

Testimonies

Letter From The Editor

What I've seen God do in 2015...

Stories. Everyone loves a good story. This booklet is a collection of true stories shared by regular people. These stories also have something else in common. They are God-stories... everyday stories from everyday people talking about seeing God's presence in everyday life. Stories from men and women just like you and me, who wake up, go to work, face various challenges, and try to make the best of each day, especially through tough times. Which makes it all the more needed to share stories of God when we have them.

So we're going to *celebrate* the end of one year and *kickoff* another by remembering what God has done in 2015 and sharing these "God-stories" with one another. There are people

everywhere who are just like you, and maybe at this moment they might be having a tough time (like we all go through at one time or another) and these God-stories will provide hope and strength to carry on. They're a reminder to us that God knows us, our burdens, our fears, and yet remains faithful to us and offers us lasting change and everlasting life, through Christ Jesus. And what better way to hear about it than to read a firsthand account from someone who has actually witnessed it for themselves.

So brew yourself a hot cup of coffee, find a nice spot, and be blessed as you hear these real stories from real people about the real Savior.

And who knows what amazing things Christ has in store for 2016...?

In His story,

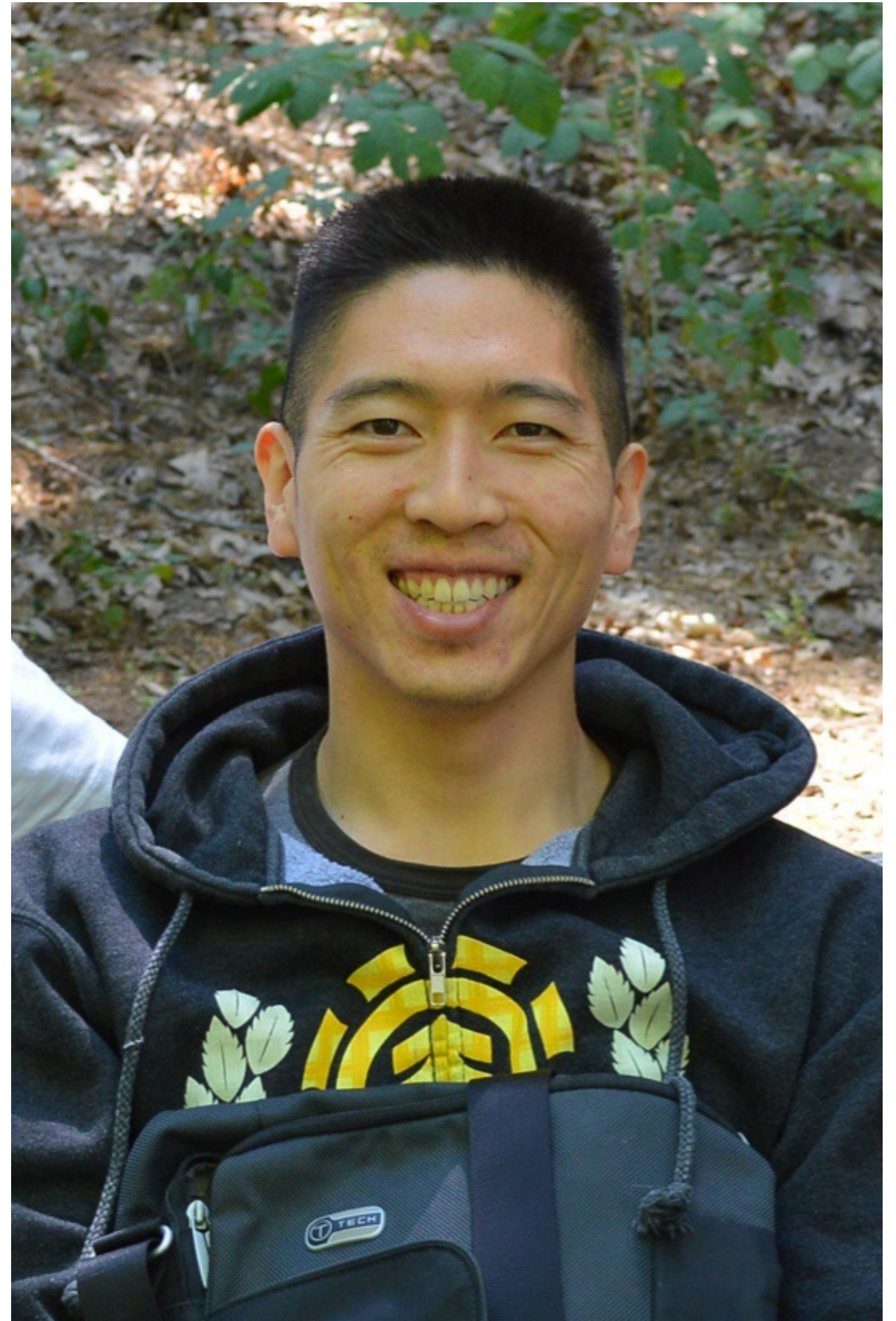
Pastor Yung Kim



WALTER HAN

Preparations

Two years ago, I began a discipleship training program with a college student, Dennis Gahm, and one of my spiritual fathers, Sam Kang. Sam led us in an in-depth study of the bible and what it means to have faith in Christ and live out the Gospel. We applied some of the things we learned from training together...helping at a shelter, going to a



Skid Row church, praying for the world, and praying for one another. After we finished the training, we were supposed to practice the things we learned and make disciples of others. Not long after we finished training, the church had a major split. I was left without a church to attend in April. There was frustration with the church split and things going on at work so I was left to wonder what was next in store for ways to both serve and worship Christ. Why would God train me only to leave me without a church?

