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# My Second Wind



Yvette W. Jones

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*My Second Wind*

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**I dedicate this book to**

My husband, Wayne Jones

&

My sister, Arlethia Royster

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**To my husband, Wayne** – Thank you for showing me how to embrace God’s love. Your biblical teachings have been an instrumental part of my second wind. Thank you for the years of unconditional love, prayers, and morning coffee – I love you.

**To my sister, Arlethia** – You are my angel! You have been the wind beneath my wings that enabled me to soar beyond the odds and live again. Thank you for all the laughs and encouragement you have sown into my life. I love you, girl!

**To my supporters** – Thank you for your continued support and allowing me to help you get your second wind.

## INTRODUCTION

This book shares the journey to my second wind. It took years of procrastination until I decided to share the pain that led me to prison. Writing this book was much harder than my prison experience, but it had to be done so that I can help others get their second wind. We have all had a prison moment that led us to a dark place; however, we must find the access code that shines the light on our purpose in life.

As you read this book, it is my prayer that you will understand that imperfection can be perfected through understanding your true identity. I spent a lot of time looking for love until I became broke and broken. In my fall, I discovered the key that opened

the door to healing the broken pieces of me. Today, I share the access code with you that led me to freedom. My beloved, please understand that your life is not your own; it was given to you before conception and far beyond being formed in your mother's womb. No matter where you are in the journey of life, I pray that you will find your pathway to freedom. As you begin to unlock the treasures stored inside of you, I promise that your life will never be the same.

As you read my story, there are a few things I need you to remember. First, you were created with purpose and not on purpose. Therefore, make a decision to get out of your comfort zone and live without just existing. Second, it is the Truth that

you know that will set you free. I am a firm believer that “when you know better, you do better.” Proverbs 4:7 reminds us, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” Finally, get tired of being tired. In order to reach your fullest potential in life, you must get out of the way. Therefore, make a decision to get uncomfortable so that you can grow. My beloved, it is time to get your second wind.

## CHAPTER 1

### Family Tree

I grew up in a small town in Virginia with my mother, stepfather, and younger sister. My mother was an educator for forty years in the public school system, and my stepfather was a local plant supervisor. My grandmother was also an educator, and my grandfather was a self-taught contractor. I didn't know much about my biological father or my paternal grandparents. Nonetheless, I was blessed to have such a nurturing family. My grandparents divorced before my first day of school. However, they maintained a healthy relationship throughout their lives. My grandfather resided in another state

but often came for weekend and holiday visits. During his later years, he spent the winter months with us. My sister and I looked forward to every minute because it was like Christmas with him around. He showered us with wisdom and gifts of love. Although my mother and grandmother were the teachers of the family, we learned a lot from my grandfather who had little education. My sister and I were blessed to have a family tree filled with wisdom and knowledge.

When I wasn't learning from my family, I was trying to understand who I was in Christ. My parents believed in Proverbs 22:6 which says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." As a result, I spent

my whole life in praise and worship every Sunday morning. My grandmother was a Sunday school teacher, and my mother devoted her time to youth ministry. My stepfather led several ministries in his church as well. My parents worshipped separately causing spiritual dysfunction in our household. My mother wore many hats and worked hard trying to get a response from God. On the other hand, my stepfather worked two full-time jobs while resting in the assurance and confidence of the finished works of Jesus Christ. He lived a life that exemplified peace while my mother struggled to find it. I must admit it was not easy trying to find the Truth in the midst of religious rituals and practices.

From a Christian perspective, a testimony is a declaration told by believers about what God has done and is doing in their lives. As early as the age of four, I recall standing in front of large audiences declaring my Savior through song and sharing a ministry that could only be ordained by God. Only God could have attached a “seal of approval” on my gifts. Every Sunday morning, I belted the sounds of the great Mahalia Jackson until it stirred up the souls of other worshippers. There was an anointing over my life that was indescribable. Yet, I struggled to find my identity as a child because my love for God was on another level. While my peers were playing with toys, I was asking questions about my Creator.

I was a very unusual gift from God. I was born with Blount's disease, a rare bone deformity of my lower extremities which causes me to have a distinctive walk. Doctors suggest I inherited it from my biological father's family tree. At the age of eight, I had surgery and wore braces on both legs in hopes to reverse the prognosis. By the age of thirteen, the braces were removed with little noticeable improvement. The struggle with childhood obesity was real too, but perseverance birthed victories in my life. I refused to let the wild card ruin the hand that God had dealt me. As a child, I learned how to push through oppositions and fight against my childhood challenges. Surely, there was nothing that could interrupt or separate me from the love of Christ.

I spent my childhood and early adolescent years attached to my grandmother's hip. She was one of the biggest inspirations of my time. She was a poised, intellectual, and soft-spoken memoir. She was a woman of virtue and offered a treasure of souvenirs that I hold close to my heart today. Although my mother birthed me, much of my integrity and values were cut from the cloth of my grandmother's teachings. She was a respected educator and mentor that nurtured the community. My grandmother was an offspring of a bi-racial mother growing up in the 1920s, an era of racism and inequality. However, she embraced diversity through the eyes of God and became the recipient of grace and favor.

I often prophesied over my life as a child. I told my grandmother that I was going to marry a preacher, and we were going to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world. My grandmother was the only one who entertained my vision. I recall laughing when she said, “Really?” “What is this man going to look like?” As she stood at the kitchen sink, I consciously thought about my answer and replied, “Like Jesus” and laughed. She kept it going by adding, “So, you’ve seen Jesus?” I chuckled because she introduced Jesus Christ to me in Sunday school. So, I laughed and replied, “Why yes, you showed Him to me!” We laughed and laughed! From that day on, I could talk with my grandmother, affectionately known as “Ma”, about all of my dreams. My grandmother was a prolific gardener,

and I witnessed her harvest throughout the years. Therefore, I trusted her words of wisdom.

I learned many lessons from my grandmother. She was an expert and my hero. My grandmother lived across the street from us, and I enjoyed sitting on her front steps talking to everyone who walked up and down the street. We lived in a small town with five churches within a mile radius. There was a little sidewalk that led to the post office, neighborhood café, drug store, and a few other peddlers' shops. In the opposite direction, there was a corner store which was the ideal place for kids to get a snack while others found pleasure in a cold brew. My neighborhood, like any other community, had people who struggled with vices to feed their

pain. I loved them all, and they reciprocated the same love back to me. I remember one in particular who always tried to avoid me. Whenever he saw me, he ran before I asked for a snack from the store. My goal was to beg him first so I could keep my quarter. Both of us were on a mission to feed our hunger. He wanted a beer, and I wanted a snack. One day I invited the neighborhood drunk to go to church with me. Sadly, it was the only name I knew for him. To my surprise, he accepted my invite with tears in his eyes. I wasn't sure if his response was from the alcohol or his heart. I ended up giving him my quarter, and boy did his eyes light up like a Christmas tree! In exchange, he gave me his word that he would be waiting at the corner store the following Sunday morning. Excitedly, I hurried

back inside to tell my grandmother that I had invited a friend to go to church with us. When Sunday morning came, we picked up my friend who to my surprise was waiting all dressed up wearing the fragrance of booze. I could have cared less about the booze because I was so happy to see him waiting for us. The last time we crossed paths, he was sober and was talking about Jesus Christ.

My foundation was built on strong Christian values from my youth. However, my behavior began to suffer between the tree of good and evil during my late adolescent years. I had a hard time hearing from God and became a doer of the world. Holiness seemed difficult for some odd reason. I couldn't grasp what it was, but something changed.

My worship got dense, and my praise was weak. The glam of the world was robbing my character and identity. It was no longer fun trying to live for God and be a teenager. My parents grew concerned with my spirit of rebellion and disobedience. My mother often reminded me of how much I resembled my biological father. I resented those comments for years. Personally, I believe she was struggling with abandonment and raising a child birthed out of her own pain.

