



PRESERVED

Thirteen Times Death Came, and Thirteen Times God Said No:
A True Story of Survival, Lost Identity, Abuse, and Redemption

DR. ROBERT BESS

*“Thirteen times the enemy struck; thirteen times
God said, ‘Not today.’ In every shadow
of my childhood, in every crack of my brokenness,
His hand was quietly holding me.”*

- Dr. Robert Bess

USA Book Review

"Thirteen deaths denied, one purpose revealed."

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A True Story of Survival, Lost Identity, Abuse, and Redemption.*

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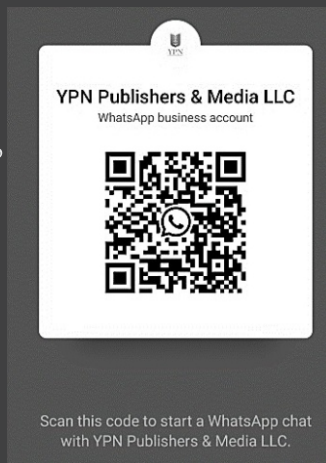
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DEDICATION

For my mother, who gave me life, who was my best friend in so many seasons, and yet the source of some of my deepest pain. We shared laughter, secrets, and survival, even while carrying wounds we did not know how to heal. You left this world before you could meet Sophia and Philip before you could see with your own eyes that the cycles were broken. But I believe you see it now.

For my children, Sophia and Philip, my living proof that the story did not end in the shadows. You are walking in a freedom and blessing no generation before you have known. I trust you will carry it well.

And for my Abba Father, who stepped in where earthly fathers failed, who fathered me when I felt fatherless, and who turned every scar into a testimony. This book is for every person who believes the chains are too strong. They are not. With Him, the cycle ends here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First, to my family, who carried me through seasons when I could not carry myself. To Mimi, whose prayers and steadfast love became my anchor; to Vicki, whose care and counsel reminded me I was never alone; and to Pam, who stood with me through storms and believed in my future even when I doubted it.

To my mom, whose life, and struggles, though often painful, taught me lessons that continue to shape the man I have become. Though she never lived to see my children or this book, her story remains woven into mine.

To those who have walked beside me in friendship and faith, I am deeply grateful. Dr. Sharelle Mendenhall, Dr. Christiane Mersch, Lee Johnson, and Dr. Howell Shall, your encouragement, wisdom, and unwavering support have been reminders of God's provision at just the right time.

I also honor those whose leadership and influence shaped my journey of faith and calling. Pastor Paul Marc Goulet, your teaching and example have been instrumental in my growth as both a leader and a son of God. To each of you, thank you for standing in the gap, for speaking the truth, and for helping me see God's hand at work when I could not see it myself.

Finally, to my children, Sophia, and Philip: you are my greatest inspiration and my greatest joy. You are living proof that the cycle is broken, and a new legacy has begun. This book, like my life, is for you.

FOREWORD

In “*PRESERVED*”, Dr. Rob Bess brings forth a powerful testament to resilience, faith, and the relentless pursuit of a Kingdom-driven life. As I’ve had the privilege of serving and working with Rob, I can confidently say that he embodies the very principles he writes about. He is a Kingdom-minded builder, forged by fire and steadfast in his commitment to not only dream but to bring those dreams to life. His story is a powerful and inspiring journey of survival and transformation, driven by a strong determination to break generational curses and to protect those who find themselves trapped in cycles of oppression.

Rob’s heart for others is matched only by his fierce entrepreneurial spirit. He views business as a tool for the Kingdom, a weapon for positive change, and his contributions to initiatives like TheRoarFest stand as a testament to his passion for community and mentorship. His leadership of all the volunteers was nothing short of value. To top that off, his kids were serving beside him throughout the whole event. This father’s example isn’t just breaking curses; he’s setting his family up for generational blessings for years to come!

What sets Rob apart is his relentless perseverance. He is a living example of what it means to rise from adversity, carrying the scars of his past while refusing to let them define his future. His ability to execute visionary ideas and inspire those around him is truly remarkable. Yet, he’s also a man who grapples with the tension of being both a lion and a lamb, a fierce warrior for justice and a compassionate nurturer who seeks God’s timing amidst his ambitious

pursuits.