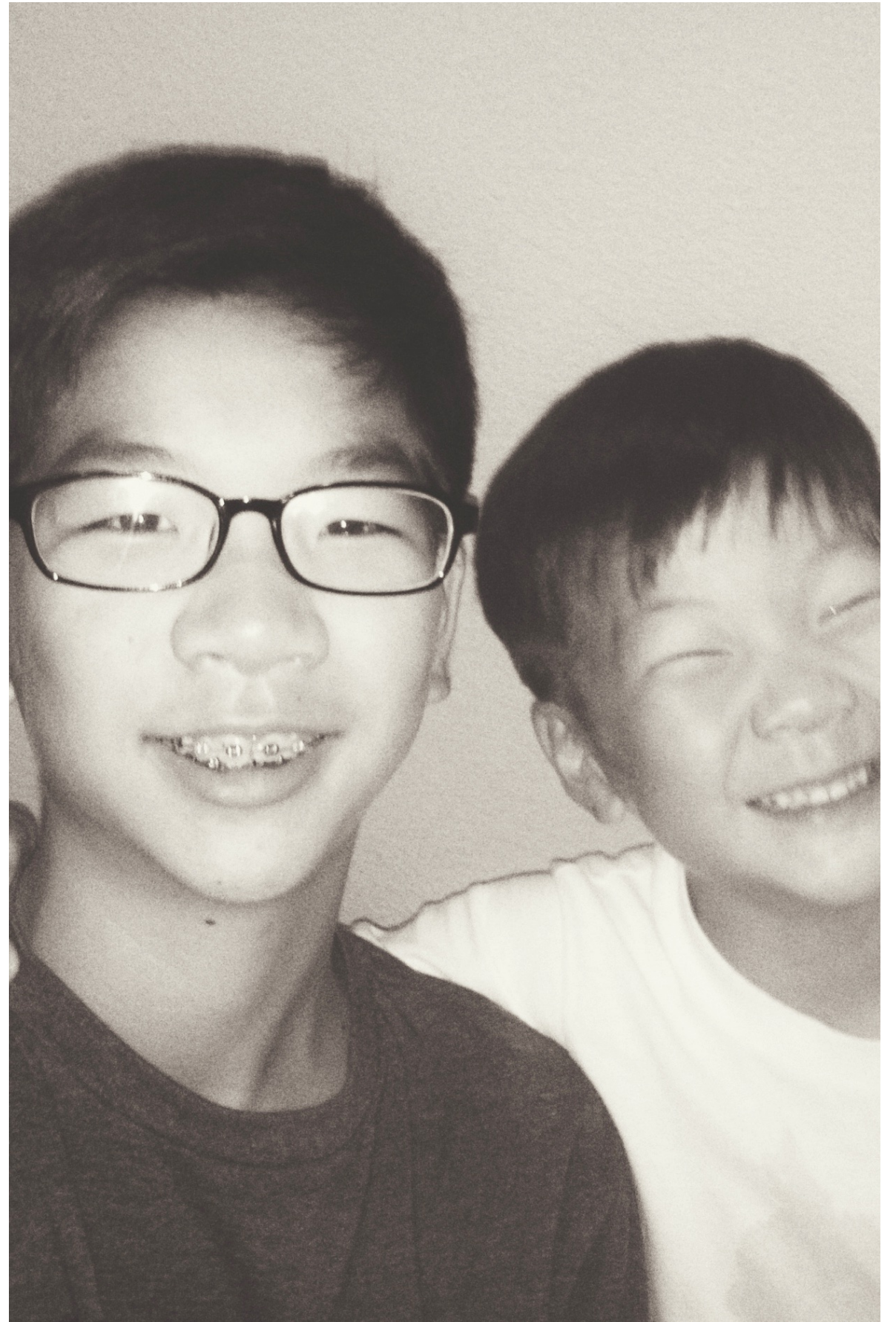
A teaching opportunity popped up in Atherton, which offered better learning and financial opportunities for me as a math teacher. I took it thinking it was a good career leap and a fresh new start to finding a church. I called Daniel Park, and was surprised to find that other members I knew and trusted -- Daniel Lee, Yung and Christy (and their family) -- were also coming up here. I came out here not really expecting too much, but I found many other members of the church to be extremely welcoming. I found that I could call San Jose New Hope a part of my family.

It didn't take long for my desire to serve in this church to occur. I've been praying about serving in the youth ministry since October, and my Gospel Life Family (GLF) group has been praying for me as well. I know God had prepared me for this moment and now it is time for me to put my training into practice. I lack many qualities as a follower of God, but I have the desire to serve. God has called me here and I know that this is where I belong today.

JEREMIAH KIM

True Identity

Hi my name is Jeremiah Kim and I would like to share my testimony with you today. I started out in a Christian family and I always went to church and said I was a Christian, but I never really understood what a real Christian was. As a child I thought I was a Christian, but when I started to grow up I started to mess up.



Jeremiah is on the left, and on the right is his brother Joshua.

I would do terrible stuff and cuss people out at school if they made me angry. I lived that life from 3rd grade to the beginning of 6th grade. That year I moved schools to a popular school, Albert Einstein Academy. At the school I lost myself, I was constantly being made fun of and every one alienated me for being different. They would always make fun of me for being me. So I tried on a new identity, a new mask, and every day I would tweak it here, clean it up there, but it was never good enough. Finally, in 7th grade I was sick and tired of all it, so I tried to go back to being myself, but I had forgotten it. I forgot who I was, I forgot my regular personality. I also forgot that the reason I am here, my core purpose, is for God.

I realized that I put God off until Sundays. I would live my life the way I wanted to everyday until Sundays, and put my Sunday mask on and live through it. That year I struggled with right and wrong and I fought with myself constantly, my flesh would desire what is unholy, and my spirit would desire likewise. I did not know what I was doing sometimes and I did stuff I was not proud of, and I would then struggle with it in the night. So I finally shut down, I lived life like a robot, I barely was aware of anything. I took in all the garbage that life threw at me and kept it inside, never sharing it and living with it for 2 years. Then it all started to change.

In the middle of the school year, I received news that we were moving to San Jose, my favorite place to go since I was little. It was where my family was, many of my good friends, and the church I loved the most. So after my move I kept my guard up at church, I did not want the same hurt to happen twice. I

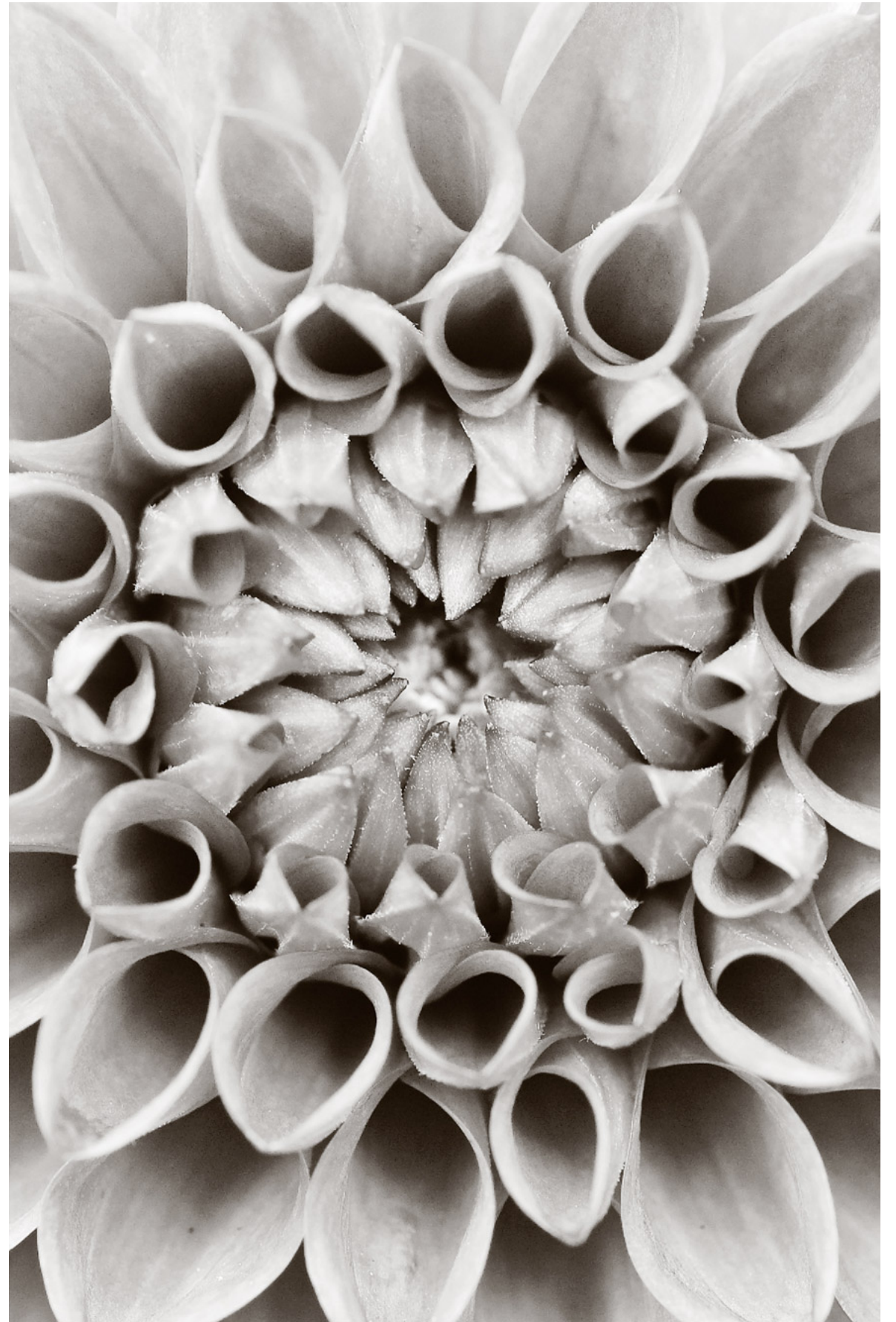
eventually learned to trust the church and I knew they accepted me. At that point I was able to let my mask down and find who I was before. In that summer through VBS and the Bishop mission trip God showed up in a big way.