During this time, I was a senior in high school and preparing for college. The warning signs of at-risk behavior grew louder than my praise and worship. My mother was prideful and tried her best to tuck these problems underneath her smile as she

did most things. In my household, real issues were seldom addressed. It was like every problem could be praised away instantly. My parents were an interesting union to witness. As a result, I struggled with faith and fear my whole life.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Cost of Freedom

High school graduation was drawing nigh. My pockets were full of money and fun. I had a driver's license, keys to the whip, and an invitation to the next party. I was no longer looking to feast upon spiritual food for nourishment. Instead, I was in search of a table with an empty chair to slap kings and queens around and cut diamonds and hearts in the midst of a club scene. When I learned how to play the game of Spades, I was all in. I didn't gamble, but I sure knew how to use my Jokers to win the game. If I only knew how much my freedom would cost, I would have played the game

differently.

High school was over, and I was free from discipline and structured learning. It was time to soak up all the fun before the next chapter in my life. Meanwhile, my family continued to pour religion into me, but my appetite was chasing the prince of darkness. After all, he was much more attractive than rules and laws. Once I tasted the forbidden fruit, I became a slave to sin. Bottom line, I enjoyed the world and everything in it.

After high school, I continued to struggle with my addiction of disobedience. My vice was just having fun. I was reluctant to accept the call to ministry because it held me accountable for winning souls for Christ. For some reason, it was easier to

bellow a song or two than taking the time to learn biblical truths. I wasn't ready to commit to the assignment designed for my life. Deception had me star struck, and all I wanted to do was have fun.

Summer was over, and it was time to leave the nest. About thirty miles up the road, I attended a small private college. I wasn't sure how it would work out being so close to home, but it did. While embracing the warmth of my freshman year, there was still a thirst for home. Often, I traveled for overnight visits just to get a home cooked meal and be pampered by my mother. Those who knew me well would agree that I was still my momma's baby. We may have had our differences and even shared a few altercations, but a mother's love sustained our

bond. My mother wanted the best for me; we shared many great laughs and good times. I also traveled back home to see my baby sister and make sure she wasn't stealing all of my attention. I was the baby for seven years, and it was hard sharing my space when she was born. However, she has been my angel throughout the entire journey of my second wind.

When I initially went to college, my plan was to major in education, specifically special education. Growing up with a physical disability, I was compassionate for others with special needs. When it was time to do my classroom observation, the idea quickly vanished. It took one day in a classroom with about a dozen of exceptional

students for me to retire the thought altogether. It was the longest two hours I had ever spent in my life. I learned a lot about myself that day too. I had a greater love for my parents who had nurtured my imperfections and needs. They must have paid a high cost in time and love to raise a child with strong genetics. Nonetheless, I made it through my freshman year by the grace of God.

It was time for summer break, and I was happy to be home. The first year of college was over, and it was a great learning experience. I made a lot of connections and friendships, but it was time to reunite with some familiar faces. I never thought I would admit to missing Sunday morning worship, but I did. My soul was thirsty for spiritual food.

Living in a small southern community, I looked forward to Vacation Bible School. There was something about a week filled with Christian learning and fun that sparked the hearts of youth as well as adults. There were no requirements to join the one-week event except wanting to learn more about Jesus Christ through music, crafts, and biblical teachings. Since childhood, my grandmother directed the annual event. Later, she passed the torch to my mother in hopes to keep the light of Christian education shining brightly. Each year it was a big success and a great learning experience. I had lots of fun, but I knew there was much more waiting for me on the other side of town.

I had a blast that summer. The fun was over, and my sophomore year was on the rise. It felt good

having my freshman year under my belt. My parents were reluctant to make another investment in my education. They wanted me to stay out for a semester and do some soul-searching. They questioned my direction in life because of warning signs in my behavioral pattern. Nonetheless, I moved forward with the registration process. The fate of my career was still in limbo, but the general studies curriculum seemed like a good fit to get my prerequisites satisfied. Shortly afterwards, I connected with an off-campus student, met an older gentleman at a party, and began to entertain his charm. Next thing I knew, my dormitory room had turned into a hotel, and I was living the life of Jezebel. I got sanctioned, reprimanded, and almost expelled. At that point, it was by the grace of God

and prayers that I existed. The cloth from my grandmother's teachings was wearing thin, and my nudity was exposed.

My grades arrived in the mailbox over Christmas break. I was placed on academic probation but decided to return and try to salvage my education. My parents stressed their disappointment and seized my personal bank account. I felt betrayed and lost. I applied for several part-time jobs, but the pay was substantially less than my allowance. It became difficult trying to keep up with my Jezebel lifestyle. I proceeded to network and learned of a job with endless hours. I could work at any time of the day or night as long as I had access to a landline phone. So, I applied

and received my logins as the next “adult fantasy phone actress”. Yes, you heard correctly! The church girl officially crossed over and exchanged her robe for a towel. My phone was ringing more than a Chinese take-out or pizzeria, and the tips were well-worth the delivery. Every day after class, I went “fishing” for a “big spender” to lure into my net. I stayed up all night reeling in big fish with whatever bait I could find.

Near the end of the semester, my boat was sinking, and the cost of freedom was at an all-time high. My phone actress job was costing me sleep, my grades, and my gifts. My professors were concerned about my future because they knew my potential for greatness. I started feeling unworthy and ashamed of myself. The energy of sin crept in,

and I surrendered. I lost my financial aid benefits, scholarships, and the invitation to return my junior year.

The following summer, I took a few classes from several community colleges to get my GPA back in good standing. Finally, I got accepted to a nearby Christian university. I renewed my relationship with God, and it felt good once again. Less than 30 days, I was right back where I started. I had an argument with my roommate and ended up leaving the university. My parents were fed up, and I was too. A week later, I was sitting in a classroom at a theological seminary across town. My mother told me it was a small, warm, and cozy campus that reminded her of home. We all knew each other on

a first name basis, and everyone was friendly. Most of the students were preachers in training, and I was still trying to figure out ME! “Why am I here?” “What am I doing?” “How did I get here?” I searched my heart waiting for an answer from God.

The seminary was in a neighborhood surrounded by crime. There was one functional dormitory, and it consisted of a handful of efficiencies that were divided by a bathroom creating the image of two dorm rooms. I was the only female resident; therefore, I had the privilege of occupying the one with the kitchen unit. The campus was designed primarily for off-campus students. Therefore, I was responsible for the cost of my welfare. It was not a picture-perfect painting, but I had many epiphany moments there.

My life at seminary became significant even to this day. I developed highs and lows in my personality until I lost my identity. One day I was happy and excited. On other days, I was sad and lonely. I developed mood swings like the unpredictable weather. Some days I enjoyed the company of my spiritual peers, but most of the time, I longed to be with an acquaintance from my hometown.

I was about an hour (door-to-door) from home. My mother and I took turns visiting one another. My sister was in high school and beginning to drive. My relationship with my stepfather distanced itself a bit. My grandmother was disappointed in my decisions, but her love remained

unconditional. The young man I had met over the summer was making his way deeper into my life. As a result, he moved in on campus with me. Of course, he was not approved to stay there. He was a lad still playing hide and seek, and the kid in me enjoyed chasing the adventure. The relationship lasted on and off for a few years. It endured domestic violence, infidelity, aborted pregnancies, physical abuse, and emotional wounds. My freedom was getting costly. But, by the grace of God and prayers, I still existed.

## CHAPTER 3

### Identity Theft

I left seminary with my baggage and went back to my hometown with my parents. I was confused and in love with a lad who was still drinking life from a sippy cup. In many ways, our relationship was dysfunctional and abusive. However, I became numb to the pain. He lived across town with his parents too. Our families were not friends; therefore, we had to make arrangements to see one another. The relationship became a financial burden, but I was drawn to the intimacy and adventure of rebellion. I had disappointed and shamed my family so bad that I was lucky to even have a roof over my head and an occasional invite

to church. Anyways, I was too busy chasing darkness to embrace the call of ministry on my life. Although my robe was waiting for me, I decided to pick up my net and go fishing again!

The adult entertainment company rehired me as a phone actress. Oh, I knew it was on and popping! Unfortunately, the call volume and payout had drastically decreased. The competition in the adult industry had grown extremely saturated and competitive. I was lucky if I made enough for dinner and a movie. So, I dusted off one of my gifts and began to play the piano for surrounding churches. It felt good to worship again, but it was not enough to survive. At that time, I thought it was cute to walk around with fresh haircuts, color

coordinated outfits with matching shoes, fine jewelry, and press-on nails. Shoot! I had the image of the world to uphold. Anything less than that was called a “reject!” My pockets were getting empty again, and I decided it was time to become the Captain of the ship. So, I took off my fitted tam and put on my Captain’s hat, looked in the mirror and said to myself, “Let’s make it happen, Cap’n!” To my surprise, I didn’t know that a pirate had jumped on board!