As you delve into “*PRESERVED*”, you will find more than just a book; you will discover a roadmap for overcoming life's challenges and harnessing your potential for impactful change. Rob's insights are not only thought-provoking but are also deeply rooted in his lived experience, his journey from breakdown to purpose serves as an inspiration to me personally and to everyone he encounters. His vulnerability and authenticity allow us all to confidently grab ahold of the full destiny God has over our lives no matter our history!

I wholeheartedly endorse this book, not just because of Rob's incredible achievements, but because he is one of the most amazing people I have ever met. His heart, drive, and dedication to leaving a lasting legacy are qualities that shine through every page. Prepare to be challenged, inspired, moved, and equipped to embark on your own journey of transformation ordained by God.

Dr. Sharelle Mendenhall (Mrs.)
United States
2024

PROLOGUE

Breaking psychos?

Sophia looked at me with that puzzled, head-tilted expression kids get when they think adults are saying something strange or when they simply cannot wrap their heads around it.

I had just finished telling her how proud I was of myself for breaking cycles; the generational curses of abuse, addiction, violence, and rejection that had haunted my family for decades. I said it almost as a declaration, half to her and half to myself, “Daddy’s proud because I’ve worked hard to break cycles, sweetheart.”

She raised an eyebrow, studying me for a second like only an eleven-year-old can, and then said matter-of-factly, “Breaking psychos?” I laughed so hard I nearly cried. But as I caught my breath, I realized how prophetic her words were.

Because yes, I am breaking psychos. The “psychos” in my bloodline, the “psychos” in the spiritual realm, the invisible patterns of pain and destruction passed down for generations. Sophia didn’t know it, but she had just summed up decades of deliverance in two words and was unaware of the struggle to break an evil cycle, destroy and rewrite an ancient legacy. She and her brother, Philip, are living proof of the victory I had reached and the walking evidence that my story didn’t end with me; it began again through them.

A while back, someone asked Philip what he loved most about his dad. He could have said, “He takes me fishing,” or “He plays video games

with me.” But instead, without hesitation or thinking twice, he answered, “I love that my daddy works for Jesus.”

That stopped me in my tracks. I stood there, stunned, trying to absorb the depth of that simple confession. I never would have expected him to give such a reply to that question. I felt a wave of satisfaction sweep over me. For a man who grew up in a harsh environment, beaten, rejected, and told he'd never amount to anything in life, hearing that one sentence from my son meant everything. It wasn't just a kind word tossed in the wind; it was the loudest evidence I had ever heard that the cycle was broken. It was an undeniable validation that those after me would not experience the same hardship I endured.

For so many years, I carried the weight of silence and shame, thinking that was all life had to offer. I had constantly fought against the tide to keep my feet rooted, but at that moment, I realized that something far greater, which surpassed my understanding and wildest dreams, had been at work all along. While I thought it was over, God had been weaving hope into places I thought were only ruins, and planting seeds of promise where I once believed nothing could grow.

Even at her early age, Sophia prays for people when she sees they are hurting. She believes with all her heart that God is a loving Father who hears and heals. Philip looks at his father and does not see just a businessperson or a provider; instead, he sees a man on mission for Jesus. He sees a man actively doing the work of the Kingdom with so much zeal and passion. To a boy who once doubted his worth, those words and actions are living proof that the chain of rejection has been broken, ushering in a season of liberty. My greatest joy is in knowing that the children I have been blessed with are not walking in the shadows of my past but are walking in the light of a faith that kept me alive when everything else tried to destroy me. There is no greater victory than watching them grow free from the pain I once carried,

thereby becoming living proof that love can rewrite bloodlines. That is the real story of preservation, God turning wounds into witness and brokenness into a legacy of hope.

