

introduction

Messy.

We're all feeling it.

None of us have to stay this way though. God has a miraculous plan for our lives. If I know you like I think I do, *you want it*. So much so, the desire for it probably drives you crazy sometimes. We're each longing for something more.

But I just have to ask—

Have you ever seen something so unbelievable you scratched your head in wonder? And your jaw dropped to the floor? That's what God wants to do in your life. It starts by encountering His presence. Would you like to hear how it happened to me?

I must say: *"I wish my story were prettier."*

Sometimes I prefer a heads-up before stories turn sideways. If you're like me, consider yourself warned.

My life has run the gamut. . . . Going from messy to miraculous, not believing in God to becoming a Christian, self-righteousness to humiliation, religious rule-keeping to enjoying God and, after eighteen years of knowing God, wondering if God was real. Yep, I know about messes. I also know about a God who transforms them.

Miracles are born of God, not methods. Because of this, I'm asking the Miraculous One to throw your eyes back to His realness, love, and presence like never before. Take heart, the *More* you're longing for longs for more of you too.

THE Lord's WAY IS TO
PUSH US
RIGHT INTO THAT

spacious

PLACE
WHERE NOTHING IS SURE,

BUT ALL IS Well

IN OUR FATHER'S presence.
#MORE

chapter one

You were made for MORE

Why not give God your whole life?

I'll tell you why I wouldn't—I was hoping to clean mine up first.

Perhaps you can relate?

The first time I met God, I was in the back room of a Gentlemen's Club. Why those establishments are called Gentlemen's Clubs beats me—I never met a gentleman in one. But let's not go there.

What I'm trying to say is: I wasn't even searching for God when I first heard Him calling me.

I was, however, searching for my face in the mirror to get ready for work. But I was too high to see and squinting wasn't helping. The girl in the mirror—the one struggling to focus—was a kid, really.

I was fifteen years old when I accepted a woman's offer of glitz, glamour, and plenty of money. The woman was right—partly. I got all of those things, but the glitz was cheap, the glamour was trashy, and the money was more than costly. But how else was I to care for myself on a ninth-grade education?

The first night on the job was terrifying. I bawled afterward.

"I can't do this . . . This isn't me."

"Don't worry now, you'll soon toughen up," she comforted.

That's when powerful drugs and potent drinks became my best friends. They lent a helping hand for morphing me into someone I wasn't—a stripper.

God spoke only two sentences when He first started drawing me to Him.

"You were made for more," He told me. And then, "Give Me your life."

But how do I give God my life? And why would He want me anyway? And what am I doing here? And who have I become? I hate my life! These people are awful. These men are married! "Go home to your wives! Get away from me!" This is all such a lie. I'm a lie. What do I do? The only Christian I know is Mrs. Kitchen. She's perfect. I can't be her.

My thoughts reacted wildly as if blasted by a bolt of lightning. I'm unsure how much time elapsed before I mustered up the courage to say, "There is no way I can be as perfect as Mrs. Kitchen. My heart is too black."

Desperation landed me here—a place I never imagined as a five-year-old girl pulling my tea sets out among childhood friends to play "tea party."

Maybe carrying those dishes in a black trash bag was symbolic?

God never saw me like trash, but I sure did. Perhaps God saw something similar to what my good friend Jennifer sees when she looks at my two daughters and says, "Now girls, don't ever forget you're fine china." What she means is, "Girls, you are valuable. Now treat yourself as such."

I always smile because, clearly, who doesn't need reminding?

What about you? Can you recall the first time you felt flawed?

Some call it shame—and I do not disagree; but what if it's deeper than shame? What if it's an overwhelming sense of emptiness?

Furthermore, what about this—

Do you often wish your life were better than it is?

Does a subtle longing for something more often gnaw at you?

If you answered “yes,” you are not alone.

People everywhere are anguished inside for something *more*. Churched and non-churched alike. I’ve met them in malls, talked with them in nail shops, prayed with them in my church, encouraged them in my friendships, visited with them at speaking events, cried with them in my home and, honestly, I’ve been that person myself.



When I was younger, I struggled to understand what made life worth the living. Before God saved me, it seemed to me as if life wasn’t worth the effort, you know? Restless thoughts tirelessly entertained my mind. I longed for a different version of life and, furthermore, I longed for a different version of me. Deep in my soul’s fabric was an irksome sense of void and vacancy.