My life was sinking deeper and deeper into sin, and I never learned how to swim. I was drowning with no life jacket or guard in sight. I traveled near and far, met imposters, and learned their value system. We added, subtracted,

multiplied, and divided our wages at a high cost. It was the little “g-o-d” that we trusted. Trickery had bought and sold me to the mastermind of darkness. Surely, I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore until the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry!

I was arrested and charged with numerous counts of credit card fraud. After nine months of incarceration, I returned home with probation. I became disconnected from my family, friends, and community. My support system had lost its legs to stand. I desperately wanted to renew my citizenship in society. As a result, I refused to renounce my rights and started taking a few classes again. However, I continued to battle with my faith and

fear. I realized that the same law that I was running from had arrested my mind. I was trapped in the middle of Eden with no Truth to set me free. It wasn't long before I was arrested again.

My life was controlled by count time, chow time, pill line, and walking recreation. I entered an environment where freedom was considered contraband. I was surrounded by many high-profile criminals and struggled to fit in. My counselor was unsuccessful in her search for a treatment plan since I did not have a history of substance abuse, and my level of education deemed me overqualified for other programs. So, I searched to find the light in a place of darkness.

I was a victim of my crime. My identity was stolen by the mug shot attached to my uniform. For many years, I questioned my actions while suffering the consequences. I had committed identity theft and robbed myself of freedom. As a product of my environment, this was one of the hardest pills to swallow. There were many days and nights that I could not digest the decisions that made the bed I had to lay in. The consequences of sin were tough especially with little communication from home.

My parents were getting older, and tolerance was low. My mother would write me and send commissary funds; however, finances were tight. My sister was on her way to college, and my parents invested much of their savings on my education and

keeping me out of jail. Lawyer bills had exceeded their paychecks. My grandmother passed away, and my last hope was resting in peace. So, I explored my new home trying to find comfort to heal my broken heart.

As I explored my surroundings, I quickly discovered that my life was a crime scene. It was the first time that I realized I had an enemy that used me as an imposter to victimize others for personal gain. My heart soaked with intense regret. Standing in the middle of a foreign land, I was lost with my identity stolen. The only evidence was the mug shot on my green jumper which was unfamiliar to me. Someone had stolen my identity too. It took a while for me to understand how I had arrived at the place

of being a victim of myself. It was not the time to blame others; instead, I began to accept the consequences of my behavior. As a result, I quickly prepared myself mentally for the quest ahead.

There were many thoughts running through my head. I was disappointed in myself. In so many ways, I felt like Eve in the Garden of Eden stripped of her covering by the voice of temptation. As I stood in the middle of a room surrounded by victims of the same whisper, my heart dropped hopelessly. All eyes were on me asking questions about the journey that led me to the garden of withered fruit and disconnected branches. My only response was “I ate the forbidden fruit.” Reluctantly, the lies and trickery that brought me to that pit left me with an

empty core. As I began to peel back layers of the mug shot resting on my chest, my identity was revealed.

The moment of truth hit me in the face with resentment and shame. Believe it or not, it hurts when reality becomes your enemy. I reached a point where I did not like the woman in the mirror. If that reflected the real McCoy, I was in trouble. The little girl who was cut from the cloth of royalty and bellowed the sound of Mahalia Jackson had perished. However, a thread of hope allowed me to see a glimpse of the gem that was buried deep inside. In that moment, I accepted the “I AM” in me. It took a while to understand that I was living my redemption story.

I went down a few steps and arrived at my dwelling. It was a single room stuck in the corner. Next door was a meeting room with glass walls. I enjoyed sitting in there and looking on in deep thought. It seemed like I was the only one with an interest in that room. The other inmates enjoyed the television and making phone calls. I was unable to call home because my parents blocked all of my collect calls and decided to put me in the hands of my Creator.

There were endless days and nights of learning and unlearning to do. The process of renewing my mind was complicated. All of my past biblical teachings did not offer a blueprint for that moment. So, I did my own Faith-Based

Investigation (FBI) of identity theft. I concluded that the residue of abandonment and fear lived deep inside of me.

All of those emotions had caught up with me. The years of rebellion, disobedience, and anger had erupted through the whispers of lies causing confusion. The absence of my biological father and a mother's love doused with fear and rejection of love was my DNA. My dysfunctional bloodline manifested itself through bad decisions and negative peer clusters. The system failed me in so many ways. And, I failed it too. Finally, I had to face the consequences of identity theft.

In the still of the night, many revelations were revealed to me. I spent a lot of time between the

walls of that meeting room and my dwelling place while waiting for my fate. As my case went through the judicial process, there were several setbacks, such as an evaluation for competency to stand trial as well as several conflicts of interest. However, I continued to spend time getting to know the royalty that lived inside of me. At times, it was difficult to understand and embrace my Creator's love. I struggled to empty old wine that fueled my life for so long. It was like playing tug-of-war in a field day event in elementary school. Sooner than later, I knew I had to surrender to the call of peace that surpassed all understanding.

Finally, the point of acceptance had arrived. I rehearsed all the manipulation and pain I caused so many people while mulling over the whispers that guided my actions. My heart bled with agony and shame from the aftermath of identity theft. It hurt to see how so many people were affected by my mess.

It was a long road ahead. I often relapsed from the nightmares that led to my case of identity theft. I wanted to be set free from the mug shot that rested on my chest. The final quest was to discover the access code to freedom during my prison experience.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Prison Experience

The verdict was in. I was sentenced to state and federal prison. My housing facility allowed state and federal inmates to serve their time concurrently, meaning at the same time. It was kind of like getting a “two for one” deal but, this was the only time that a bargain was hard to buy. As a consumer of stolen goods, I wished there was a way to give it all back. However, it was not the case.

The adjustment to maximum security prison was time within itself. Because of my physical limitations and high blood pressure, I was classified as an at-risk inmate. The medical facility was

onsite, not far from my unit. There were several housing units and a cafeteria which reminded me of a college campus. However, my prison experience was nothing like college.

It took a while to understand the prison system. For thirty days, all inmates went through a classification period. During this time, extensive medical and mental evaluations were conducted before moving into the general population. Once I was classified, it was a whole new world. I arrived at my new home, and it was crazy! The sound of decks of cards smacking, chit chattering, and lighters flickering filled the room. For a moment, it felt like Vegas. And, you know what they say, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!”

In my housing unit, there were two tiers designed in a U-shape. Luckily, we had the option of opening and closing our doors until lock down each night. Each room had two desks, two beds, two shelves, and a small window. There were a few single rooms, and one of them belonged to me. My dwelling was close to the bathroom and shower. The traffic didn't bother me because I was used to the noise. A matter of fact, the keys and whistles along with footsteps helped to break the monotony of my day. I occupied that room for several months before moving to another room and gaining a roommate.

I was housed in many facilities throughout my prison experience. Each new home offered a

new opportunity. It wasn't long before I developed tunnel vision, lost sight, and ended up in a place called Sodom and Gomorrah. I learned how to speak their language and adopted their lifestyle. There was something about "sin city" that attracted me to it more and more. By the time I reached my last destination, I was groomed and seasoned.

Survival was the name of the game. Every inmate knew how to manipulate the system and strategize a survival kit. Gambling, lesbianism, and gangs, just to name a few, were the norm. There was a small percentage of holy rollers, but their motives were even worse. They would set up small tent revivals, sell religious warfare, and take up offerings full of noodles, beef sticks, and candy. I

attended one time and left hungry – spiritually and physically. After that, I had to go back to the table and use my trumps just to survive for the next two weeks.

I learned how to play the game of Spades long before prison. It was one of the few card games that could hold my attention for hours. When I learned the object of the game, I instantly became a pro. My skills were like a first draft pick in basketball. Although I loved the game, I got tired of playing the sport.