And I need you to understand something. I'm not that man because I had a good earthly father. I'm that man because I finally met my real Father. The One who never left, never changed His mind about me, and was never tired of waiting. For a long while, I carried an empty ache inside me, bleeding and convinced that I had no one to lean on, no one to steady me, no guide, and no one to call me their own. I also thought that I was not worthy to be cared for, as that was the narrative my daily experiences taught me. Every bruise and cruel word made me believe that I was unloved and unworthy of love. The wounds of abuse and neglect followed me everywhere, even when I hadn't asked for them and never wanted them. I believed the lie that I was left to navigate this world and find my place on my own. But I wasn't. Even in the silence of my darkest nights, He was there, watching, waiting for me to turn and see Him. And when I finally did, I found not judgment but embrace, not condemnation but belonging.

Psalm 68:5 declares that God is *“a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, in His holy dwelling.”* That verse became more than words on a page; it became the truth I could lean on when my past screamed otherwise. It became a reassurance that I have a Father who steps in when earthly fathers fail in their responsibility. Romans 8:15 reminds us that we are adopted into His family and we can cry out, *“Abba, Father.”* Those words reshaped my entire identity. I wasn't abandoned. I wasn't disposable. I was chosen, claimed, and loved by the One who has never failed me. Even when my past tried to drown that truth, His voice reminded me that I was wanted, I was seen, and I was known. My story is not about the absence of an earthly father but about the presence of a heavenly one who refused to let my pain have the final say. My journey is not about the harsh realities I endured but the

saving grace of a God who never turns His back on a lost soul.

It took some time for me to understand the new life that my heavenly Father was inviting me to. I could not bring myself to believe it was real. It was the exact opposite of everything I had gone through, and it seemed too good to be true. How could love be so gentle when all I had known was pain? How could a Father be so patient when all I had experienced was violence, hatred, pain, and rejection? I wandered through life for years, feeling empty, drained, and carrying the heavy weight of being fatherless. That certainly meant I had no anchor or a place where I truly belonged. But then, in the middle of that brokenness and disorder, the Word of God through the Holy Spirit walked me through everything I thought I knew.

I carried my wounds and pains as though they defined me, convinced that without them I would be incomplete, and believing I had to survive and strive on my own. “Abba, Father,” taught me how to answer when the longings in my chest begged for a name. Slowly and painfully, I learned I was chosen and kept. So, yes, Sophia, you’re right. I am breaking psychos. Not by my own strength, but by a supernatural enabling. I am breaking the cycle of hardship and setting a new pace because Abba Father stepped in where earthly fathers failed. He rewrote my story and now, where shame once held sway, His love now guides my home and the same hands that once trembled in fear now hold you and your brother in peace. Because of Him, the chain of rejection ends with me and begins again, healed, and whole, with you. My children did not inherit my fear; they inherited a faith that kept me alive when everything else tried to swallow me. They inherited companionship instead of silence, laughter instead of rage, joy instead of sadness, and love instead of fear. That is the work God has done in me, and that is the promise I pass on.

EPIGRAPH

*“I was a boy lost in the cries of rejection, bruised by hands that should have held me, and haunted by a world that did not see me. Yet through every wound, every shattered piece of who I was, God said no to the enemy and spoke plainly, you will live. You are preserved.” - **Dr. Rob Bess***

THE PRESERVE TRILOGY

Vol. 1

Preserved

*Thirteen Times the Enemy Tried. Thirteen Times God Said No.
“I lived through it; I’m still learning why.”*

Vol. 2

Perseverance

*From Brokenness to Breakthrough: A True Story of Healing, Faith,
and Finding Freedom After Trauma.
“This is where the real work begins.”*

Vol. 3

Purpose

*From Pain to Purpose: How God Turned My Story of Survival into a
Life of Meaning, Ministry, and Miracles.
“Now I walk beside others as they find their way.”*

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*“Thirteen times the enemy tried.
Thirteen times God said no.”*

- Dr. Robert Bess

INTRODUCTION

The King's Kid

Have you ever wondered why it seems like some children always make it out of the fire when everything around them says they shouldn't? Why does one life survive the blows of rejection, abuse, and neglect, while another is crushed under the same weight or sometimes even a lesser one? I have asked myself that question more times than I can count. And the only answer I keep arriving at, and the one I give you, is God.

