Not So Picture Perfect

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We all have a story – they're all different, and some are filled with more destruction than others – but that doesn't mean that any of us needs more saving than another person. Outside of Christ's saving grace, we are all in the same position.

I have been saved for several years now, and married for two of those years. My wife and I are also the proud parents of a beautiful, healthy baby. Many folks who don't know our back story would look at us and describe us as quite a 'picture perfect' little family. Yet none of what we have would be possible if it wasn't for God's incredible power and grace, evident in our lives and young family.

I was born into a broken and dysfunctional home environment. My parents were (and still are, to a degree) very broken people. My dad favoured my brother and my mom favoured me. It was only later in life that I figured out that my dad resented my mom and so he rejected me (the child she idolized). The severe rejection I experienced from my dad drove me closer to my mom, to an unhealthy degree. There was also physical abuse while growing up, and my dad would often beat us out of anger, frustration, or because he was too drunk to care.

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Because of the hurt I experienced from the relationship with my dad, I ended up rejecting him in order to protect myself – and I continued to grow closer to my mother. Years later, I would

realise that by rejecting my dad, I was rejecting manhood itself (as my dad was my primary representation of that). Rejecting manhood meant I didn't grow into my own masculine identity, and ended up craving it in another man.

Growing up, I had a very distorted image of what real love looked like. At times, I think my parents tried to love me, but I didn't know how to receive it in a healthy way, e.g. my dad would come to me after a beating and say how much he loved me (without actually apologising for the abuse), but it only caused my hatred and rejection of him to grow more. I was also sexually abused as a young boy (by an extended family member). I think that, because of the broken relationship with my dad and my desperation to receive love from a male father figure, I was an easy target for a sexual predator.

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I started drinking and smoking at the age of 14, and kept alcohol in my school locker to drink between classes. I also started stealing things and experimenting with the same sex and the occult. The truth was that my self-hatred and brokenness meant I craved self-destruction. Soon after school ended, I fully submerged myself in the gay lifestyle. I was introduced to drugs by a friend who bought me LSD for my 18th birthday, and from then on I would go on drug binges, sometimes for days. All I wanted to do was to forget.

I had a number of boyfriends over the years, but the relationships never lasted very long. I was always very unsatisfied with the situation and usually unfaithful. No matter how hard I tried not to do so, I always ended up doing the same things my father did: verbal, emotional, and sometimes even physical abuse. This carried on for years: drugs, partying, relationships, anonymous sexual encounters. It was at this stage in my life that I reached a tipping point: I was either going to keep going and end up dead (or riddled with diseases) or I could get some help.

Soon after this, a friend took me to an HIV testing facility that coincidentally was located next to a church in the city. There was a ministry related to the church at the testing facility that counselled people who were caught up in sexually broken lives – I went for counselling for the next year. The counselling helped me, and I calmed down from my hectic lifestyle. Ironically, however, I met someone (who was also there to be counselled) and ended up entering into a relationship with him.

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During this time, my counsellor kept telling me about a church called Joshua Generation Church (JoshGen), but because of my relationship, I didn't want to go to the church. A year later, however, I was in a desperate place and found myself at JoshGen's doors. It was there that I gave my life to Jesus. I found God and I found family – but most of all, I found peace. I broke off the relationship and began the process of God restoring my broken and messed up life and heart. Coming to know Jesus didn't mean that my human struggles were immediately taken away. I still battled with strong same-sex feelings. Also, because of my insecurities, I struggled to be friends with guys, but my friends and family at JoshGen stuck with me. I hurt them many times, but still, they loved me.

Despite God's amazing restoration in my life, I never thought it would be possible for me to get married, to become a husband and, even more so, a father. It had been a deep desire of my heart my whole life through (even while I was living a gay lifestyle), but I kept ignoring it, never thinking it was a possibility. One day, however, I felt God clearly say to me that He had marriage in His plan for me. I buried that word in my heart and asked Him to confirm it many times over the years (at times my faith wavered) as I waited to see Him provide.

What I didn't know then, is that God was taking my wife on a journey of her own. He needed to prepare her for our life together – she needed to grow in courage, boldness and faith. He needed to take her 'pastor's kid' ideas of who God had for her (bearing in mind my wife grew up in church, loved Jesus from a young age, and was absolutely committed to sexual purity) and speak to her about a life He had for that wouldn't be the 'white picket fence' she had once imagined, but would be filled with God's glory, if she dared trust Him.

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A day came when God took His word and showed me the fulfilment of it. From zero sexual attraction to women in general, and even my own wife through most of our dating and even engagement time...to being married to my best friend, who gets my heart racing like no other. It hasn't been a smooth road, and at times we feel like we're definitely walking the rocky road (much) less travelled, but God continues to show us His faithfulness.

The devil has a plan for each one of us, and he will specifically attack us in the areas in which God has called us to be overcomers. Thankfully, God has given us everything we could possibly need to live a life of overcoming.

My Keys to Overcoming

1. You have to be **intentional** – you have to choose an eternal perspective.
2. You have to be **accountable –** two are better than one, and walking in the light brings freedom from shame and condemnation. (1 John 1)
3. You have to **get up when you fall** – we all sin, and no sin is unique, but choose to run **to** God and not from Him when you sin. Also open up and confess your sin to your leaders/accountability partners. (James 5:16)
4. You need to have **time alone with God** – the Word says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Don't skip your times with the Father – press into Him daily and get from Him what you need to keep fighting.
5. You need a **deep revelation of the Cross** – 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 6:23)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This testimony has been written by a member of Joshua Generation Church, but due to the sensitivity of the topics mentioned, we have chosen to not disclose his/his family's names at this time.