Prison was starting to get to me. It was the same thing every day. Count time, pill line, chow.... count time, pill line, chow! Each day seemed like one big never-ending cycle. It was the

same routine every day. Unlike other inmates, I didn't have a television because I enjoyed my snacks too much and money was tight back home. Besides, I sent several televisions home in the midst of all of my transfers from one facility to another. My case was quite complicated; therefore, I spent a lot of time going back and forth to court. It was very frustrating because it delayed my mail and communication with my family.

During the preliminary stages, I met a lot of people, some good and some bad. I lost a lot of good friends during the classification process which determined where I would do the rest of my time. While others went on to lower security prisons, my fate remained at maximum security. It was all good

because I needed the discipline. All of my life, I thought I was in control. Until one day, I had to pick my battles.

I grabbed a seat in the day room surrounded by high-profile inmates. It was one of those days where I really didn't feel like being bothered. I wasn't even in the mood to play cards. I was always the witty inmate and life of the party, but that was not the day to crack a smile. I guess I should have stayed in my room. Instead, I decided to bring my problems into the presence of faces that were doing life and possibly waiting for death row. I was considered a "short timer" and there were only a few others who shared that space with me.

While sitting there in my funk, I was occupying a table that others wanted to play cards. Spades, of course! Well, I wasn't moving. So, I had two choices. Either I was going to get up or play cards. The next thing I knew I had thirteen cards staring at me. Reluctantly, I counted my books and the game began. My Spades partner was a tall stud chick who walked like a dude, acted like a dude, but too top-heavy to be a dude. And she was loud! We had never been partners before, so our rhythm was off. Besides, I really didn't want to play. I wanted to be left alone, but I refused to give up my table. Instead, I chose to compromise with the odds that day. Anyways, I was left with this chick sitting across from me with two gold crowns and running her mouth. She didn't have many fans. We all just

tolerated her. Those who knew her from the street said she acted the same way. She never had commissary and always came to the table with her hand out. For some reason, I always thought her “stud game” was fictitious.

Rumors suggested that it was not her first time in prison. Obviously, there was some truth to it because other inmates who had been locked up for years shared old prison stories with her. As I sat there listening, it felt like sitting in the middle of “Shawshank Redemption” stories. Well, the game was going pretty slow due to all the reminiscing. I was hoping that we were going to be the first team to get to 500 points to end the torture and misery. It was a close game and too early to call a winner, so they decided to take a break and re-up on caffeine

and sugar. In prison, coffee was the drug of choice followed by sugary snacks. On this particular day, I was not in the mood for coffee or snacks. So, I waited patiently while others went on their scavenger hunt. After all, coffee was a commodity in the prison system. If you had an abundance of it, you always had friends and haters. I kept coffee but, I wasn't sharing that day. However, my partner decided to share a cup with me.

The show was back on the road, and it was my deal. I wanted the game to be over so bad. My tension span was getting short, and this stud-chick annoyed me sipping loudly on her cup of gold brew. I could see the steam from the coffee was hitting her face. I was hoping like hell it would burn her tongue

and shut her up, at least until the game was over. Meanwhile, the game was getting tense; it seemed like the energy had shifted. Everyone was talking junk, but my mind was somewhere else. I was thinking about home and all the lost time I couldn't get back. Also, I missed my sister immensely. While in deep thought, I lost my concentration and played a card. Not realizing that it was the wrong play, my partner jumped up and lost it! This chick went ballistic and lost her mind! Before I could pick my card back up, she had given me a drink of her coffee. The worst part of it all, she missed my whole mouth. There I was, sitting in the middle of a boxing ring wearing an expensive fragrance of coffee beans on my freshly washed uniform.

I still wear the scar and memory of my first “L” for Loser. I lost twice that day – the game and the fight. I had been defeated by a chick with a loud bark and bite. Maybe she was a dude? Nonetheless, I had a lot of pride to swallow that day. It took everything within me to hold back the tears. I felt like a punk, but I was too tired to fight back. Besides, I didn’t see it coming. Well, I guess I did because I had a choice. Maybe I should have given up the table?

In prison, you are taught to stand your ground. It wasn’t cool to run and tell the guards everything that happened. Besides, your whole life is videotaped in prison. They probably already saw

it. I guess my story just didn't make the news that day. But, it did change my life.

In prison, you have to choose your battles. It was one of those days for me. There was something within me that just did not want to put up a fight. I threw in the towel and could care less about what my peers thought. Of course, some of them were angry; yet, they were not willing to take the hit for me. It was funny but true. When altercations occurred in prison, you could always seem to count your team on one hand. For some reason, I could see the victory belt around my waist with the referee holding up my hand that day. My reactions may have seemed delusional, but my vision was clearer than ever before. With steaming coffee all over me,

I didn't retaliate. To be honest, I didn't want to. I didn't even want to get up out of the chair. So, I just sat there and waited for the pain to go away.

It was the type of pain that would run straight through a band aid. I couldn't cover it up. So, I decided to let the wound heal supernaturally. The process lasted longer than expected, but I gained a new kind of respect from that day forward. It was a lesson that had to be learned. And, it looked like I was the chosen one to teach others how to win a fight. I wasn't trying to gain fame; I just decided to walk away. I knew if I reacted, it would lead me to solitary confinement. I was already separated from my family and the outside world. The bit of

civilization left was worth more than that. So, we both went our separate ways.

Losing that fight was actually the birthing of a winner. I got tired of making bids and turning tricks into treats on the card table. So, I started spending more time in my room learning about the gift that lived inside of me. Since I was a child, I knew the real me was living in a box with a big red bow. Inside, there was a jewel with luster and shine that would give light to darkness. I just didn't know the access code to see it. But, I knew there was something or someone else inside of me. It was hard for me to share this intimacy with others because they were still fighting battles in the world. Yet, I was looking for freedom from it all.

From that day on, I spent a lot of time to myself. I got to know me in a different way. There were parts of me that I loved, and there were other parts that I despised. Often, I would revisit the moment that helped me to swallow my pride. It was like a breath of fresh air, and the push needed to set me free. Finally, I reached the level of maturity. I received several invitations to join the fun in the day room like old times, but I turned them all down. I knew what I was missing, and I was good with that. I enjoyed sitting on my bunk reading a book more than playing a game of Spades. I never thought I would say that in a million years, but I did. Even my roommate was proud to see the change.

My roommate and I didn't run in the same circles, but we respected one another as roommates.

She had the top bunk, and I resided on the lower level. After all, I was too big to think about jumping up on a top bunk not to mention being scared of heights. Oh well, I guess that was the first time I was happy to have meat on my bones. Anyways, she and I had absolutely nothing in common except we missed our families. She enjoyed reading and worked with the landscaping crew on the yard. Although we didn't talk much about what brought us to those common grounds, we did discover that we had about the same amount of time left to do. Many nights we cried while talking about memories of home.

My roommate taught me the value of quality time. Although I couldn't get all that time back, I could surely make better use of what was left. I

spent a lot of time writing, reading, and listening. It was amazing how well I could hear in silence. From time to time, my peers tried to negotiate with me. They missed my company, but I knew the quiet time was going to be the reward of my prison experience. I was at a place where nothing or no one could fill my cup, not even a game of Spades!

During this time, God revealed His plan and purpose for my life. It was sad that it took prison for me to see my destiny. In the midst of distractions, God had a way of getting my undivided attention. He showed me how sin cost me to lose my identity and freedom. However, He assured me that He would be with me always.

In the still of the night, I asked questions and waited for the Holy Spirit to respond. I wanted to know what happened. I could not understand how I ended up as a prisoner of war. It seemed like my family tried so hard to plant good seeds in me, but the harvest refused to grow. At that moment, God showed me how much of my foundation was built on works and not faith. He revealed to me that I became an abiding citizen “under the law” – the old covenant – which led to feelings of unworthiness, unbelief, and doubt.

It was that moment that led to the epiphany of my prison experience. Perhaps, it was the best of the rest of my days. God took the worst part of my story, returned me back to the womb, and re-birthed

me from my tomb. Glory! Glory! Glory! In my mess, there was a message to let me know that I was about to get my second wind.