VBS was not only a lesson for the kids, but a lesson for me in the many ways God helps me in all of my troubles. The mission trip to Bishop then changed the entire course of my life. I went to Bishop with thoughts of fun and games like another VBS, but every morning we read the Bible and did devotionals. I thought it would be boring, but I felt closer to God immediately. Learning about his love and having deep conversations with Mr. Moon and my small group, I learned I cannot keep all my problems in the inside. I'm not strong enough to hold it all and be laden with that burden, so at Bishop I gave them all to Jesus, all the despair, anger, sadness in me. After I came home I was a changed boy, fully filled with the Holy Spirit. Lastly I want to say I am eternally happy for what he did for me in Bishop, because of his amazing love and his willingness to take my burden, I want to openly proclaim that I am a follower of Jesus.

GRACE LEA

God Is Always By My Side

Who is God? That is a question that I have always asked myself ever since I knew him. Being born in a Christian family I have learned about God since I was a child. As a child I thought of God as how a child would see him. God was a person who created the heavens and the earth and sent his son to die for our sins.



I remember that I would sing songs and draw pictures about him in my bible study classes every Sunday. I have constantly been told that God is always there for us and loves us. However, I had doubt that he was not there for me because I could not tell when he was next to me.

Later as time passed my perspective on God became more doubtful. I doubted if he was really there because at times when I wanted him to help me, he was not there for me. For example, I would ask God to let me do well on tests and projects. When the results were not what I expected I could not understand why he was not there when I needed him. I remembered being told that he is always there for you. However, when he was not there for me when I thought I needed him to, I got angry and frustrated at God. After that moment I had decided that since God was not there for me when I wanted him to, that would mean that he was not here at all. During that time, I felt isolated, and lost in thought because I did not know what to believe or what to think. I felt very conflicted and put all that stress and anger on people who tried to help me, like my friends and family. I felt like I could deal with my own problems and I put into my mindset that everyone who tried to talk to me about it was just helping me out of pity.

Although I tried to handle situations on my own and close off people that I didn't want to receive help from, I eventually started to open up slowly and realize what God has done for me. It first began in my 9th grade year; I was at the church's youth winter retreat. I have always gone with the thought of

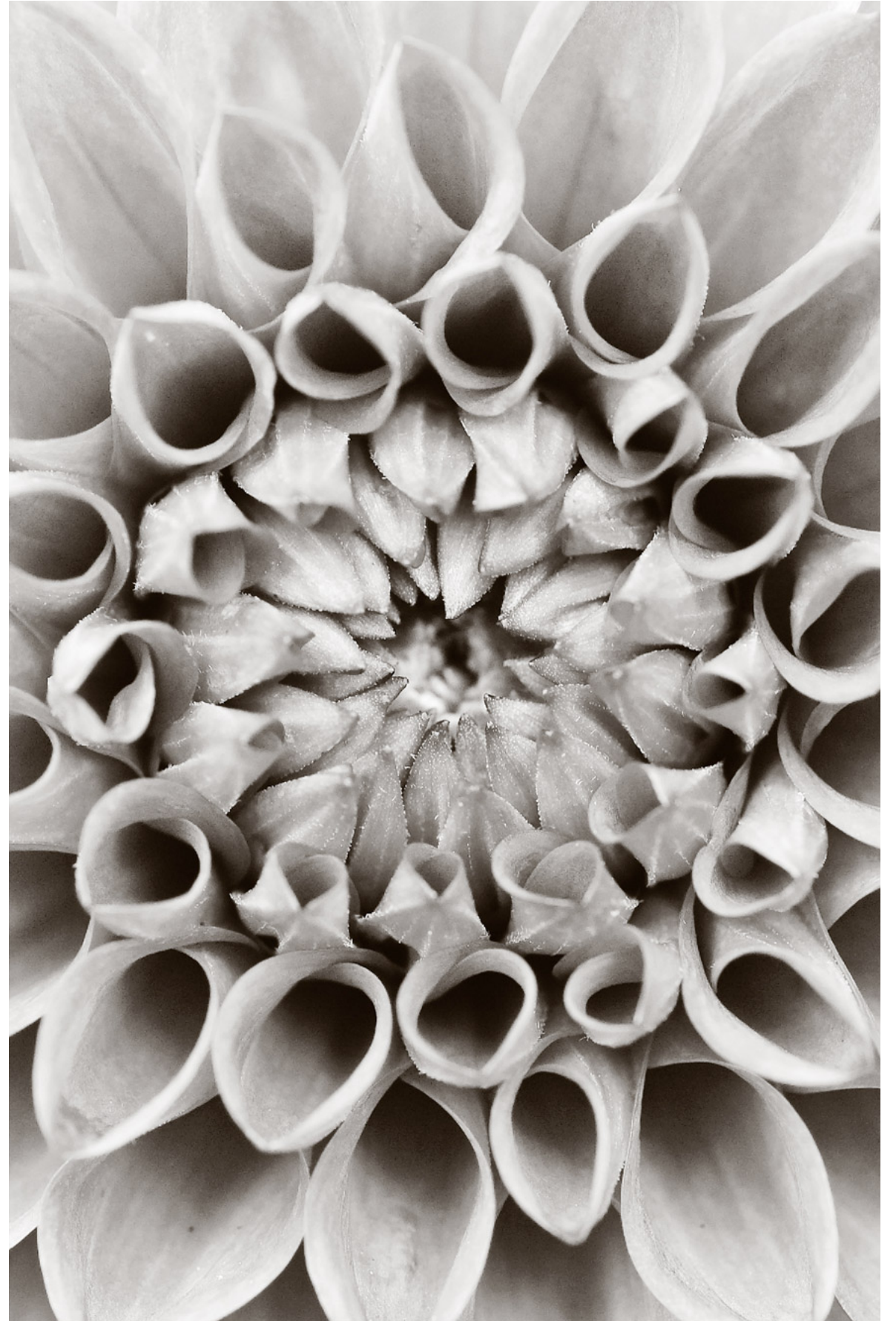
just having fun and as a break from all the things that I stressed about. What had happened that year though was completely unexpected. While people were crying out to God during the last night of the retreat I was sitting there awkwardly and gave tissues to people. During that time some of the girls came to me and hugged me and cried saying that they were sorry for everything that they had against me. I was a little taken back because I did not realize that people would care that much about me. Although that seemed like a small act to do, it had big impact on me. After that day, I started to rethink how I viewed God.

