dangers of surfing lies in the mysterious underworld that rests just beneath the waves. Perhaps you have tried your hand at surfing. If not, just

try to imagine. As you coast along on a thin slab of foam above the water, an entire world of creatures exists in that great abyss just beneath your feet. Some with poisonous stingers. Some with razor-sharp teeth. Some large enough to engulf a human body in one swallow. Rather unnerving, isn't it? Like the ocean, the Bible describes another world that is hidden from our view in the fourth dimension, where angels and demons dwell, and those who refuse to believe in this are the most susceptible to its danger.

While the surfer cannot focus solely on the dangers that exist just beneath them, out of sight, or they will be afraid to ever enter the water, there is the other extreme of denying that any danger exists. Similarly, those who are reasonable must acknowledge the overwhelming evidence of the spiritual elements in the fourth dimension. We have all heard stories of supernatural phenomena as

evidence for things beyond our sight. We must be aware of this danger if we hope to survive this life and make it to the next. Still, even our awareness is not complete safety. We must do more than simply acknowledge a potential danger. We must learn how to live on another sphere out of the reach of spiritual enemies. We must learn to ride above the spiritual waves that seek to pull us under.

Just as Bethany learned at an early age how to rise above the waves and even became skilled at surfing, many people learned early how to rise above the waves of sin and temptation and become skilled at the word. They learned the importance of church, prayer, Bible study, and daily devotions. They said with the Psalmist, "Your word I have hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). They learned that what the surfboard is to the surfer, the word of God is to the Christian. As Bethany

used the board to stay above the water, they learned to use the word of God to stay above the waves of sin, but something happened along the way. Over time they became careless and lost sight of the dangers.

Many who have been raised up in the church slowly begin to dip into the waters of sin. A little drink of alcohol. A little cuss word here and there. A little look at pornography. A little white lie. It's just a little sin. It's kind of fun, you think, as you start to reason, what's so bad about this? In fact, the waters of sin are quite cool and refreshing for a moment. The desires of sex bring moments of strong emotion and ecstasy, but intimacy outside of marriage usually ends in bitterness, broken heart, and pain. Drugs excite and entice the senses for a season, but in the end they turn you to slaves. Violence may give a sense of power for a season, but it sinks the soul into guilt and despair.

Just one arm in the water is all it takes.

While some will use tragedy as an excuse to blame God, others turn to God for help during tragedy. As Bethany drifted in the midst of the ocean bleeding to death, she remembered her Christian upbringing and threw up a prayer for help, then with her one remaining arm she paddled to her friend, who led her back to shore. At once, a tourniquet was tied around her arm to slow the blood flow, but the situation was serious. She was taken to a hospital where the doctor's worked tirelessly, as Bethany was put on a national prayer chain. And as prayers ascended across the nation for the young shark attack victim, God answered. Against the odds, God delivered. But this is where some of you are ready to stop reading. Why? Because God didn't for you. Where was God when your grandmother died? Where was God when your child

got cancer or when your spouse left you and the thousand lonely nights you have suffered since? The same place he was when Bethany was bitten by a shark. You see, the story of Bethany could just as easily become a story of defeat as it is a story of victory.

Bethany could have spent her life lamenting her circumstances. Instead of telling the story of a girl who survived a shark attack, we could be telling the story of a young girl whose dreams were crushed at the age of thirteen. The difference is perspective. Bethany cheated death. Death didn't cheat her, because she didn't let it. She could have blamed God, and she could have let the attack sink her into despair, but instead, within three weeks of the attack, she was back out in the water with her surfboard. The first few attempts were failures, but finally, she caught a baby wave into shore. It was her road to recovery. What about you?

The story of Bethany Hamilton is the story of defeat turned to victory. She is still scarred. So are you. Her blood cells still drift in the waters. Perhaps your pictures still drift across the internet. For the rest of her life, she will suffer the results of her attack. Maybe you will too, but get back up. Pick up your surfboard. It's okay. You may slip a couple of times as you are getting used to the waters again, but don't give up. Like Bethany, you can rise above the waves again. You can still live abundantly, just like Bethany does. She still surfs. She still wins trophies. But now she travels the world, speaking to young people all across the globe, affirming her faith in Christ. You see, what the devil took, God restored, and more. And He can do it for you. You were scarred. It's okay. You think you have gone too far. God doesn't think so. He wants to pick you back up. Get back out there. There's an adventure still waiting for you.