# **The Access Code**

**to**

# **Freedom**



## CHAPTER 5

### Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the key ingredients to living a successful and prosperous life. Forgiveness allows you to fully enjoy all the benefits of GRACE – **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. In addition, forgiveness bridges the gap to freedom. When forgiveness is practiced, it allows the wounds and battle scars of life to heal without the residue of pain and anger. Often times, we hold on to our pain thinking that it will allow us to endure the race more swiftly and victoriously. However, when we do not forgive, it slows us down causing us to reach the finish line fatigued or perhaps, falling short of God’s plan and purpose for our lives.

Forgiveness can be a hard pill to swallow if you have not digested the finish works of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to forgive when you have developed a hardened heart towards the Truth. In reality, we have all fallen short and reaped the benefits of being a slave to sin. Therefore, we must examine the root of forgiveness and how it unlocks the access code to freedom. As a result, you will gain the ability to move forward and live your life with purpose.

Forgiveness sets you free and initiates spiritual growth. Ultimately, forgiveness is for you. It gives you power over your life and mends the broken circle of distorted feelings and emotions. Furthermore, it eliminates the anger and pain

oppressed by the whispers of the adversary. Satan's biggest weapon is to rob our thoughts; therefore, it is critical to identify the messenger. In order to do this, you must meditate on the Word of God consistently. The Apostle Paul said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you [live in you] richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16, AMP). Therefore, meditation develops wisdom and understanding that will lead you to forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the foundation that leads to intimacy with God. Embracing God's love opens the door for you to forgive yourself and begin the healing process in your life. Although others may have hurt you, forgiveness is about YOU. The key ingredient is love.

Forgiveness is the best therapy for a broken heart. Doctors are constantly promoting heart health, and millions of dollars are spent researching ways to prevent heart attacks. Likewise, health and wellness coaches are on the rise to empower healthier lifestyles. Consumers have invested in health programs, diet fads, and gym memberships hoping to become healthy. However, a broken heart needs spiritual food and living water.

I learned how to forgive in the midst of my prison experience. It was a daily process. As my mind was renewed through the Word of God, my vision got clearer. I went from hating those who hurt me to resenting being a passenger of a reckless driver. It all started coming together for me, piece

by piece. It was like trying to find the missing piece of a puzzle and realizing that it was never in the box. In spite of my emotions, I started to see the big picture. So, I began the journey to a healthier ME.

It took a spiritual regiment to shed the weight of hurt, pain, and resentment. Ephesians 6 reminded me of the complete armor to wear in a battle. So, every morning before the break of dawn, I clothed myself with the peace that passes all understanding by allowing God's Word to minister to my spirit. Through prayer and meditation, my mind became renewed with His Promises. The biggest revelation I received was that God had forgiven me and had a plan for my life.

The ultimate plan was to build an intimate relationship with my Creator. When I began to identify God as my “Creator,” my life has not been the same. Immediately, I embraced His love for me. As a result, it allowed me to reciprocate His love to others. More importantly, it allowed me to love myself. At first, it was difficult to embrace His love because I was always looking to give what I never received initially. Therefore, I had to unlearn the costly expressions of love by receiving an unconditional love that was free and without stipulations.

God’s love opened the door to transparency and forgiveness. There was no way of fooling the One who created me because He formed me in my

mother's womb. He knew all my dark secrets, so I unpacked my baggage and dealt with my pain.

My adolescent years were some of the toughest years of my life. I was an overachiever and an academic scholar. I was socially inclined and active in student government. In spite of my physical challenges from childhood, nothing hindered me from being the life of the party. My vice was not alcohol or drugs; it was rebellion and disobedience. I enjoyed being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was something about the midnight hour that was adventurous to me. By the age of sixteen, I set my own curfew and rules despite my parent's guidance. My mother stayed up many nights waiting for me to come home. Although I was only a few miles away, I enjoyed

being a rebel. To be honest, it was fun manipulating the system until the consequences caught up with me.

After high school, all hell broke loose in my life. My vision was distorted by sex and money. I attempted to further my education several times. After my sophomore year, I robbed a young man's heart and youth. He was young; his heart was still developing. I was a young woman trying to feed an appetite of lust which led to several abortions and a broken heart.

The act of sin will always leave you broken. My actions had spoken louder than words. Many innocent lives were destroyed by my selfish pride. The evidence of sin had snatched my faith and hope

until I was scared to look in the mirror. It was the same feeling I had when I looked at the mug shot on my prison uniform. Somehow, somehow I had to get past this pain and live again. So, I continued to unpack my baggage.

Since childhood, I lived a life of anger. I was mad at daddy for his voluntary absence. Furthermore, the resentment of a mother's abandoned love gave birth to a wound that never healed. My mother was too prideful to admit that she had daddy issues too. Instead, she tried to cover up her unwed pregnancy by forcing a marriage that failed. By the time I was born, she was working on her second divorce. Likewise, my biological father was married before and had abandoned his previous

family to chase his selfish vices. The only thing my mother and father had in common was a broken heart and a child that bore their pain.

It wasn't easy living with a dysfunctional DNA. I lived life knowing my X chromosome and always wondering about the Y chromosome that made up the other half of me. It was perplexing how the missing gene was so visible in my life. Everywhere I would go people would tell me how much I looked like the missing piece of my puzzle. It was frustrating being reminded of the emptiness that dwelled within. My mother would always say, "You look just like him" or "You act just like him." I often wondered why she never identified his name.

From my point of view, I was her sin-baby that she had to live with for the rest of her life.

The pain and lack of forgiveness remained in the shadow of my family structure. At the age of four, I was blessed with a nurturing and loving stepfather. My sister joined the family when I was seven years old. Throughout our family circle, remnants of abandonment built our foundation. My stepfather was a great provider and a godly man; he did not have a relationship with his mother or father. He was raised by his grandparents and aunt who offered him a vision of hope that kept our family together.

I developed shame and guilt by the time I reached my adolescent years. The only thread worth holding on to was my religious rituals and practices.

My mother never taught me what to do after the shouting, dancing, and singing was over on Sunday mornings. So, I lived the rest of each week hungry to find the Truth and answers from my past. When questions would arise, she ran and manipulated the truth by pointing fingers at others. As a result, I had a bittersweet relationship with my mother when it came to understanding the missing link in my life. As time went by I realized she struggled with forgiveness too.

During my prison experience, God revealed the importance of forgiveness. For years, I expressed my anger and hurt in ways that negatively affected innocent bystanders. I began to see the truth in the saying, “hurting people hurt people.” The lineage of hurt produced generations of

bondage. I got tired of the antics of sin and searched for freedom. As a result, I made the greatest investment of my life – FORGIVENESS.

Forgiveness was not instantaneous. First, I had to recall the hurt. So, I went back to the dark places in my life where I wore a smile to cover up the pain. Although it hurt like hell, it was a fire that had to be put out for good. Then, I had to address my pain. At the age of twenty-four, I went to meet my biological father who lived only a few miles from my home. The fact that we lived in the same small hometown was painful. On top of that, I traveled passed his house daily. He was always sitting on the porch – rain, snow, or sunshine. All of those years, I never knew the agony of my pain was sitting on the front porch a few miles away.

When I drove up, I was greeted with a stare. We locked eyes for a few minutes to examine our similarities. I know that they say little girls look like their fathers, but I was his clone. We even had the same gaited walk; he was bow-legged too. My heart dropped because I could not believe I was finally facing my pain face to face. I asked many questions, but answers were few. I learned he was recovering from a stroke and was no longer drinking alcohol to cover up his pain. My biological father was a sad but content man. He seemed okay with his irresponsibility of not watering his seed. He was lonely and bitter. You had to dig deep just to find his vital signs. I also learned that I had a sister and brother from his previous marriage. Otherwise, he was very solemn and showed no remorse for his

actions. Through the years, we communicated off and on. When my mother passed in 2007, he reached out to me, and we attempted to build a new relationship. I learned a lot about the man whose name resided on my birth certificate. Unfortunately, I decided to leave that pain there and move forward.

After forgiving others, I had to learn how to forgive myself. As I searched scriptures to heal and restore my life, I began to embrace God's love. First, I had to understand His thoughts towards me. Psalm 139:17-18 says, "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!" Then, I had to realize that years of pain and hurt weighed me down physically, mentally, and spiritually. As I kept reading, God instructed me to cast my cares on Him. So, I began to pray

consistently telling God how I felt. The exciting thing I learned was that God was my friend. He did not remind me of my past, and He always revealed my future. He showed me the “I AM” that lived inside of me. It was an “Ah Ha” moment that I will never forget. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Sitting behind prison walls, I accepted God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ who paid for my freedom in full.