I slowly started to trust God and I fully accepted him at Bishop the past summer. That summer was my first time going on a mission trip. At Bishop I was shocked at how many people have broken relationships with family and friends. I realized that despite their situation, I was no different than they are. I tried my best to do what I thought was helping them, like talking to them a lot, but one particular instance I knew God worked through me. It was during the praise night and the girl I was sitting next to was crying. At first I did not know what to do, but I felt that God was telling me to comfort her. It was the first time that I had prayed for someone. It amazed me, and after the trip I realized that God had always been there for me. Bishop showed me that God helps, just not in a way I expected him to. This whole experience made me see that by learning from my pain in the past I can move onto a better future life with God by my side.

JOSEPH LIM

Restoration

This past year was a year full of growth and blessings that far outweigh any given suffering I experienced. The biggest blessing of all is the restoration of my relationship with my mother. As much as I hate to admit, my relationship with my mother was not great.



Our conversations revolved mainly around my career building journey, consisting of academics, volunteering, and colleges I would be applying to. While I knew my parents showed such strong interest in my success out of their zeal to provide me with what is the best, I did not understand why our daily conversations had to be repetitively exclusive on the same matter with minimal changes (if any). Getting used to this dynamic, I ultimately felt so unnatural for me to talk about anything else. I have recognized the brokenness of the relationship, but as calloused as my heart was, I was completely unaware of the need for the relationship to be restored. It was not until years later that I saw the seriousness of this flaw.

As I was not able to attend school of my choice, I decided to transfer into a four-year institution after attending two years of community college. Though I was content with my decision at first, the newness soon wore off and I started to open my eyes to downsides of my decision. One of the most painful was the inevitable loneliness that arose from the age gap between church members and myself. Admittedly, I felt utterly alone. I constantly questioned myself. Do people even know me? Do people even know me apart from a guy who beats his guitar every Sunday? Why did I have to stay here? What was I thinking when I decided it was better to take the community college route rather than to apply to more schools that would readily accept me? Is all this loneliness worth it? I've always been told that God does nothing in vain, that He does everything for my good. Why did God put me through this experience? I contin-

ued to wrestle with this question that seemed to have no answer.

God, however, has answered this question through a very unexpected way: my conversation with my mother. It was a rare occasion when my mom and I had a nice and quiet conversation. While we were talking about my life, my mom told me, "I think God made you stay in the area for two more years to reconcile our relationship." As she spoke, I knew that was God speaking directly to me.

Although I have tried my best to love my mother, the years of carrying a hardened heart stood as an insurmountable obstacle. While I have forcibly tried to listen and smile to my mother, part of me resisted and felt repulsed by the shallowness of this routine conversation; I felt superior because I am (supposedly) less superficial and less consumed by this desire to achieve worldly success. The whole relationship dynamic felt rather unnatural and coerced. I knew this was not what a restored relationship would feel like. By the end of the summer, I was inevitably burnt out.

However, God was not hesitant to encourage me. A week before the start of this school year, I spontaneously decided to go on a trip to LA, where I stayed at Pastor Jeong Woo's place. During my stay in his place, I was able to have conversations about my life. The struggle in my relationship with my mother was inevitably one of the first topics that we talked about. "You know J.W. (what I call Pastor Jeong Woo), it just seems too hard." Pastor Jeong Woo, after listening to my struggle for

the past year, said, “I think that’s the main task God laid in front of you this year. Continue wrestling with her during the rest of your time at De Anza. It really is a golden opportunity you won’t have for a period of time.” Although I did not expect such conversation, it stuck with me throughout the trip, into the school year. Ultimately, it encouraged me to continue to struggle to restore my relationship with my mother in a much more profound level. By reminding me that I must still strive for restoration, I was able to reflect on myself and perceive that I will never be able to carry it out with my own strength. It made me realize that I really do need God every hour. As my heart changed, action followed bit by bit. I started to cherish His words and discipline myself to cling to them.

Today, I still continue to struggle with my mother. However, I can confidently say that my relationship with my mother has been restored. No pretentiousness exists in my conversation with my mother. I believe my relationship with my mother is exactly where it should be. Through this struggle over the past year, I’ve grown to trust in God; despite my unbreakable selfishness and total lack of ability to love others, He has been working in me. I no longer have fear of failure and of my flaws, because I know that, as Philippians 1:6 very clearly puts it, “he who began a good work in [me] will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

DAMON MOON

Everywhere Missions

My story of 2015 begins with a story from the summer of 2012, one of the hardest times of my life financially. I was finishing up grad school at UCLA with no income, a wife and 2 kids, and only had several hundred dollars to sustain us until September. Thankfully I had a job offer in the Bay Area, but we had 5 months to live until the first paycheck.



We minimized our expenses to the maximum and sold everything we can think of. We finally came to a point where we had to sell our car to pay the rent.

So, one Saturday afternoon we placed our ad on Craigslist. Then we had our church small group that evening, so selling our car for a good price was our prayer request. A couple of days later, a young couple came over to test drive the car. After the test drive, he asked me why I was selling the car. I told him that we really wanted to keep the car, but had to let it go to pay for the living expenses until September.

Several days later, the couple came over to our house to close the deal. As they finalized the document, the Russian husband asked us to join our hands together and pray. He blessed our family with prayers and left. It was strange and awkward moment, but in a very good way. At first, I wasn't sure if he was even a Christian, and I was a bit frightened too because I didn't know what might happen when I closed my eyes. This whole process was a memorable moment of my life in L.A., especially experiencing the prayers being answered soon after becoming a Christian.

Since then, I had a big question in my heart: "Will I ever be able to walk into someone's house whom I barely know and pray for them?" But recently, through our summer short term mission trip to Bishop, God started to give me confidence and the heart for interceding for someone whom we barely know.

Well this summer, we had to sell another car, and it led to a leap of faith. To explain, Joy and I decided to donate all the

money we got from the sale of the car to the two new missionaries in Africa and North Korea. It was probably the first time we gave purposefully to the missionaries. It was our way of saying, "Thank you," to the LORD for the smooth transition to a new city, church and workplace. It also made us become less anxious about how much we get from the sale. Also, I decided in my heart to pray for the buyer without knowing who that person was.