***“But dad, these ARE my best church clothes!”***





I've been struggling with something lately. I don't want to go into details, but I know it's not honoring God. What can I do?

First, it's important that to know that even though it may feel like it, you aren't alone. We all have struggles and temptations that we fight against throughout our lives.



That's good to know. I appreciate that. But what do you do when you are struggling with an addiction that you know is bad.

I know it sounds cliché, but the first thing I do is pray. Plead with God for help. He has promised to 'make a way of escape' from any sin we are fighting (1 Cor. 10:13).





Right. I do that, but I keep messing up. I fall, then I feel guilty and get discouraged. Like, what else can I do besides pray?

I know this also sounds cliché, but when you fall, just but keep getting up. Proverbs 24:16 says ‘a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.’ The key is not in the falling, but in the getting back up.



But if I keep falling, won't God give up on me? Doesn't He get tired of me falling?

God doesn't give up on us. He forgives us over and over (See 1 John 2:1; Mt. 18:22). The danger is, when we get discouraged, we are tempted to give up on Him. Then we stop praying and stop trying. Keep at it.



But that's the point. I'm not getting the victory. I still struggle and slip and fall.

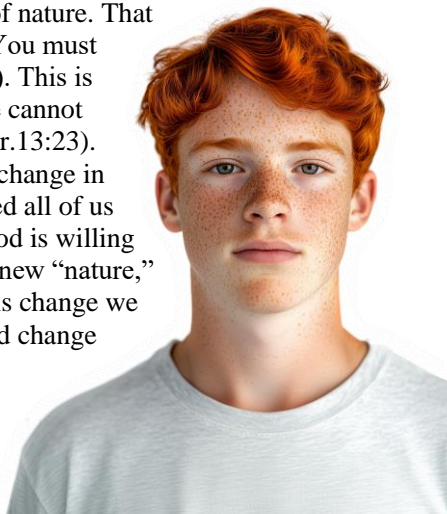
It's your job to keep praying and trying, but it's God's job to get you the victory (See. Isa. 55:11; Heb. 12:2) He will get you there. Just trust Him and cling to His promises. It's like riding a bike. It takes time. Just don't give up on God. He'll get you through this. Believe it.



## WHY IS GOD SO AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS IF HE MAKE THEM LIKE THAT?

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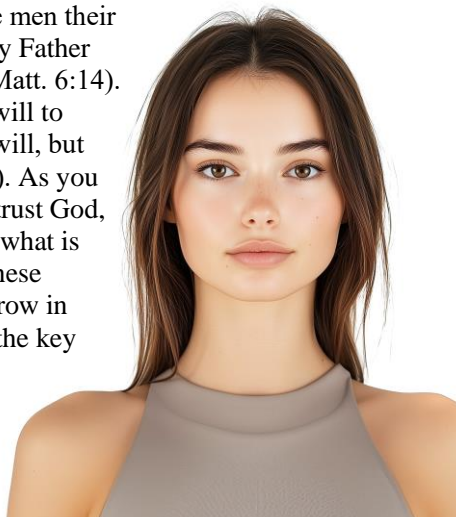
Answer: First, God is not against homosexuals. He loves them. Second, He did not make them like that. They, like the rest of us, are born with a disease called sin. Sin has genetic consequences that have been passed down to every person alive. We are all “conceived” with sinful tendencies (Ps. 51:5). Some are born with stronger tendencies to indulge in drugs, alcohol, or sex. Some are born with homosexual tendencies. Whether you are lusting after the same sex or the opposite sex, both forms of “lust” are sinful, so in a sense we’re all in the same boat (Matt. 5:28). Homosexuals can’t help how they were born any more than any other sinner can help the way they were born. All of us are born sinners and need a total change of nature. That is why Jesus declared, “You must be born again” (John 3:3). This is a supernatural change we cannot make on our own (See Jer.13:23). Only God can make this change in us. While sin has damaged all of us, the good news is that God is willing to restore us, giving us a new “nature,” but in order to receive this change we must be willing to let God change us (2 Pet. 1:4).



## WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO LIVE WITH GOD FOREVER?

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Answer: First, come to Jesus just as you. Say a prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart. After that, God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Repentance is a sorrow for sin, but you don’t have to wait until you ‘feel’ sorry to acknowledge your sin. Be honest with God. Even if you still enjoy sin, tell God you are sorry for hurting Him and ask Him to help you stop. Third, we must “confess our sins” (1 John 1:9). Tell God what you are doing wrong. If your sin involves other people, ask the people you sinned against to forgive you. Fourth, be willing to forgive others. Think of anyone you hurt or anyone who hurt you and try to reconcile the relationship, being forgiving towards them, for “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14). Finally, surrender your will to Christ, saying “not as I will, but as You will” (Mt. 26:39). As you grow you must learn to trust God, realizing that He knows what is best for you. If you do these things and continue to grow in your faith you will find the key to eternal life.



# Quotes *to Live By*



*When you feel like you are drowning on the sea of life remember your lifeguard walks on water.*

*Roma Downey*

Real true faith is man's weakness leaning on God's strength.

D. L. Moody

*Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.*

*Max Lucado*

*"It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity.*

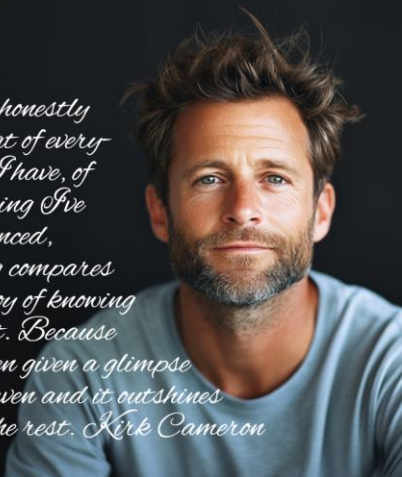
*Ellen White*

Our hope is in the power of God working through the hearts of people, and that's where our hope is in this country; that's where our hope is in life.

Charles Colson

*I can honestly say that of every thing I have, of everything I've experienced, nothing compares to the joy of knowing Christ. Because I've been given a glimpse of Heaven and it outshines all of the rest.*

*Kirk Cameron*



## The Wake-Up Call



Ryan considered himself invincible. He was that guy. Life of the party. The one who took all the risks. The one who never backed down from a challenge, no matter how hard or crazy it might be. But that night, everything changed.

It was a Friday evening, and Ryan was driving home from a late-night hangout with friends. The roads were slick with rain, and his mind was foggy from exhaustion. As he rounded a bend too quickly, his car hydroplaned, and before he knew it, he lost control. The next few seconds were a blur—a screech of tires, a crash, and then darkness.

When Ryan opened his eyes, he was in a hospital bed, surrounded by the beeping of monitors and the sterile smell of disinfectant. His body ached all over, and his head throbbed. He quickly realized that he was lucky to be alive.

The accident shook Ryan to his core. He had always lived life on the edge, never really thinking about the consequences. But lying in that hospital bed, he was forced to confront the fragility of life. What if he hadn't made it? What would have happened to him?

A few days later, Ryan was discharged from the hospital, his body bruised but

healing. His girlfriend, Jenna, who had been by his side throughout the ordeal, drove him home. The car ride was quiet, both of them lost in their thoughts.

That night, as they sat in Ryan's living room, the weight of the situation finally hit them. "Ryan," Jenna said softly, breaking the silence, "I'm so glad you're okay. But... what if you hadn't been? What if something worse had happened?"

Ryan nodded, his eyes distant. "I've been thinking about that a lot. I don't know, Jenna. It's like I've been living in a bubble, thinking nothing bad could ever happen to me. But now... I'm scared."