Today, I am free and forgiven. The biggest part was learning how to forgive me. I wasted a lot of time carrying baggage that did not belong to me. As a result, there were setbacks, time lost, and innocent victims. It hurt knowing that my mother

and I spent our best years fighting against the forces of darkness. Once I learned that God had a plan for my life, my life has never been the same.

Forgiveness was a vital part of my second wind. It offered me the air to breathe again. Forgiveness empowered me to live with purpose and not on purpose. Forgiveness was worth the investment it took to live a grace-filled life today.

## CHAPTER 6

### Prayer

The ultimate plan is to know and understand the relevance of God in our lives. We often struggle to find the solution to our problems. We spend endless days and nights rehearsing our thoughts with no results. We carry the weight of our burdens without resting in the finished works of Jesus Christ. Perhaps, it is our lack of intimacy with God that produces anxiety. The Apostle Paul says, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything” (Philippians 4:6). Therefore, we should be in constant communication with God through prayer.

Prayer is a two-way street. It opens the pathway to share our thoughts and emotions with God. It also allows Him to commune with us. When we spend time with God, hidden treasures are revealed to us. Proverbs 4:7 says, “Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do.” Jeremiah 33:3 says, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.” God waits for us to utilize the gift of prayer so that He can build a relationship with us. We are spiritual beings designed with an innate thirst for communion. Naturally, our soul longs to know Him personally, and prayer is the tool that opens the door to freedom. Prayer gives us the ability to have one-on-one time with God; it is an open invitation to communicate with God without reservation.

Prayer is the key that ignites our faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” As we meditate on the Word of God, prayer gives us confidence and assurance to believe that whatever we ask in His name shall be given unto us. When we pray using our faith, it builds our trust in God and allows us to receive what He has given to us through Christ Jesus. Then, chains of bondage are released so we can begin to walk in our authority.

A constant prayer life is vital for spiritual growth. During childhood, my parents taught us the importance of prayer. They offered morning prayers, meal prayers, and bedtime prayers to recite.

I am so thankful because prayer was the foundation that initiated my personal relationship with God. I discovered joy, peace, and love in the ability to commune with God through prayer. 1Thessalonians 5:17 instructs us to “pray without ceasing.” Today, I constantly talk to God and listen to His guidance.

There are hidden treasures in praying early in the morning. In prison, I began each morning in my secret closet of prayer. Before count time and chow call, I began each day with God. In the midst of our intimate talks, He became my best friend. It was weird because I used to pray to God and beg for things that I already possessed. I never knew that the things I asked for were already given to me. Today, I realize how prayer has allowed me to cast

my burdens on God and given me hope for each day ahead.

Prayer is one the greatest spiritual exercises we can do. Prayer shapes us for the plan God designed for our lives. It gives us the endurance to live a purposeful life. When we pray without ceasing, it gives muscle to our faith. It gives us confidence in knowing that God has already supplied our needs. As a result, we can spend more time giving thanks instead of begging God for what we already have in Him. When we receive what Jesus Christ has done for us, our prayers are powerful. It reminds us that Christ has fulfilled all of our needs. Often, it is the simple prayers that motivate us into our destiny. A simple “thank you”

lets God know you acknowledge His love. Through exercising a prayer life with thanksgiving, we discover spiritual intimacy.

Intimacy begins with knowing who you are in Christ. Prayer is one of the greatest tools we have to tap into our identity. Often, tears would saturate my face as I uttered thanksgiving unto the Lord. In return, His presence commanded the atmosphere, and the Holy Spirit guided me as I rested in His arms of safety.

Prayer opens the door to hear from God. There is a soft and gentle voice that speaks to us when we are in His presence. If you have not experienced this, I recommend that you put yourself in an atmosphere of thanksgiving. God is

omnipresent; therefore, He is with us all the time. We tend to be in such a rush to pray that we treat God like a genie. We ask Him for so much without realizing that He has given it all to us. God has supplied every need before we ask Him; yet, we get impatient during the waiting process. In reality, the waiting is us believing and receiving from Him. As a result, God is blamed for our setbacks as we attempt to answer our own prayers. In the end, we are left with the debt of our decisions. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, “Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.”

God wants a relationship with us. He gave His Son, Jesus Christ so that we can have everlasting life. When we get to know God, we receive from Him. When we spend time with Him through prayer, we get to see the beauty of His love. He wants to know that we are thankful for all He has done for us through Christ Jesus. Psalm 136:1 says, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endures forever.” Prayer gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude for the provisions God has made for us.

Prayer is the access code to freedom. It opens the door to communication with God. When you pray, you will find joy, peace, and strength in the midst of opposition. When you pray without

ceasing, you will grow wings like an eagle and rise above it all. You will no longer need others to pray for you; instead, you will have confidence in your communion with God that whatever you ask is yours. Therefore, Pray Always!

## CHAPTER 7

### Praise

Praise is an expression of admiration. It allows us to thank God for His faithfulness. Praise is the key that drives us through challenges in life. Satan wants us to give up, throw in the towel, and become a statistic of mental illness. Although we live in a fallen world full of opposition, evil, and distractions, we must understand how to become a survivor of trials and tribulations. It's a process called PRAISE!!

I grew up in a household with practicing Christians. We had the formula down to a science. We plugged the religious components into the

equation every Sunday. We had a praise fest before every worship service. Sometimes, family and friends gathered on Saturday nights to sing and witness the goodness of God. There was something exciting about those Saturday night praise sessions that set the tone for Sunday morning worship. Sunday was the one day of the week that we were guaranteed to put on our best attire and market our righteousness to the world. My mother went the extra mile to make sure we were camera ready for our debut every Sunday. After the red-carpet event, we would sashay our way into the sanctuary to continue the praise fest. After church, the hype continued in search of the after party. In the rural south, it was common to attend evening musical programs. A quartet group with mics and

instruments assembled across the front of the church completed our Sunday worship experience.

As a child, praise was learned through music. We got excited as soon as the music set the atmosphere. If we did not like the music, our religious souls would hunt for another festival to satisfy our hunger. Often, we would “church hop” on Sundays looking for that religious fix. Looking back, it was quite exhausting. As a psalmist, my mother enjoyed using her power of suggestion to volunteer my ministry. Next thing I knew, I had a mic in my hand bellowing one of James Cleveland’s greatest hits. No one knew how I hated those karaoke moments. For the rest of the week, I resented my mother for putting me on the spot.

My mother never took the time to understand my praise. She always wanted to take it to the big stage. Every time I turned around, she enlisted me in the next talent competition. The trophies and awards were plentiful, but my praise was beyond the spotlight. My mother could not understand why I was so reluctant to live her dream. First of all, I discovered it was more than a talent; it was a gift from God. As I used my gift, I began to see the greatness that was inside of me. Yet, my mother was still trying to display her first born gift – Me!

I learned a lot about praise while I was in prison. I discovered how to muscle my way through the walls of confinement. I was tired of doing time, and my prison journey had just started. To be

honest, I felt hopeless and suicidal. I couldn't believe all that churchin' from childhood had left the building. I was devastated and lonely. I called out to everyone, but no one heard my cry. I was angry because I had no manual on how to praise my way through it. My biggest competition was trying to fight deception that led me to that dark place. Growing up, I learned how to win a competition, but I didn't know how to win this fight. My mother was busy showing me off but missed showing me how to win against the adversary. I accepted Christ and was baptized at an early age. I had fulfilled the rituals of being a Christian; however, I didn't have a personal relationship with Christ. I carried my Bible as part of my Sunday outfit. It looked good but served no purpose. It was like additives that

kept the outside looking good, but the inside was full of poison. As a result, my praise was tainted by religion. However, I followed my heartbeat and praise was birthed behind prison walls.