The testimony you're about to read is not just my story. It is not a collection of the difficulties I faced while growing up; rather, it is God's story written on the broken pages of my life. If you listen closely between the lines, you will hear His voice redeeming where there was despair. It is an account of how He preserved and rescued my soul when the enemy tried to erase me thirteen times. Thirteen near-deaths, thirteen moments where darkness thought it had the final word. Every scar I bear has a voice, every failure I encountered has a memory, and every moment of despair I lived through is a lesson that points back to the hand of a Father who refused to let go. Even when I ran, He pursued. Even when I hid, He found me. And when I finally fell to my knees, He lifted me higher than I had ever stood before. This book is the beginning of that journey, raw and painful, but soaked in redemption.

What you will read in these pages is Volume I of my life, covering the years from birth through age twenty-four. It begins in the shadows of

childhood trauma and progresses into the flicker of hope I found in faith, eventually leading me to earn a bachelor's degree in Virtual Reality from Phoenix, Arizona. Volume II will follow the stretch of years from twenty-four to forty, telling of business ventures, trials, and the relentless pursuit of purpose in the middle of it all. While Volume III will carry you into life beyond forty, into marriage, fatherhood, and the ongoing lessons that only God could write into the script of my days. By then, I hope you'll not just know my story, but you'll see your own reflection in its grace, courage, and continual process of becoming who you truly are.

Without a doubt, I understand perfectly well what it feels like to keep secrets that burn in your chest. I know what it is to pretend you are fine when you are crumbling and struggling to live on the inside. It is the art of smiling with your mouth while your eyes betray you. If you have ever hidden your hurt behind a smile, you will understand what I am talking about. If you have ever kept silent out of fear when you were supposed to scream for help, that means you can relate to my story. It is easier to stay quiet than to risk being judged or pitied. For me, the silence was a shield. I thought it was protecting me and helping me avoid unnecessary troubles, but in reality, it was suffocating. Silence does not only mute pain; it feeds it until it grows roots in your soul. Every year that passed without telling my story added another stone to the weight I was dragging behind me.

Then something shifted, there was a change. A couple of years ago, I realized my story was not just a collection of painful chapters; it was also a testimony of survival. It was not just about what had happened to me; it was about what had not destroyed me. It was a blueprint of freedom for those who were also stuck in a cycle similar to mine. The same experiences that almost destroyed me could become a source of healing for others who had walked through the same fire. The same flames that once tried to consume me could now light a path for

someone else's deliverance. It could be the answer to someone's prayer; it could be the light to the one in darkness and a lifeline to the one who is thinking of ending it all.

That revelation unlocked me. It gave me a reason to share my experiences, hoping to inspire someone out there. I have realized that testimony is not just an oration but a bridge. And every time I speak, I can feel heaven crossing over to reach someone ready to give up. What once felt like a curse, God began to use as a vessel of hope. So, while this book may uncover darkness, it will not leave you there. It will expose you to the devices of the enemy in trying to cut the life of a young boy short, but you will also learn of God's unending grace. You will walk with me through my struggles, but you will not remain there. Together, we will trace the fingerprints of mercy on the very circumstances that once trapped me. What you are about to read is proof that pain can be redeemed, wounds can become witnesses, and brokenness can birth healing for others.

To see me now and hear my story is to witness how a child who was once broken by life became a king in the Kingdom of the Most High, not by title, lineage, or inheritance, but because I am a King's kid, raised, crowned, and called by God Himself. Thirteen times the enemy came for me. Thirteen times God said no. Every attempt failed. Every breath I take is proof that hell's plans cannot come to fruition. And because God's hand preserved me, I will fulfill the mandate He placed on my life from the beginning. This is not just my redemption story; it is my commission. My life is the living evidence that what was meant to destroy can become the very thing that delivers.