Three weeks after the ad was placed, I finally received a phone call from a young man from India. He came to the US about a week ago and started attending grad school. He told me that it was particularly difficult for him using public transportation to get to school, and he wanted a car that will work on a low budget. After this conversation, God gave me the heart to bring down the selling price way below my asking price. God reminded me how I struggled several years ago and had to give up my car to cover living expenses.

When I met him to finalize the title transfer, he brought his fiancée. After finishing up the final paperwork at their relative's house which was filled with Hindu ornaments, I carefully asked if I can pray for the couple, just as awkward and strange as how the Russian couple did three years ago. So Joy and I joined our hands together with the couple in a circle and prayed, blessing their life not only here in the Bay Area, but also for eternity with God. After the prayer, his fiancée told me that she is actually a 3rd generation Christian from India, planning to get married with her Muslim friend. This not only reminded me of the time in my life when I was separated from

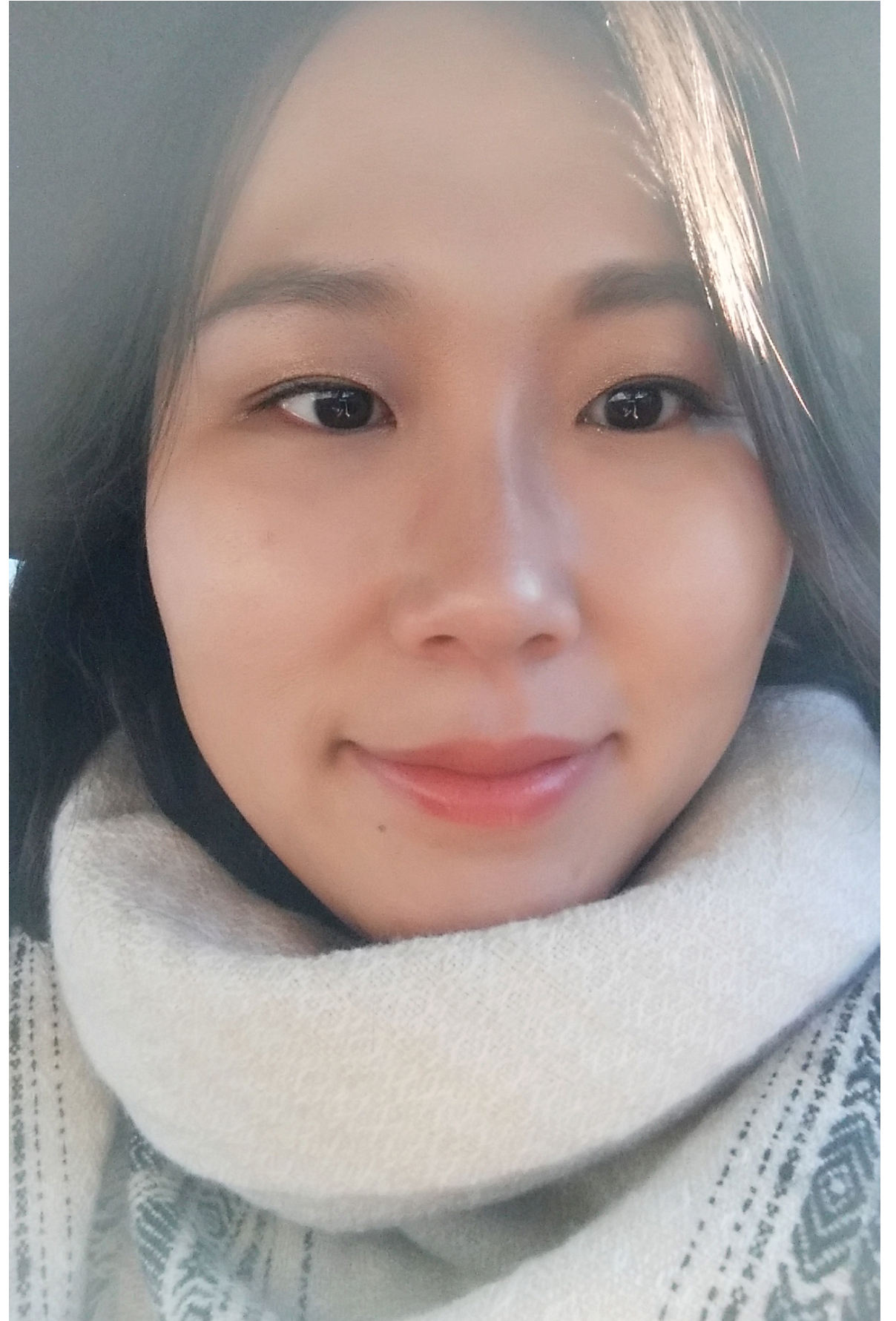
God and Joy brought me into God's family, but also how God had brought this couple to this moment through the car we were selling.

Tears just rolled off from our eyes as Joy and I left the house saying to the fiancée, "You are the missionary for your husband!" It was a moment of truth when I experienced that His Kingdom is being expanded, even through something as ordinary as selling a 17 year old car to someone I met for the first time. A couple of days later, I received a text message from him. "The car is great, you are our savior! I can not thank you more." "No, Jesus is your savior," I said to myself, looking at the text.

This experience reminded me that missional life is not just for the people in Africa, or in North Korea. It was not about becoming rich one day and finally being able to donate millions of dollars to feed starving children. Opportunity for a missional life is out there everyday and everywhere in every interaction we have with the people around us.

Blessings

My 2015 started pretty awful. I suffered from non-stop asthmatic coughing for couple months already and my condition dragged me down not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. Now thinking back this year, I know the Bishop mission trip over the summer has been the significant turning point in my 2015, probably in my life as well.



I am now completely recovered from all the downsides. God filled me with His strength spiritually, emotionally, even physically after the trip which could be very tiring. So I would like share my testimony about the Bishop mission trip, and pray God bless you through this.

The mission trip to Bishop was awesome. I had so much more fun than I expected. I asked my children, Jiho and Teo, “What was good about Bishop?” They both answered, “Playing with dogs.” Then I asked, “What was hard?” Jiho said, “Not scratching mosquito bites,” and Teo said, “Pulling the dogs.”

A week at Bishop with my kids was the best family trip God gave our family. But I wasn’t sure whether we should go, even weeks after the submitting the application. I had concerns such as, wouldn’t the kids bother the service teams? I also didn’t want to be seen as an angry, tired mom chasing after the kids. I was also worried about where we would be sleeping, whether I can take a shower every day, and even the bugs.

Then God encouraged me to think about “Jesus Centered Family” through my husband, Damon. I began to think just being there as a family will be a blessing. My lack of confidence started to change into hope and expectation. I want to share three things God made me realize at the week at Bishop.