My momma had me when she was fifteen years old. She was a troubled girl looking for a better situation. I cannot blame her. She ran into the arms of a young man who provided a safe harbor—his momma’s house. The marriage crumbled soon after, and my momma returned back home, now with a baby in tow. Many of my childhood memories are of us running to and from that tiny house—trying hard to survive. I probably don’t need to tell you that my momma lacked some maternal skills, but I will. Although, let’s be honest, who wouldn’t? Motherhood is a heavy weight of responsibility for anyone—let alone a young teen.

Due to our conditions, I often cried while asking, “Why don’t you love me?”

She’d quickly look away, purse her lips together, and say, “I do. I just don’t know how to show it.”

Later I would learn for myself—it’s hard to offer something you’ve never received.

To be honest, I've grieved her upbringing nearly as much as my own. Nowadays, I think she would have made a great mom if she were given a different set of circumstances.

I loathe the destroyer's work in my generational line.

I used to think my upbringing was the initiator of my pining for something *more*. But then I grew up and discovered many of my friends felt it too. And their backgrounds were dazzling compared to mine. What I realized is all of us engaged life as human garbage disposals looking for something, *anything*, to whet our appetites and satisfy us.

Some of us sought it in seemingly good ways—pursuing good deeds, being respectable, and passionately watching our every single *p* and *q*. Others sought it in rebellion—pushing the envelope, climbing out windows, and sailing the gusty winds. Neither avenue, respectable or not so respectable, was able to provide what we yearned for.

Truth is, everything sold us short. Finding lasting love. Amassing popularity, power, and control. Working our way up the corporate ladder. Making great money. Having gorgeous bodies. Accumulating loads of material possessions. Owning fabulous homes. Living however, wherever, and with whomever—getting our own way for a change. When our heads hit the pillow at night we each still knew:

Something's missing.



Here's what I think.

I think our need for more stems from the same empty well in all of us—even if our attempts to satisfy our emptiness play out differently in each of our lives.

I think this emptiness was created in us *by* God and *for* God.

I think the “more” we're longing for is God.

I hope to prove it to you as our subject matter builds.



Remember the words God spoke over me at the club? *You were made for more.* Those words haunted my growing up. The day I attempted suicide at fifteen, “You were made for more,” rang in my ears like fingernails on a chalkboard. I seethed with anger and silently screamed, “Shut up! Who are You anyway?”

To be honest, I felt harassed.

If our paths crossed today, you’d highly doubt this was my experience. My penchant for stylish clothes, polished nails, and for the most part, a happy upbeat personality reveals nothing of my past, but those who knew me “when” say I don’t even look the same. My mother-in-law is one of them. She’s been most amazed, saying, “God has transformed your entire countenance.”

Growing up, there were days and nights I lived terrorized at the hands of several sexual abusers. Anytime opportunity afforded itself, the predators lustfully pounced. One was my grandfather. Unfortunately, I wasn’t his only prey. Some in the family yielded to his abusive wiles and did tricks for his money, approval, and manipulative control. I determined early he wasn’t getting the same from me. I was young, but I knew it wasn’t right. Even in the darkest days, those five words echoed on my insides:

You were made for more.

As a young teen in high school, I decided I couldn’t take it anymore. I was done with high school and done with my home life. I was losing my mind. I dropped out of school and married the first guy I could get to marry me. What I didn’t foresee is I had only exchanged one nightmare for another. The boy had his own set of problems and you know I had mine. The marriage was a wreck from the beginning, lasting only a matter of months. Though I had biblical reasons to leave, leaving didn’t make me better. It set me up for far worse. That’s when I tried to commit suicide—drinking

poisons and waiting to die, after I beat myself in the face. Only I didn't die. I vomited my guts up as that voice spoke over me, "You were made for more."

In a last-ditch effort to care for myself; I hunted down the crinkly piece of paper. The one with the woman's number on it that promised glitz and glamour and plenty of money. My hands trembled as I dialed her phone, and my voice quivered when I cried for help.

"It's going to be okay," she nicely assured. "You're going to be alright."

Later on I would learn "okay" and "alright" were not so easily attained.

You can take the girl out of the mess. But taking the mess out of the girl?