What I never understood for most of my years is that I was never truly fatherless. I carried that word around like it was my life sentence, convinced it defined everything about me. I wore it quietly, like some hidden tag saying I wasn't enough, without seeing how it was just a big lie that had twisted how I viewed myself and everything else. I didn't

have a life outside the mindset of being all alone, and so as I moved from one phase to another, I felt the need to be there for people and not for myself. I tried to fill others in hopes that I might finally feel full. This is not far-fetched; it was as a result of constant disappointment, as those who I looked up to and longed for their presence never showed up. Because of these experiences, I went about carrying the weight of abandonment and the scars of abuse as if they defined me.

But the truth was different. Psalm 68:5 calls Him “*a father to the fatherless.*” Romans 8:15 says we have been adopted into His family, crying out “Abba, Father.” These are not empty words meant to offer a temporary feeling of peace. They are the foundation of my survival, and without them, I would not be standing strong, having the courage to share my story. Every word of those scriptures became a lifeline, holding me steady when the waves of memory tried to pull me under. I did not see it then, but I can see it now with clarity that even when the world turned its back, He never once left me.

Looking back, I can trace His fingerprints through every season I thought was void of love. They were there, although faint but steadily pressed into the details of my survival. They were there in the faces of strangers who showed kindness. They were there in the unexpected moments when strength rose up uninvited. In the nights filled with fear, He was there. In the mornings when shame felt heavier than my body could carry, He was there. In the times when I gave in to failure and didn't have the strength to move on, He was there. My story is not simply about pain; it is about presence. Not the presence of an earthly father who failed, but the presence of a heavenly Father who never fails. That is why I stand here today, not as a victim of my past, but as proof of His faithfulness. I am living evidence that what was broken can still be beloved, and that no story is too imperfect for grace to finish.

Victory: Pain Turned into Purpose

Every story I share, every life I touch, and every person I inspire whether old or young, stands as proof that nothing is wasted in God's economy. Even the moments I once despised, the tears I once thought were useless, have become the things that led me to my purpose. Every encounter, every word, every chapter of my past, painful or peaceful, has been repurposed by grace. It shows that God has a reason for preserving me through perilous times, He had an expected end; and that is why He permitted all that happened and needed me to learn certain lessons so I could become a source of hope to others.

My scars are not decorations of shame; they are maps, pointing the way for others who are still lost in the dark. Each mark tells a story, not of defeat, but of discovery, of a soul that learned to walk again after being buried under rubble. They serve as blueprints for those who are still struggling to find their way out of the rubble. To the broken, they say, "You can make it." To the weary, they say, "There's light ahead." Where I once saw only curses, abandonment, abuse, and shame, I now see testimonies of redemption. The unpleasant things that once made me hide have now become the reasons I speak. That is the heart of my call, to walk others home, to take broken hearts by the hand and lead them to the One who turns ashes into beauty and brokenness into brilliance.

I have stood on stages and in small rooms, met with people one-on-one and in groups, and I have watched eyes brim with tears as people hear how a little boy, who was beaten, raped, abandoned, and had his innocence stolen from him, could rise to declare victory through Christ. Every time I speak those truths aloud; I can feel heaven move through the broken parts of my testimony. I remember that survival is not the end of the story, but redemption is. Those moments are not speeches or words meant to motivate. They are altars. Every time

someone whispers, “That’s me,” or cries out, “I felt that same pain,” I know heaven is at work. I know that I am doing the work for which my Father preserved me. In that space, my wounds stop being just mine. They become windows where God’s light shines through, reaching souls who thought they were too shattered to be saved. It’s not fame I seek, but fruit in the form of transformed lives, and of captives set free.

This is the main reason I tell my story; it is why I have refused to keep quiet anymore. Silence once felt safe, but there comes a point when your healing demands a voice, when you realize that what you once despised can now serve as your sermon. It is not so I can be pitied or for applause, but because testimony is the weapon God uses to break chains and open the eyes of those who might still be blindfolded. Your story, when surrendered to God, becomes an instrument of freedom. It slices through deception and shame, revealing that no pit is too deep for His arm to reach. The enemy tried to silence me thirteen different times, using terrible occurrences, but God preserved me for this very purpose. What was once my deepest sorrow has become my greatest offering. And every time another life is lifted from despair, I am reminded that victory is not just about surviving the past. It is about redeeming the pain and turning it into a legacy that will outlive us all. □