1. God uses everyone, including little kids like Jiho and Teo. Jiho and Teo quickly became friends with the Paiute kids. A few days later, they were brothers and sisters in one big family. Fellow church members became uncles, aunts, grandma,

grandma, brothers, and sisters. God let us experience the “Jesus Centered Family.”

2. God invited me to taste the glory of how His Kingdom is expanding. He didn’t want me to simply “do something” at Bishop. I felt His steadfast love for the Paiute Indian families, despite the brokenness in the family and the hurt in their daily lives. He wanted me to become a witness of His works, by letting me experience the Gospel being planted and fostered at Bishop.

3. It is the same God that takes care of the Paiute kids, all the kids in this world, including my kids. I started to have more faith in God and overcome the anxiety I had raising up the kids in Silicon Valley. Because God loves my kids, more than I do. I started to have peace in my heart believing that it is He who will take care of my kids.

There are many good things that happened after I came back. One sister told me that she had been praying for me; another sister wanted to buy me coffee to listen to my stories at Bishop.

All we did was just being there as a family. But God gave us this time of grace, showing us the big family in Jesus Christ during our family trip. My husband and I still talk about the fun we had and the tears we shed at Bishop. Expecting His great works at Bishop, I am looking forward to going out there together as a family trip. I will pray many of our EM Church families can join together and taste all the blessings God prepares for us in 2016.

CHRIS PAK

Normal

My story isn't exactly a story that begins in 2015 but is a work in progress. My story actually starts February of 2013. As some of you may know, I was born with a chronic kidney disease called Alport Syndrome. It is an incurable disease that affects my kidneys, ears and eyes (mostly my kidneys). Everything was fine until that fateful February.



I was a year and a half out of college and was working at a biotech company. Every month or so, I would get routine blood tests done to see how my kidneys were doing. That February I went to Stanford to get the blood test done. On my way back home with my dad, I got a call from a doctor saying that I needed to come back right away and admit myself to the ER. They told me my potassium levels were dangerously elevated and that my kidneys were failing. This news completely blindsided me. For 24 years of my life, I knew my kidneys would fail eventually and I thought I would be ready if that day came. I wasn't. Tears started to stream down my face.

I started to ask God, "Why can't I have a 'normal' life? Why do I have to go through this?" I was then reminded of a quote from a book I read by Tullian Tchividjian. He said "There is nothing like suffering to remind us how not in control we actually are, how little power we ultimately have, and how much we ultimately need God.

All of my life, I had been using my own strength to push me through this disease. I'd suck it up and internalize all my sorrow and pain. I had to be strong for my parents. I had to make it seem I was "ok." All of that came crashing down that day in February. I realized how weak I was and how much I needed God. After being admitted to the ER, my potassium levels were brought back to acceptable levels and my kidneys were ok. The prayers and support I received from San Jose New Hope was immense. It was then I realized, I didn't have to walk alone in this difficult time. I didn't have to "suck it up." I

would have my brothers and sisters that God has placed in my life to walk with me.

Things still aren't "normal." I had to travel to multiple hospitals to get on their transplant lists. I had to undergo surgery to begin dialysis. I had to go through the pain of two donors not working out. I have to deal with the occasional pain that comes with dialysis, multiple injections, and blood draws. Even though I have to deal with all of this, God has been present in my life more than ever this past year. He shows Himself to me in the Scripture I read that comforts me in my times of suffering. He shows Himself to me through the brothers and sisters that pick me up and walk beside me even when I fall.

I end with a part of a hymn by Martin Luther called "From the Depths of Woe" (Psalm 130) that has helped me a lot this past year.

Though great our sins and sore our woes
His grace much more aboundeth;
His helping love no limit knows,
Our upmost need it soundeth.
Our Shepherd good and true is He,
Who will at last His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow

Beloved

Before I came to church I was not religious at all. I knew that God existed because my grandmother believes in Jesus. On the other hand, my father believed in another religion. Since I was in between two religions, I did not believe in anything. The reason why I started going to church was because of my grandmother. She wanted me to go to church to make new friends and believe in Jesus. I was not interested, but it was rude to ignore my grandmother's request, so I decided to go to church a few times and if I did not like it I would tell her that I will stop going.



This is how I came to church. After I attended church a few times I actually enjoyed it. Even though the sermon was boring, I came to church to hang out with friends, but eventually I stopped attending.

I started attending church again during my sophomore year of high school, so it has been more than a year since I went to church. Even a few months ago, I had no idea that I would get baptized this fast. First when I came to church, I did not want to come because in Korea I listened to the adult sermons and it was boring. I thought New Hope church will be boring too, but I figured out that there are different groups like KM, CM, Youth Group, and EM. After I realized that church was not as boring as I thought, I came to church looking forward to hang-out with friends and listen to Pastor Frank. Most of the time I really did not understand what he was saying. For example, Frank JDSN connects many things with our life and there are many things that I agree with, but when he starts connecting things with God that was the part that I did not understand. However, these days I have been listening to him very carefully. While listening to the sermon, I found many connections between God and actually understand what God is thinking about.

There was a moment that led to my decision to get baptized. Last month was one of the harshest months for me. I have been through a lot of struggles with schools, SAT and the biggest one was my family. My mom lives in Korea and I am the only one that lives in the States. Whenever I have a hard time at school, I tend to miss my mom a lot. Last month was really