Jenna reached out and took his hand. "Maybe this is a wake-up call, Ryan. Maybe it's time for us to start thinking about what really matters."

Ryan looked at her, his heart heavy with regret. He knew she was right. They had both drifted far from the values they'd grown up with, skipping church, ignoring their faith, and living for the

moment. But now, all of that felt hollow.

"I've been thinking about going back to church," Jenna continued, her voice barely above a whisper. "I miss it, Ryan. I miss the peace, the sense of purpose we used to have."

Ryan was quiet for a moment, then nodded slowly. "I miss it too. But do you think we can just... go back? After all this time?"

Jenna smiled softly. "Of course we can. God's not the one who left; we did. But He's always waiting for us to come back."

The following Sabbath, Ryan and Jenna found themselves standing outside the church they hadn't entered in years. It felt strange, almost like stepping into a different world. But as they walked through the doors and were greeted by familiar faces, a sense of warmth and belonging washed over them.

During the service, the pastor preached on a verse that seemed to speak directly to Ryan's heart: "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).

As the words echoed through the sanctuary, Ryan felt a lump form in his throat. He had been living without any real direction, chasing after temporary thrills, but now, here was a promise of something more—a future and a hope.

After the service, Ryan and Jenna sat in the quiet of the church, reflecting on what they had heard. “It feels like we’ve been given a second chance,” Jenna said softly. “A chance to start over, to find something real to hold onto.”

Ryan nodded, feeling a deep sense of gratitude. “Yeah, I think you’re right. I don’t want to waste my life anymore, Jenna. I want to find that peace, that purpose we’ve been missing.”

Over the next few weeks, Ryan and Jenna began attending church regularly, slowly reconnecting with their faith. They joined a Bible study group and started reading Scripture together, finding comfort and guidance in God’s Word.

One evening, after a particularly meaningful study, Jenna turned to Ryan with a thoughtful expression. “You know, I think God allowed that accident to happen for a reason. It’s like He was trying to get our attention, to show us that we were headed in the wrong direction.”

Ryan smiled. “Yeah, I think you’re right. It’s like He was giving us a chance to start over, to find a new direction.”

As they continued to grow in their faith, Ryan and Jenna began to see their lives transformed. The restlessness that had once plagued them was replaced with a sense of peace and purpose.

Looking back, Ryan realized that the accident had been a blessing in disguise. It had shaken him out of his complacency and led him to a place of true fulfillment. Now, as he stood with Jenna, hand in hand, he knew they were on the right path, guided by the One who had never given up on them. For the first time in a long while, Ryan felt like his life had meaning and that he was exactly where he was meant to be.



# Light

Devotional



The Deeper Things

*It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Eccl. 7:2.*

This seems like a strange thing to say! Why would the writer say that it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting? He said this because the house of mourning is a place of contemplation, where we think about the important things in life. I spent many of my early years thinking feasting, alcohol, and parties were the way to happiness, but as I grew up, it started to get boring. While drinking and parties gave me seasons of fun, inside, I felt empty. The fun that I had did not give me any real meaning or fulfillment. When my grandmother died, I started to think about the deeper things in life. Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What will I leave behind after I die? It amazes me that, even though all of us know we are going to die, no one ever talks about death until it

happens. We seem to think that we're immune to it, or by not talking about it, we can avoid it, but death comes to all. Tragically, most are not ready when death comes. The time to think about death is before it happens. We should ask ourselves why we are here, how we got here, and what the purpose of our life is. Sadly, most of us wait until someone dies, then we start to think about what really matters in life. That's why the Bible says it is better to go to the house of mourning. When death comes, some begin to ask the more important questions of life. If it takes death to help us get our priorities straight, to start thinking about what is most important in life, and to get us to start searching for God and eternal life, then it is far better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting.