Part of me wishes you knew me back "when." Back in the days I lied through my teeth and told all sorts of stories. That's what people with my kind of past do. They make stuff up. Somehow it softens the pain while helping to appease the questions of curious people.

Only, it backfires.

Like the time I told my boyfriend, Erin, and his family that my dad was in the Italian mafia. How else was I to explain his absence? The lie seemed believable to me. I did have dark hair, olive skin, a fiery personality, and I loved me some spaghetti and Italian dressing. That counts, right?

All was fine and dandy 'til I walked down the aisle, and they became my kinfolk. Talk about a soul set on edge. That lie haunted me like an evil spirit lingering over my head. Then one day my home telephone rang.

"Hello?" I answered.

"Is this Tammie Mitchell?"

"It is. May I ask who's calling?"

"This is your cousin, Mayola. Do you remember me?"

My stomach leapt to my throat—and sweat drops appeared on my forehead.

“I do . . . I mean, a little. What do you need?”

Somehow she got my number and was calling because our grandmother was dying of cancer, and her last dying wish was to have the opportunity to perhaps talk to me. I quickly informed her under no uncertain terms, “We are not family, and don’t you ever call my house again.”

Click—I slammed down the phone.

Sadly, our grandmother died. And later I would apologize profusely to Mayola.

But I’m getting ahead of myself.

A year or so after that phone call, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. And that lie? The one about the mafia? God was not letting me off the hook.

“It’s time to tell the truth. I want you to find your father. He doesn’t know Me, and I want you to take Me to him.”

You better know I put up a fight—that’s what fear will do to you.

“There’s a whole world of people out there! Why can’t You send one of them?”

God didn’t answer back. In fact, He quit talking altogether.

Did you know God plays the silent game? He does! Except it’s not a game to Him. It’s a supernatural spanking for anyone who loves feeling close to Him. About three weeks later, I got so lonely for His company I decided bravery was a better option than rebellion.

But, get this—

As if I needed one more reason to obey, my pastor preached a sermon on someone having a “nag.” Something nagging at you, something secretive pestering you, something refusing hiddenness because God is laser focused on it and is saying, “Own up. Get it out. Tell the truth. And deal with it.”

I cried through the ENTIRE message.

And thought, *Stop it—What if Erin starts thinking you’re having an affair?*

After getting home and putting my oldest daughter, Peyton, down for a nap, I tattled on my lying self.

I was shocked when Erin graciously said, “Honey, it’s not that big of a deal. I really think you should find your dad.”

You’ve got to be kidding me! Then again, maybe he was flat-out relieved?

Next I had to find the same bravery and courage to call the extended family.

I could kick myself for not cooking an Italian spread for the big reveal. Wouldn’t that have been so great? But, no. I was just trying not to vomit. Finally, I nerved up and spit it out. I’ll never forget my father-in-law’s expression when he said, “That’s ALL?” and his shoulders dropped in relief. Or my mother-in-law quipping, “Well, I never believed you anyway.”

We laughed our heads off—still do to this day.

Want to hear something awesome?

I felt God’s nearness again, and my emptiness subsided.

I learned two valuable lessons that day about God’s presence and character.

I learned how much the presence of God is the “more” factor I ultimately long for. I also learned if the Lord keeps insisting integrity on a matter we’d much rather keep hidden, it is for our greatest freedom and joy. The heart of God is never to shame us but to free us.



I hope you know I’m trying to show you what a mess I was. I have a purpose in it, you know. I want you to know whatever your messy situation is, you’re not alone. Madness, sadness, unfulfilled longings, and inadequacies? Everybody’s got some skeletons in their closet. I just happen to have a graveyard. But that’s okay. God brings corpses to life.

I tend to think God has a tender spot for human messiness, anyway.

Now, I'm not saying God enjoys our messes, per se. I can't imagine Him smiling over victimization or broken hearts, nor can I picture Him happy about poverty and injustice or humanity's various illnesses. I am saying I think God finds our messes somewhat attractive because He enjoys showing up, performing a miracle, standing us to our feet, and loving us to life.

I've seen God come where messy and misery meet too many times to deny it.

In fact, I saw it recently while holding a tiny baby girl in my arms. She was an African orphan, three years old, raped repeatedly by a man in her slums—left unable to walk. “She only talks at night,” her caretaker said, “telling of her abuses.” Anger burned my face, and I bit my lip to keep from screaming, “Where is her victimizer? Let me at him. I'll scratch his eyes out!”