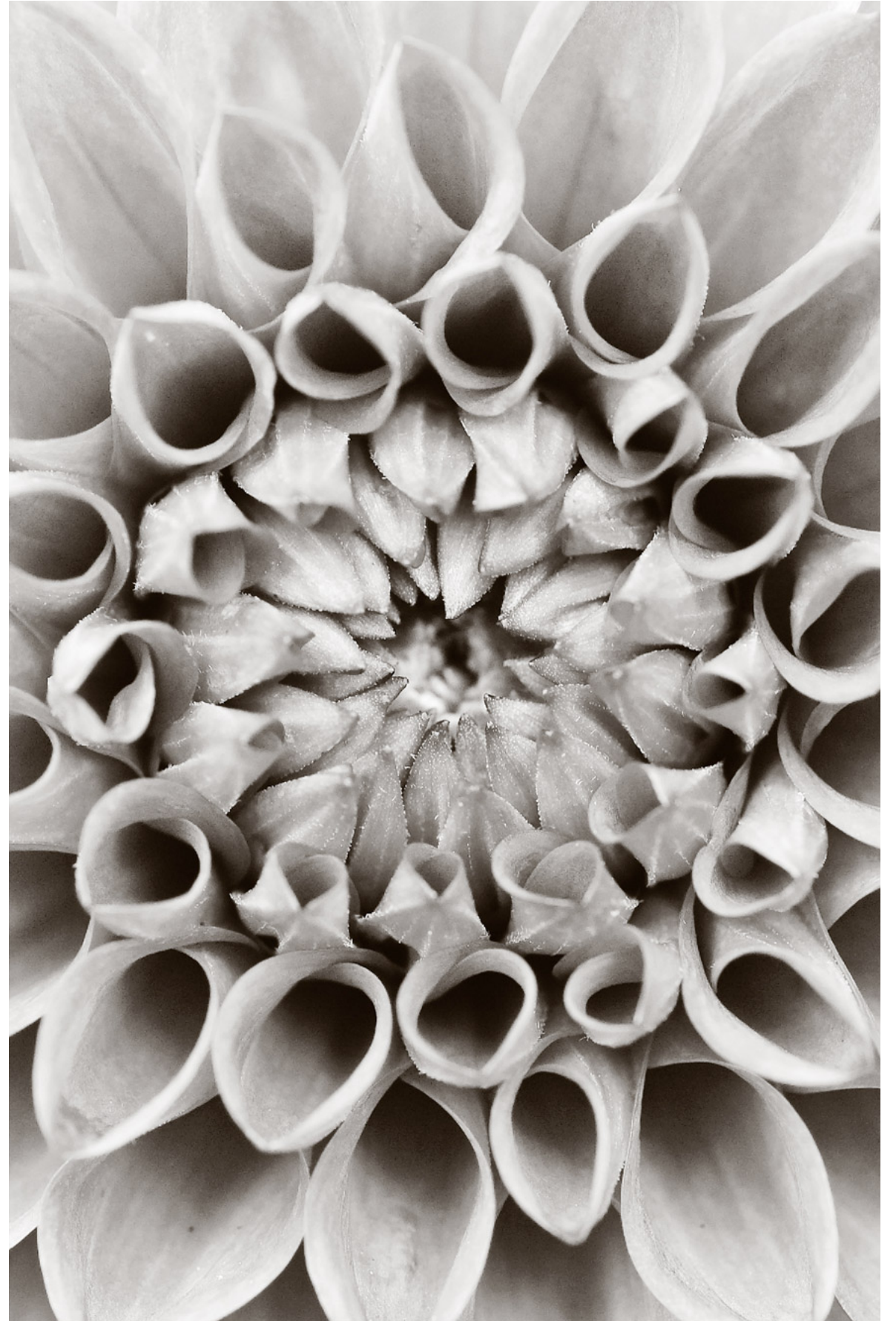
depressing for me. I did not want to do anything, and I started crying anytime when I heard something related to my family. I even cried at church a few times. It was after the sermon was over and we were in small group. While we were discussing about the sermon, our Sunday school leader Jin was sharing his story and Jin said, “Even though your parents might not say the right things to you, they say them because they care for you.” He also said, “Wherever you are, your family will always love you”. When Jin said that, it touched my heart because I miss my mom and whenever I call my mom I start crying. What Jin said gave me strength and energy to stop being down. After hearing what Jin said, I was tearing up and Jin saw me. After small group, Esther and Jin came up to me and gave me words of encouragement and prayed for me. It really gave me strength, and in that moment I believed that God is close to me. I felt like I truly believed in God.

Also I feel that God is helping and healing me through these struggles. I believe that God is giving me the power to persevere and I believe he is my savior. Now I feel much better and feel like God really did help and save me. I want to be baptized so that whenever I go through struggles, I will be reminded to rely on God and pray to him that he will help, heal, and be with me. There are so many different things that happened after I started coming to New Hope. I am so blessed that I met all these wonderful friends and people. More importantly I’m grateful in knowing Jesus.

JULIE SONG

Back To Him

It was not until this past summer that I began to really believe in God. Bishop 2015 was a life changing trip for me and has impacted me so much, that I have decided to be baptized. My main reason for this baptism is so that it is a reminder for me to never stray from Him. I know there will be countless times where I will turn away from God for whatever reason, but I want this to bring me back to Him, and be a constant reminder that His Spirit is always with me.



Before Bishop, I would say that I was a Christian, but I did not know completely what being a “Christian” meant. I would go to church every week, go to winter retreats, go on mission trips, but I did it because I felt obligated to. I did all those things to prove that I was a “good Christian”, not as a way of serving and worshipping God. After going to numerous church events, I would tell myself “you did a good job” after each one. And yes, I would feel as if God was with me, but after each event, I would go back to my regular life where God exists only when I am at church.

However, the past Bishop trip has changed my heart. God suddenly opened my eyes and my heart to really see and listen to the Paiute Indians’ brokenness. This trip truly blessed me and I fully put myself in God’s hands. My eyes were opened and I saw and felt the Paiute Indian’s needs and my heart broke for them. I cried and prayed for them, and served them wholeheartedly. However, I tried so hard to help them, but I was not satisfied with myself. I was feeling down and frustrated because I could not fix their problems. It was then I realized that I was frustrated because I tried to be Jesus. I did not depend on Him, but I tried to help them with my own will. After realizing that God is the one who is in control and that he has the power to heal, I began to pray more and I felt as if God was healing not only the Bishop kids, but myself also.

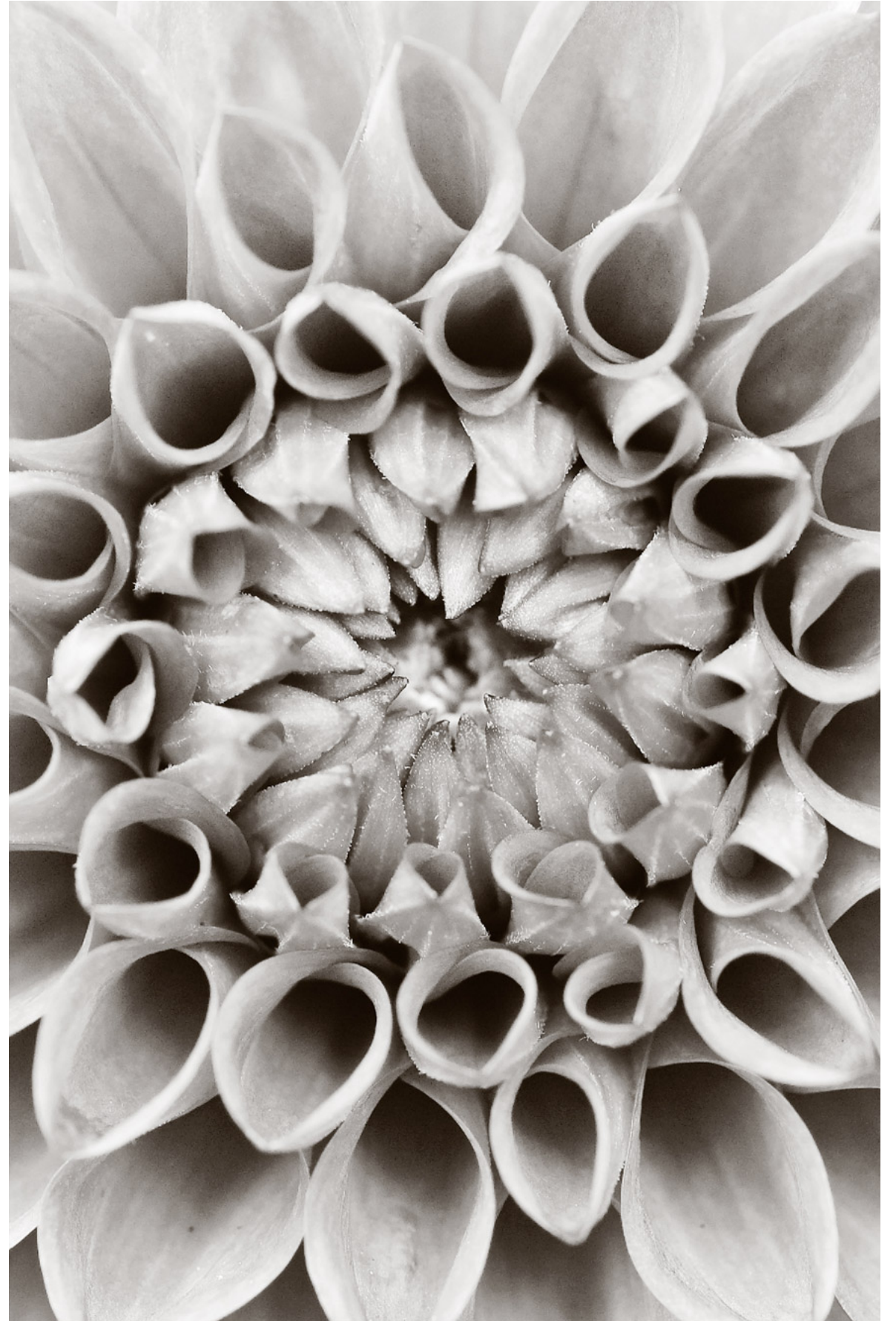
Getting baptized means that I fully put myself in God’s hands and is a reminder that everything I have is from Him. It will also remind me to always go back to Him whenever I fall away from Jesus. I know that even after being baptized, I will fall