# THE PLAYLIST

*Five country*

*Christian gems you need to check out!*



**God's Will – Martina McBride**

**Album: Martina**

**Album Release Date: September 30, 2003**

**Church in a Chevy – Jordan Davis**

**Album: Jordan Davis**

**Album Release: June 19, 2020**

**Temporary Home – Carrie Underwood**

**Album: Play On**

**Album Release: November 3, 2009**

**If Heaven – Andy Griggs**

**Album: This I Gotta See**

**Album Release: August 10, 2004**

**Your Plan – Dustin Lynch**

**Album: Dustin Lynch**

**Album Release: August 21, 2012**

# OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS



## *Opposing Viewpoints*

Society today has fallen into the listless habit of embracing things on the basis of authority. Christians will accept doctrines because “my pastor said it.” Students will embrace ideas because “my teacher said it.” Atheists will embrace theories simply because “science says it.”

As all of us are fallible, there is danger in embracing ideologies on the basis of authority, the purpose of this opposing viewpoints is to get people to look at both sides of an issue instead of blindly accepting a subject.

The current theme of opposing viewpoint looks at the question, “What happens when we die?” While most Christians believe that when a person dies, consciousness continues as they go directly to heaven or hell, there are others who believe that when a person dies, they rest in the grave in a state of rest, or dreamless sleep, until Jesus returns at the second coming to resurrect the dead, when their consciousness returns to face the judgment and be given their reward. Both of the views claim to be based on biblical authority, so let’s consider the claims of each.

## *Immediate Reward Doctrine*

One of the most direct references of the belief that when we die, we go straight to heaven or hell is found in Luke 23:43, where Jesus promises the repentant thief, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." This suggests that the thief would immediately go to Paradise with Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul says he longs "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." Here, implying that absence from the body in death is to be present with the Lord. This suggests an immediate presence with God at death.

Paul's notes his "desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," also implying that death brings us in the immediate presence of Christ, opposing the idea of unconsciousness at death and soul sleep (Phil. 1:23).

Revelation 6:9-10 also provides an example, where John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar,

crying out to God for justice. They are seen as conscious and aware, engaging with God, and waiting for the time of judgment under the fifth seal.

Finally, Matthew 17:3 shows both Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus during the Transfiguration which took place centuries after their earthly lives had ended. This suggests that these figures were conscious and active, refuting the idea of their souls resting in an unconscious soul sleep state until a future resurrection of the dead.

Taken together, these passages provide a challenge to the doctrine of soul sleep, suggesting that upon death, believers experience an immediate transition into the presence of God in heaven or, alternatively, into eternal separation from Him in hell. This interpretation aligns with the broader biblical theme of conscious existence after death and eternal life with God for those who believe and accept Jesus.

## *Soul Sleep Doctrine*

The idea that we go to our reward the instant we die is from the pagan teaching of the immortal soul, but the Bible says God “alone has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16), which is a gift given at the resurrection when “the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For ... this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:52, 53; see also Job 14:14).

At the resurrection, we are told there was a special resurrection in which many who had “fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves... appeared to many” (Matt. 27:52, 53). Why are they coming from the graves if they are in heaven? And incidentally, we know Jesus did not immediately see the thief in paradise since, after the resurrection, He says, “I have not yet ascended to My Father” (John 20:17). And Moses and Elijah were both taken to heaven (See Jude 1:9; 2 Kings 2:11). The rest of us wait for the resurrection.

The Bible even tells us that the David was still in the “tomb” and had “not ascend into the heavens” yet (Acts 2:29, 34) because, as David says, “in death there is no remembrance of You” (Ps. 6:5). Solomon says that “the dead know nothing,” adding, “there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl. 9:5, 10). Job adds that when we visit the dead in the cemetery, we “come to honor, and he does not know” or “does not perceive it” (Job 14:21). That is why the Bible often compares death to a “sleep” (John 11:11-13).

While some people get comfort from the idea that people go straight to heaven, others are tormented by the same idea that people are suffering in hell, but if we go straight to heaven or hell at death, why would we need a resurrection? While I have no room to address all the counter-arguments, there are answers. There is another side of this issue.

# Short Stories *and* Anecdotes



## **Bless the Food Anyway**

At a picnic, a boy was asked to pray for the food. He prayed, “Lord, thank you for this food, even though it’s not pizza, and bless the people who brought the gross stuff.”