Instead, I took her ravaged body into my arms, and began rocking her back and forth. It's a wonder I didn't suffocate the poor child. Then again, her body was as stiff as a stick. Her limbs refused to relax in my arms. The madness of her situation was too much. I was stricken by a million thoughts, a million emotions, and nausea—I felt sick.

All I could do was all I knew to do—pray. No. I begged.

“God, I beg You. Heal her and pour love from my pores. Do a miracle.”

God hears the cry of the desperate—He's listening to our pleas. I wasn't begging for God's help as if He needed convincing. I was only begging for Him to hurry.

Are you ready for something amazing?

She smiled that day . . .

And she walked.

Six months later, she was a completely different child.

That's a walking miracle right there.

I'm not suggesting God shows up like this every time. Experience alone proves otherwise, but I am saying the God I have come to know and love has enjoyed restoring me from my own personal slums.

When God speaks, chaos snaps into order—like cyclones calmed, like dead bones arising, like darkness fleeing, like broken lives made gorgeously whole.

I'm not guessing, *I know*. This is the story of my own life.

Once I was tormented, now I am free.

Once I was blind, but now I see.

Once I survived, now I dream dreams.

With one touch, Jesus of Nazareth, the Saving God, changed my life.

Would you believe after twenty years I am still not who I was?

Oh, I've been a mess a time or two since then. But nothing like the maddening mess I was before I met God, before He opened my eyes.

I was not orphaned like the little girl I was holding, but I grew up within high levels of abusive chaos. Distrust ravaged my bones. I, too, hardly relaxed in anyone's presence—even the seemingly nice folks.

Unlike Baby C, my rescue did not come until many years later.

Which means, I learned the skills of surviving as a happy-faced actress who feverishly toiled at keeping her act together because, indeed, life had become a stage and living out a convincing performance of perfection was of utmost consequence.

For whom, you ask?

Well, it took me years to finally answer this correctly—*myself*.

I was scared of succumbing to what I feared most: Being a good-for-nothing, wimpy and weak, mangled-to-the-core mess.

Like the little orphan I was tightly rocking, only a God of wonders could undo my tangled-up mess of lies and destructive thinking.

And He did—He began the process all by Himself when I was not asking or looking for *anything* religious.

Restoring people is one of the things He does best.



To be honest, few have known my background for plenty of good reasons. Nevertheless, in the winter of 2011, God used a time of healing from surgery to probe my heart about publicly sharing the truth about how He radically changed my life, and where I first met Him. I tend to live at breakneck speed much like everybody. Sometimes the Lord jerks a knot in my neck to get my attention. Admittedly, that's where I was.

It was time to listen, and to listen up carefully.

“Why are you stealing My glory?” He nudged.

I was utterly taken aback. “What do You mean, Lord?”

“Why aren't you telling what I've really done for you?”

I started sobbing.

“God, You know stories like mine aren't so acceptable in church.”

For one who grew up in tumultuous waters of uncertainty, I like the land of safety. For a restless wanderer who lived many years full of conflict, suffering, and being eaten alive by vexing hopelessness, I do not like this portion of knowing God, of walking in step with Him. I lived enough years in survival mode—sucking wind, losing my mind, and performing hard. This journey God is calling me to whiffs of danger. As if I'm being asked to step into Daniel's fiery furnace or, as the Israelites, into the raging waters of the Red Sea. Those are fascinating Bible stories to read—but to live? This feels like that. I know it's not, but please throw me a few bones of empathy. I know all will not approve of my

background and it's killing the approval addict in me—the one who really does need to die.

But I've also learned a few things about God—

Following God kills *us*—just so you know. In God's economy, dying precedes all living. The Lord's way is to push us up and out of our comfort zones all the way into His strong arms of a thousand dichotomies; rest and risk, safety and unknown, death and life, worship and warfare, wounds and healing, suffering and joy. He pushes us right into that spacious place where nothing is sure, but all is well in our Father's presence.

One reason I had guts enough to write this book was because my hairdresser Tanja helped me get brave. The day I showed up at her shop weary, ready to quit because of all that was at stake, was the day I realized how necessary this message really is. My little fiery Yankee, born-of-Serbian-Orthodox-heritage, transplanted-to-the-South, wielding-a-pair-of-scissors Tanja has cut more than just my hair. She's been a tool in the hand of God to cut away religious junk tangling up my soul. Junk I had no clue was even there.