into my earthly desires and that being a Christian is a long, rough journey, but I want to take part in creating God’s kingdom and constantly showing His love and grace through me. Thank you.

MICHELLE YOON

Transformed

To start with, who is God and what does He mean in my life? I would consider Him as my dad or a close friend, constantly revolving around me, nurturing me as I grew up and encouraging me in darker times. In addition, I would consider Him as my safety blanket. God has always been there for me, whether I thought I needed Him or not; for several years, I lost my safety blanket. I tried replacing it with other material things, but their presence was not comforting, unlike my blanket. Now, I have found my safety blanket, and I plan to stick with it until the very end.



My transformation started after Bishop. I felt a tug towards the man who does not live in the mirror, but lives in Heaven and is always proud of who I am, good or bad. To this day, I've claimed to be a Christian, and believed I was good enough to attend church and pray for the sick and the lost. However, this year, I discovered there's so much more than attending church, and closing our eyes and clasping our hands together; it's taking the first step of obedience with Jesus towards God to glorify Him. Previously, I believed that God had standards and guidelines on how to be a "good Christian." I strived to excel in each standard, but I found it difficult to be "perfect" in God's eyes; after accepting the truth, I felt fake and unworthy of being a Christian, because I have not done anything to become closer to God, and I could not live up to His standards. I saw others during retreats swell up with the Holy Spirit and I longed to experience God speaking to me. However, I did not hear or feel anything. I strained my ears, but nothing came, so I closed my ears to Heaven and complained about not feeling "heavenly." Although I was the one to give up in my relationship with God, He did not give up on me and never has.

Bishop changed things up, I thought I had to prepare myself to be a perfect Christian in order to truly love the Paiute Indians. Trying to save every Paiute Indian proved to be impossible; I've learned to give up that burden to Jesus, because He is the only one who can, and I am good in God's eyes, whether I'm a superhero or an ordinary girl. He does not expect us to undergo an immediate change, but understands our struggles and reaches out His hand to guide us. Romans continues to

comfort me whenever I feel fake or undeserving of Jesus. Romans 8:1-4 proclaims, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

NANCY VILAYSAK

I Love You

What I learned in 2015 is that God loves and pursues me like no man ever can.

I know, I know....what about Frank?
Well, you may all know me as “the youth pastor’s fiancé,” but before God brought us together I was a hot mess that God took 28 years to teach me what “true love” really meant.



When I was single, I wanted to meet my prince/godly man, but I am pretty blunt and straightforward. I hated going on dates because it felt like a game. People would tell me, when you go on dates don't be too intense. You don't want to scare them. What was wrong with me? It seemed like every time a boy would show interest in me and once I felt the same way, he would stop liking me. Girls would tell me boys like to chase, so don't be too eager. I didn't know how to play the dating game. God please sent me a good husband, I prayed. All I heard was silence.

Here I was, almost 30 and I never had a boyfriend. I thought I was doomed to die alone, a virgin, with 20 cats. Even my 17-year-old cousin had a boyfriend. So I decided to take matters into my own hands, but I got more discourage with each guy I dated. It seemed like the Christians guys I dated were worse than the non-Christians. So feeling defeated, I started to ask God to help me be content wherever He took me, even if it meant being single for the rest of my life.

I knew God loved me, but I still felt like He was punishing me by keeping me single because I had all these sins I didn't fix up yet. I thought maybe if I became holier I would be worthy to be someone's wife. Then in May 2014 God brought me back to the Bay Area and Frank pops up in my life and the rest is history.

What made Frank different from the other guys was that I felt God's love for me through Frank. God was telling me, "Nancy this is the man I have been molding up slowly for you. You did

not trust me, and you were impatient. You wanted to take matters into your own hands, but I made sure to protect your heart from those imposters. Yet despite your lack of faith and disobedience I brought you Frank, because I love you that much."

In "The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God" by D.A. Carlson, he paints a great illustration of God's love to us:

Picture Charles and Susan walking down a beach hand in hand at the end of the academic year...Charles turn to Susan, gazes deeply into her large, hazel eyes and says, "Susan, I love you. I really do."

What does he mean?...the least he means is something like this: "Susan, you mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your smile poleaxes me from fifty yards. Your sparkling good humor, your beautiful eyes, the scent of your hair—everything about you transfixes me. I love you!"

What he most certainly does NOT mean is something like this: "Susan, quite frankly you have such a bad case of halitosis it would embarrass a herd of unwashed, garlic-eating elephants. Your nose is so bulbous you belong in the cartoons. Your hair is so greasy it could lubricate an eighteen-wheeler. Your knees are so disjointed you make a camel look elegant...But I love you!"

So now God comes to us and says, "I love you." What does he mean?....

When he says he loves us, does not God rather mean something like the following? “Morally speaking, you are the people of the halitosis, the bulbous nose, the greasy hair, the disjointed knees, the abominable personality. Your sins have made you disgustingly ugly. But I love you anyways, not because you are attractive, but because it is my nature to love.” And in the case of the elect, God adds, “I have set my affections on you from before the foundations of the universe, not because you are wiser or better or stronger than others but because in grace I chose to love you. You are mine, and you will be transformed. Nothing in all creation can separate you from my love mediated through Jesus Christ” (Rom8).

This year I look at my single days in a different light. For 28 years God protected from a broken heart. I was an ungrateful brat with halitosis, greasy hair, disjointed knees, but He loved me just as I was. For 28 years I had the best Father, protector, and lover with me. No man can ever pursue me as much, protect me as much, and love me like my Heavenly Father. And He loves you that much too (morning breath and all).