## **Praying for Time**

A woman, frustrated by her never-ending to-do list, prayed, “Lord, please give me more time in my day!” That afternoon, her power went out, halting her ability to work. As she sat quietly with nothing to do, she smiled and said, “Not exactly what I meant, Lord, but thank You.”

## **My Patient Dad**

A pastor once asked, “Who’s the most patient person you know?” A little boy yelled, “My dad, because he has to wait for my mom all the time!”

### **What God Wants Most**

A little boy at Sunday School was asked, “What do you think God wants most from us?” He replied, “For us to stop fighting in the backseat!”

### **Not So Smart**

A little boy was listening to his pastor talk about the story of Noah’s Ark. The boy appeared confused for a moment before looking up at the pastor and asking, “If Noah was so smart, why didn’t he swat those two mosquitoes?” He couldn’t stop the whole thing before it started.

### **The Miracle Diet**

A woman was fervently praying for God to help her lose weight. She woke up the next day to find that the elevator in her building was out of order. Forced to take the stairs, she groaned, “Okay, God, but I was thinking more along the lines of a miracle diet!”

### **The Silent Prayer**

A pastor noticed that one of his church members always fell asleep during his sermons. One week, as the man sat snoozing, the pastor began his prayer with, “And now, let’s all bow our heads in silent prayer... except for Jim, who is already ahead of us!” Hearing his name, Jim’s head immediately popped up and the congregation laughed.

### **Good Boy**

A churchgoer asked his pastor if he could bring his dog to the service, saying, “He’s really well-behaved and listens better than most people.” The pastor chuckled and said, “Sure, but only if he tithes.”



# Dear Younger Me...



In October of 2007, country singer Brad Paisley released the song, *Letter to Me*, in which he gives advice to his former seventeen year old self. By early the next year the song had topped the charts and given birth to a trend. Mercy Me borrowed the concept with the song, *Dear Younger Me*, followed by Nichole Nordeman's *Dear Me*. Many others have repeated the trend, writing letters, posting videos, and even devoting websites to giving advice to the former self. Intrigued by the idea, I decided to give it a try in the following letter.

Dear Younger Me, just hang in there. Some days you feel like you're on top of the world. Other days you feel utterly hopeless. Learn to ignore feelings and move forward by faith. The most important thing you can do in your life is put God first. This is a lesson you learned too late, but you can change. Start now. The Bible says "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). God will supply the things you need for happiness, peace, and well-being if you will give Him a chance.

God does not hate you. He loves you dearly. He will not let you go when you fall into sin and make mistakes. Life is full of successes and failures, but God is faithful during all of it. He will pick you up again and again, so don't run from Him when you fall. Run to Him.

Just like everyone else, you want to be happy, but the things you think make you happy are often the very things that cause you pain in the long run. Like most kids, you chase alcohol, sex, and all the things you think will make you happy. While these things bring seasons of pleasure, they do not bring true happiness. In the end, they just leave you empty.

I know the Bible may seem boring, or irrelevant, at saying things that make you feel uncomfortable. Instead of ignoring it, or fighting it, give it a chance. Embrace it. The things in the Bible are not written to make your life miserable, but "that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). The advice in the Bible is

given to show you the way to real happiness, peace, and fulfillment in life. Give it a chance.

I also know you are shy. You think that drinking alcohol or improving your self-esteem helps, but it does not. The real problem is the selfish nature. People are shy because they are focused on themselves. Turn your focus off yourself and onto others. The Bible says we should "esteem others better" than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). Stop thinking about how people make you feel. Instead, start thinking about how you can help others. Instead of asking how this person can make you happy, ask how you can help them? They may be having a bad day. Smile at them. Say something nice. This will change your life

I know you have been bullied and had your share of troubles. This will make you sensitive to others who are hurting. God uses these trials to make you a better person, so while it is difficult, try to embrace your trials and learn

to trust God through the hard times. I know sometimes it feels like it is too much, but hang in there. Tomorrow is a new day. Don't sink into despair. Trust that God has a plan in your trials and learn from them. They will make you more kind and caring. You are stubborn sometimes and God has to let you learn things the hard way, so do your best to endure trials patiently, knowing that God is using them for good.