During my prison experience, I learned the true meaning of praise. It amazed me to discover how much God inhabits the praises of His people. My mouth dropped in admiration with my hands lifted high. The worship experience was different from the praise festivals growing up. When I realized the difference, I was in awe. Immediately, I thought about how Paul and Silas discovered freedom in prison. I remembered reading how the guards were concerned that the prisoners would escape in the midst of the high praise. Instead, the guards began to praise with them. At that moment,

tears hid my face with my hands raised high in praise. My heart was the only beat in the room. I danced around from wall to wall consumed with the presence of the Lord. It was one of the most memorable moments of my life.

It was late one night. The guards had finished their last evening count time. The lights grew dim. I was at a federal holding facility waiting to be transported to my final destination. I didn't have a roommate. It was just me, a bed, toilet, sink, and a soundproof door with a buzzer. The facility was located near a military base, and I learned a lot about praise while housed there. One night, I took all of my court documents out and began crying. With little communication from home and no visits, I was

all in my feelings. I cried and cried! I tried everything I could to spark a Sunday morning worship experience from childhood. Unbeknownst to me, the praise festival turned into my second wind.

Praise is one of the most powerful tools we have for warfare. Satan will try to rob us of our praise. He will use opposition, setbacks, delays, and disappointments to steal our joy. He will do whatever it takes to get our attention off of the goodness of God. He will remind us of who we were and never who we are in Christ. He will attempt to snatch our praise through deception. Satan is a dream killer and longs to distract us from the Truth. We must realize that Satan will never

win. Jesus Christ has defeated Satan so that we are victorious in every area of our lives. Isaiah 43:2 says, “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” Therefore, we should praise God for what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf.

As I followed the beat of my heart, I found the key to freedom. The chains of bondage were broken in the midst of my praise. Every time I share the memories of that night, my heart becomes syncopated with a joyous melody. Today, I am able to sing unto the Lord a new song.

Praise is the antidote that opens the door to freedom. Through the journey of life, I learned how to praise God when my hope was gone. When the odds were against me, praise gave me a new song to sing. In the middle of my darkest hour, praise was the tool that broke the chains of bondage. In response to my prison experience, praise was the access code to freedom.

## Chapter 8

### Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from life stressors. Further, resilience is the elasticity that enables us to heal from life-changing events. It is the ingredient that sustains the flavor of life. It preserves our dreams and allows us to taste and see the goodness of God. Resilience motivates us to spring forward to reach our goals in life. Hebrews 12:1 says, “And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.” Therefore, keep running!

I had lots of mixed emotions about life after prison. Although I survived the politics of the prison system, it was a whole new world waiting for

me. Statistics indicated that the odds were definitely against me. As a result, I believed that society would always see me as an ex-offender regardless of my success after prison. All of these thoughts were running through my head after years of preparation for my future. Instantly, I had to get a grip on my thoughts and focus on the plan that God had prepared for me. It just didn't make sense to throw in the towel on all of that training and hard work and punk out right at the finish line. So, I decided to endure the race until it was my turn to transition back into society.

When I returned home from prison, resilience was a process. With years of structured living, this was all new to me. Finally, I had to make decisions

again. This time, I had to set higher expectations instead of fashionable fun. It was time to step in the ring and let years of discipline and training speak for itself. After all, I had one heavyweight belt around my waist. In my head, I had just won a Mayweather fight. However, when the gate opened, my knees buckled as I walked over the line that separated my past from my future.

It was not an easy journey. After prison, simple things seemed so hard. Every step in my life was a chore. I recall wanting to give up so many times. The negative energy was draining. I had to catch myself from falling for the nonsense. Religion had consumed the future of my hometown, and it was a struggle sifting through the thorns to find the

land of milk and honey. Often, I wondered how to escape from my past with it staring me in the face. Finally, I realized that it didn't matter how others perceived me. After all, it was their perception of me that kept me in bondage. Truthfully, the first few months were a living hell. It took crying and praying and praying and crying to get through each day. No one understood my pain. It had nothing to do with prison, but all to do with my future. I never thought I would say this, but life was simple with a deck of cards and a cup of coffee. That's right! Transparency is letting you know that resilience is not easy.

Resilience is a learning experience. I learned that freedom comes with responsibility. Also, I learned that I was held accountable for my destiny.

Jesus Christ paved the way, but the choice to follow was mine. It was too costly to lose a defeated fight. There was a winner inside of me. So, I evaluated my connections. As a result, I let a lot of them go. At that point in my life, distractions were dream killers. I wish I could call them haters, but they were believers better known as practicing Christians. They would go door to door spreading gossip under the disguise of The Good News. Now, I understand why my dad spent so much time in his man cave.

A good support system is one of the best ways to bounce back from a setback. On Monday morning following my release from prison, my dad took me to enroll at a local community college. He encouraged me that I could do all things through

Christ who strengthens me. My dad was a bible scholar who demonstrated love from a pure place. He took the remnants of my mother's past and nurtured it to life. Although he didn't biologically give me his last name, he gave me his love. I was one lucky girl. For me, that was enough to birth God's plan for my life. It was simple; my dad promised to guide me into my destiny by committing his time, love, and Christian values. He had the principles for success down to a science. Ironically, my mother was a math and science teacher. However, my dad mastered the formula for resilience. Raised by his grandparents with little education, he learned how to resist a poverty mindset with perseverance and determination. My

dad shared the secret to his success and vowed me to use it because it works.

My sister also taught me resilience. Seven years apart, she still keeps me grounded. She is a blessing from God. My sister was the only one who visited me while I was in prison. I like to call her “my bridge over troubled waters”. She is my angel and best friend. It’s always good to have someone to tell you the truth. Today, she still holds no punches. After all, she took a lot of them from me growing up. I was always getting on her nerves. She would agree even today. When I returned home from prison, my sister was about to receive her Master of Arts (M.A.) in Public Health from The George Washington University. I was so proud of her. She was the epitome of resilience. In the midst

of losing her big sister to the system, she conquered her quest. My sister has inspired me to keep going in spite of the curve balls life has thrown at me. Likewise, I urge you to keep pushing forward.

My husband is the greatest motivator I know. He encourages me every day. He is my prayer partner, best friend, and soul mate. Over ten years later, I still get morning coffee and daily devotionals. As a minister of the Gospel, he constantly reminds me of who I am in Christ. I am so thankful to have his partnership. My husband's relationship with God speaks volumes to a country girl who "churched" her way through life. He spent endless nights revealing hidden treasures in the Word of God. He fed me until I vomited the residue

of my past. My husband's ministry has been a vital part of my second wind.

Faith, hope, and love played their part in my transition from prison. The death of my parents was the deal breaker. It was one of the most traumatic events to ever experience in a lifetime. However, Jesus Christ resurrected my faith to focus on His Promises. If I didn't quit then, I can't quit now. God has reassured me that He is with me and will never leave me nor forsake me. God reminds me every day – "Yvette, I got you!"

## CHAPTER 9

### My Second Wind

When I heard my name called over the intercom, I began to take my last walk across the prison yard on August 9, 2002. Dressed in my burgundy uniform with memoirs of what was home, I carried my faith and hope for better days to come. It was a beautiful day, and the smell of a freshly manicured yard greeted every step. As I took one last look back, I sighed with tears. They were happy tears, for that was where the journey of freedom began.

It was time to live my second wind. With nearly five years of prison experience girded around

my waist, I carried the weight of excitement to fulfill God's plan for my life. I remember it so well. As the gate opened, I looked up and onward. The anticipation of that day had finally arrived. It was my dream come true. I knew it was going to be a long road ahead, but I was all in for the journey. I searched the parking lot until my eyes rested on the two faces that had given up most of their lives for me – my parents. They were reluctant to share in the celebration because the return on their investment always seemed to fail. Nonetheless, we embraced one another in our own way. I realized that I made parenting difficult, especially during my adolescent years. Reluctantly, it was worse during my college years. However, we enjoyed the ride back to my hometown of Halifax, Virginia.

Although being home was not the same with my grandmother gone, I was blessed to have the memories of her as I looked across the street.

Home sweet home! The last time I crossed this path was the morning my dad took me to court. It was all so surreal. I thought I was watching an old movie. The millennium was here, but unbelief flooded the atmosphere. Shattered dreams and war stories were living throughout my community. Religion had stolen their identity. I wondered, “How am I going to be resilient in this environment?” First of all, I encouraged myself daily until God spoke to me. Then, I had to have a plan to win in the midst of all the odds. I had to counteract the negativity and religious influences

that paved the way to my prison journey. Finally, I had to decide to trust God. I figured that if He knew every hair on my head, He definitely knew me better than my family. So, I buckled up for the new chapter in my life and began to walk into my destiny.