She looked at me with shock when I mentioned quitting and said, "Tammie, don't you understand you are writing to people like me?"

Tears stung my eyes. I hadn't thought of it that way. She went on to say, "If you're just writing for people like your church friends then, by all means, use a bunch of generalities about your life. But if you're writing to the rest of us, we need to hear what you've shared with me. We're living in the real world. And we need the help—somebody to shoot straight with us. Besides, your life isn't so shocking to us. We get it. We get *you*."

She was right.

God did ink people's junk all over the Bible's pages, right?

So why am I hiding my own? Do I not trust God with my reputation?

Think about it. Paul was Saul, a religious madman. How would you like to be known as one who, among other heinous crimes, gave nod to the killing of the first Christian martyr? And Mary Magdalene, she was demonized! How about that? Miss Rahab. Good grief. Poor thing can't ditch being known as a former prostitute. Then King David—adulterer, liar, murderer. Marriage material, eh? Or Peter who denied the Lord to His face! Is your face grimacing like mine? What about Solomon? Hundreds of wives. Can you imagine? Here's a big one for you: The demoniac of Gadara—he ran around naked scaring the daylights out of people until Jesus miraculously set him free. How's that for weird?

Yes, dysfunction is littered all over the sixty-six books of the Bible.

It reads like a modern-day reality show sans the Jesus factor.

Truth is, when I read people's life stories, I'm encouraged or, at the least, forewarned. Aren't you? I cannot help but to rejoice over their victories and take notes of their mistakes. Who doesn't love when a captive is set free? I want to live just like them! Who cares about their background? I love their faith! Who's focusing on their junk? I'm focusing on their God!

I hope my junk makes you see my God.



At the end of the day these are the questions I've wrestled with:

- *Is God happy about our silence?*
- *What if our silence is keeping us messy?*
- *If God wrote our life into the pages of Scripture how would it read?*
- *If this notion scares us, could it be time to let God redeem our messes?*

I'm not suggesting we throw everything out there for the world to see—even I haven't done that. But I am asking this: Do people know how good your God has been to you?

Is your whole life—good, bad, and ugly—surrendered into His hands?

These days I am resigned to go with God. Even if it kills me.

Could He be calling you to do the same?

I'm not talking about going to church more.

I'm not talking about doing another Bible study.

I'm not talking about listening to another podcast.

I'm not talking about attending another small group or reading another God-book.

I'm talking about throwing ourselves at Jesus' feet and surrendering our guts out—messiness and all—to the One who promises to fulfill us beyond our imaginations.



Friend, what is your mess right now? Has tragedy struck you or someone you love? Are you in a season of personal crisis and need a miracle? Are you feeling worthless and rejected? Are you down in the dumps and you don't know why? Does an addiction have you or someone you love enslaved? Has a relationship gone awry? Is your health under attack?

Many of us are in troubling situations we don't understand, nor do we know where to go from here. We can't see past our present disappointments, confusions, and despair because, in all honesty, we never saw ourselves traveling down this broken, fragile road.

Struggles can have a crippling effect on us, leaving us empty and wondering, *What happened to my legs? Will I ever recover? Will I get back up?*

I have good news for you. You will. You can. How do I know?

Because I'm standing.

If you're ready to find what you're longing for, you've come to the right place. If you have an itch you can't seem to scratch, keep reading. If you're wrestling with bouts of loneliness, worthlessness, and hopelessness, I've got good news. If you're feeling like you have no purpose, overwhelmed with life, and dying for a change, I think God has a word for you.

My prayer for you is similar to my prayer for the little orphan girl. I am asking God to do a miracle in your life—a now miracle, where you experience His loving presence in the deepest crevices of your soul. Places you cannot quench no matter how hard you've tried.

If you'll lend me your ear, this is a message on how to find your spiritual legs.

To start walking. To start running. To start living the miraculous life.

You were made for more than mere survival.

So why not give God your whole life?

ARE YOU WILLING TO
THROW DOWN
YOUR CRUTCHES OF
SELF RELIANCE

TO GIVE *God* WHAT HE
WANTS?

HE WANTS
Your Life.

#MORE