In some ways you are too serious and in other ways you take life too lightly. You must find a proper balance. Sometimes you beat yourself up over little things. Don't take little things so seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself. In other ways you take life too lightly. I know, at times, you try to contemplate the big picture. Keep that in mind. Start making right decisions now for your future. Choices you make now will largely determine what you will be in the future. Don't think that you can live carelessly today without consequences

tomorrow. Remember what dad says. "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Sins you commit in youth will weigh on you in the future. The less bad things you do now, the less you will suffer, in general.

Also, keep time in its proper perspective. As they say, 'Live like you are going to die tomorrow, but plan like you will live for a hundred years.' Treat people kind. Make peace with God. Ask forgiveness. Don't have any enemies. Don't take life for granted. People don't live forever. You will lose loved ones unexpectedly in life and you will have some regrets. Let people know you love them. When they are gone you will be glad you did. When you are tempted to get irritated at people, stop. Replace bad thoughts with good thoughts. Think good of everyone, as much as possible. Try to give people the benefit of the doubt. I know you are not always expressive, but try to shower kindness on people in little

ways. Let them know how special they are and share Jesus as much as you can. Store up encouraging Bible verses in your mind to share with people. Learn to give people hope. People always need hope.

At times you struggle with low self-esteem. Self help books are not a real solution. Raising yourself up leads to pride, while putting yourself down leads you to self-hatred. Instead, become nothing in your own eyes. Do not seek self-esteem. Don't care what people think of you, or what you think of yourself. Focus on what God thinks of you! Live to please God, because He loves you.

Also, as the Bible says, be faithful in the little things. Keep chipping away, one step at a time. Write a little every day. Set aside a little study time every day. Take piano lessons and practice a little each day. You'll be amazed at what you can accomplish if you get in a routine of doing something a little every day.

God has a real amazing adventure planned for your life. It is not always fun or easy, but God will be with you through it all, so hang in there and don't lose hope. In life, you'll make friends and lose friends. You find love and lose love. You'll have an amazingly sweet son. Teach him about Jesus as much as you can while he is young. Protect him from worldly influences, and pray for him. You'll also have a beautiful wife from another country who is amazing. No, your life is not all rainbows and butterflies, but it is also not all dark clouds. Hard times come and go, but hold onto Jesus. Turning to God is the beginning of the greatest adventure ever. No matter how hard things get, or how dark the valleys may seem, your future with Jesus is very bright, so don't sweat the hard days. They will pass. The sun will rise tomorrow and God will still be there. Saddle up and get ready for an adventure. See you soon – Signed, Yourself.



***“Samson killed a lion with his bare hands and you can’t even change a flat tire!”***



# EXPRESS YOURSELF!

*Bible Study*

*Wisdom from Ecclesiastes*

1. Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. What does it mean, God 'has put eternity in their hearts?' \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Why does Ecclesiastes 7:2 say the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting?  
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3. Read Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2. Is this verse saying we should never make plans for the future? Explain.  
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4. What does Ecclesiastes 7:1 mean by 'a good name'?  
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5. The song, 'Turn, Turn, Turn,' is based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. What insight do you get from these verses?

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6. Ecclesiastes 9:5-10 challenges the popular concept of life after death (See Opposing Viewpoints). Share your thoughts.

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7. Ecclesiastes 10:20 says to control our thoughts. Why is it import to even control our thoughts? (See also Proverbs 16:32)

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8. Solomon gives specific advice to young people in Ecclesiastes 12:1. Why is this important?

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9. When Ecclesiasts 12:13 says to 'fear God,' does this mean we should always be afraid? Explain. (See also 1 John 4:18)

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10. Ecclesiastes 7:21 says not to take everything people say to heart. How will this help attitude, perspective, and relationships?

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Couldn't you use a little hope?

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