It was one of the most bittersweet moments of my life. The joy of freedom gave me hope each day. It was extremely challenging to return to my hometown where small minds think just alike. There was more gossip than gospel, and my mother enjoyed feeding the media. My dad didn't tolerate that nonsense. He was too consumed by The Good News to give attention to "smallville". The support system around me was limited by religion. There

were churches on every corner dying from the law that divided them from the Truth. I will always say, “When you know better, you do better.” Therefore, I spent a lot of time feasting on my daily bread for nourishment.

My prison experience allowed me to get my second wind. Before prison, I had no idea what to do when the music, shouting, and dancing was over. The antics of religion had interrupted my personal relationship with God. I didn’t know that the hummingbird inside of me was filled with milk and honey. In prison, I discovered my true identity. I realized that I was an heir of The King and precious in His sight. All along, “I AM” was living within the walls of my belly. In my darkest days, God gave

me the vision to see His plan and purpose for my life.

It took years of labor pains to give birth to what was inside of me. At an early age, I was told that there was an anointing on my life. However, they forgot to look deeper than my praise and worship through song. To this day, people ask me if I am still singing. I just smile in response knowing that they just don't know any better. See, small minds will always keep you in a box. They can only see you within the scope of their own relationship with God. That's real talk! Pay attention so that you don't end up living your life through the impaired vision of others. God has a plan for your life. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have

for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Furthermore, Jeremiah 1:5 says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Colossians 1:27 says, “For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.” Therefore, I chose to receive the report of the Lord. Today, I have given birth to the call and plan for my life.

It took a journey to hell to get my second wind. I recommend this journey to no one. The route to freedom is much easier when you use your

roadmap. Living your life by testimonies of others will lead you on a scavenger hunt. It is when you decide to invest in your future by renewing your mind with biblical truths that you begin to understand your identity. You will discover that deception robs your freedom.

My second wind was when I knew who I am in Christ. It was a pivotal moment that changed the rest of my life. When I discovered that I was no longer a slave to sin, I begin to walk into my destiny. In the midst of count time, chow line, and mail calls, I became free. I was free from myself and from chasing the voice of deception. I was free from the agony of fear and shame. Romans 6:18 says, “Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have

become slaves to righteous living.” Today, I am the branch that bears the harvest of the fruits of the spirit.

As a result of my second wind, I have learned that God is my source. He has given me the deed to the land. I am an heir of The King. Luke 10:19 says, “Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you.” Therefore, I have the ability to speak to my mountain while resting in the assurance of what Jesus Christ has done for me.

The pruning process was not easy. It took discipline and lots of unlearning for me to experience my second wind. The Word of God

became a safe house for me. Daily, I watered the seed that was rooted within me until “I AM” showed up. Each day I would say, “I am the righteousness of God.” Then, I began to speak His Promises over my life. With each day, my eyes were enlightened, and the Truth began to flow like rivers of living water out of my mouth. As a result, my faith was positioned to receive from God. My hope began to rest in the arms of Jesus. My hardened heart began to release the poison consumed by religion. In the midst of hell, a death notice turned into a birth certificate. My identity has revealed that God is my Father. John 8:36 says, “So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.” Ephesians 1:5 says, “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This

is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.” Therefore, I am free today by way of Jesus Christ. Everyday has been sweeter than the day before. The sweet perfume of blessings and favor are all over me. The Hope of Glory lives in me!

I am a new creation in Christ. I am no longer the mug shot that rested on my chest. I am a royal princess. Through Christ, I have been set free, and in Him I live! My Father has given me possession of the land, and everywhere I go, blessings follow me. I am connected to the root that supplies all of my needs. I know who I AM! I AM the righteousness of God! I AM blessings and favor!

“I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39, NLT).

The access code to my second wind was in me. The spirit-being that was formed in my mother’s womb was a gift from God. 1John 4:4 says, “You are of God, little children, and have

overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” In search of my identity, I knew that there was greater in me. In my darkest days, there was a light beaming inside trying to shine. Through prayer, meditation, faith, forgiveness, and resilience, I discovered my second wind. It was Christ who lives in me. It was the evidence of things not seen that kept me hungry and thirsty for Him. I continued feeding my spirit with the Word of God until the manifestation of what I read started showing up in my life. As I spent time listening to God, I was able to forgive others as well as myself. Now, I am able to share my second wind with you.

The journey to freedom required discipline. It wasn't easy, but it was worth it. It took a strategy

of planning and guidance to arrive here. It took a lot of losing to win this victory. Consistently, I had to water my spirit with wisdom and knowledge only found in the Word of God. My parents laid the foundation in hopes that one day I would follow the roadmap out of the wilderness. In spite of their imperfections, they gave me what they had which was their unconditional and sacrificial love. Today, their prayers have been answered, and I have found my second wind. It saddens me that we could not share this moment together; however, I know they are resting with the Lord.

My second wind is not about me. It has prepared the way for me to help you find the pathway to freedom. My prison journey has been more than just a testimony to share with others. It

has given me biblical insight and facts to help build your faith. Prison showed me how to defeat deception and guide others to redemption. After prison, I pushed through the odds and earned a degree in Psychology and Marriage and Family Counseling. All of the accolades are great, but my second wind supersedes them all. After grad school in 2014, I asked God a simple question – “What do I do now?” He said, “Take care of my people, and I will take care of you.”

As founder of Freedom Chain Ministries, I seek to help others get their second wind. We support ex-offenders, at-risk youth, and their families to reduce recidivism and overcome challenges with resilience. Today, I am a counselor! Through Freedom Chain Counseling, I provide my

clients with the tools to break barriers to freedom. From marriage and family to individual counseling, I am blessed to help others identify the triggers and warning signs that have held them hostage in a world of bondage and despair.

Are you ready for your second wind? Are you ready to live your life with purpose and not on purpose? Did you know that Plan B is NOT an option? That's right! God has strategically and uniquely designed a plan for your life. It is a plan to prosper you, give you hope, and a future. My beloved, it's time for you to get your second wind!

## **Scriptures for Spiritual Growth**

(New King James Version)

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”– **Deuteronomy 31:6**

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”– **Hebrews 13:5**

Be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. –**Philippians 1:6**

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. – **Philippians 4:13**

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

– **Luke 10:19**

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

– **Matthew 6:26**

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

– **Philippians 4:19**

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High  
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I  
will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my

fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.” – **Psalm**

**91:1-2**

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. – **Psalm 34:1**

I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. – **Psalm 34:4**

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. – **1 John 4:4**

For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever

things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. – **Mark 11:23-24**

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”– **John 8:31-32**

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. – **Isaiah 43:2**

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**

And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. – **Romans 6:18**

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. –**Ephesians 2:8-9**

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.  
– **Jude 24-25**

## About the Author



Yvette W. Jones is a native of Virginia. She is a Marriage and Family counselor. She is married to Wayne Jones, a bible teacher and Certified Christian Life Coach specializing in spiritual formation. She is an alumna of Liberty University and holds a M.A. in Human Services and Marriage and Family Counseling, a B.S. degree in Psychology with a concentration in Christian Counseling, and an A.A.S. degree in Administration of Criminal

Justice. She is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

Yvette W. Jones is committed to building the bridge between communication and healthy relationships. She has adopted a hope-focused approach to help clients break barriers to freedom. With extensive studies in forgiveness, Jones has dedicated her career to turn the key of love into the antidote for long lasting relationships.

Jones is committed to working with ex-offenders, at-risk youth, and their families to break barriers with resilience and reduce recidivism. Since 2010, Jones has helped thousands of prospective youth find schools and programs of interest to reach their career goals. She also works with youth and

adolescents to create an environment that encourages learning and social growth through character building and setting high expectations. In her spare time, Jones enjoys sharing her radio personality to empower listening audiences around the world to find a solution-focused approach to real challenges in a real world.

**To learn more, go to:**  
**[www.yvettewjones.com](http://www.yvettewjones.com)**

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