Outside the sanctuary walls, I coach entrepreneurs and business leaders, many of whom carry hidden scars of their own while pretending to be fine and without any struggles. But pain does not disappear when you put on a suit or sign a contract; it simply hides beneath titles, paychecks, and long hours. And it patiently waits, seeking for the perfect time to burst out in the form of anger or addiction. I make it a point of duty to have one-on-one sessions where we strip away the polished image and get to the truth, leaving nothing hidden. During those sessions, we gently peel back the layers of fear, doubt, and identity struggles, and in that raw space we replace lies with truth. We trade performance for presence, control for clarity, and

slowly, light starts to seep through the gaps. And so, what starts as business coaching often turns into soul work, because the battles of the heart always spill into the boardroom.

I have had clients look me in the eye and say, “Your resilience is contagious.” They do not say that because of numbers on a balance sheet, but because they recognize the story behind my journey. They sense the grit beneath the grace, and the struggle beneath the success. They understand how it takes a lot of effort, determination, and divine intervention to rise from zero to hero. What they see now is only the fruit of years of labor, not just physical, but spiritual labor that refused to quit. They see how survival tactics, mowing yards at ten, selling firewood at twelve, and hustling to keep food on the table all came together to form the foundation for real businesses. What once kept me alive in childhood has now become a tool to build sustainable companies that support families, fund ministries, reach the lost, and break cycles of poverty.

The beautiful and redemptive part of my story is knowing that the same hands that once carried shame now carry strategies that empower others. The same boy who was told he would never amount to anything now equips men and women to lead with purpose, profit, and faith. What once sounded like an insult has become a prophecy reversed, a living contradiction of every dark word spoken over me. The same boy who was once told to end his life now offers hope to the hopeless and a helping hand to the weak. Even outside the church, I am not just coaching; I am continuing the mission. Every client who breaks free from fear, every leader who discovers their true identity, is another testimony that God wastes nothing, not even the painful beginnings of a broken son.

Mentorship is where the rubber meets the road. It is a practical, hands-on stage of learning, where knowledge, guidance, and experience turn into real growth and transformation. It is discipleship in its truest

form, not bound by pulpits or pews, but alive in everyday conversations and courageous steps forward. It is not theory or lofty words but walking shoulder to shoulder with broken people who are finding their way back to life. Every now and then, I walk alongside young men whose fathers walked out before they could say their first word, women who are clawing their way out of the grip of trafficking, and couples trying to stitch trust back together after betrayal has torn it apart.

In every relationship, the mantra doesn't change. It is the saying that "your past doesn't define you; your choices do." And when those choices move toward healing, we celebrate. We celebrate loudly, with laughter and sometimes with tears, because every little victory is a miracle in disguise. We celebrate the first shaky steps after trauma, the first sale after months of despair, and the first tear shed in the safety of the real community. Those moments matter. They are proof that scars can become steppingstones, and validation that restoration is possible.

This is why I say pain turned into purpose is not a slogan. It is a living reality I witness every day. When I see the spark return to someone's eyes, when laughter seeps through years of silence, when a man or woman stands taller because they finally believe they matter, when faith stirs up again in someone who had been angry at God, I know that redemption is not abstract. It is not confined to scripture; it is scripture come alive in flesh and blood. It is happening in real time, right in front of me. My story may be the starting point, but the ripple effect reaches into the lives of countless others who are desperate for hope, both those I know and those across the shores.

So, let me set the tone for this book right here. I am brutally honest to a fault. You will read things that may seem too hard to believe and make you shake your head and wonder how anyone could survive. And maybe that's good. Maybe disbelief is the right reaction, because what you are about to read isn't supposed to make sense apart from grace.

The truth is no one could survive on their own. I did not survive because of strength or willpower; I survived because God refused to let me go. Even when I was pushing Him away, He refused to release His grip on me when I tried to pull off His hand. He kept holding on to me. And not only did He keep me alive, but He also transformed my survival into thriving, turning what the enemy meant for destruction into a testimony that now serves as a source of light for others. That is the heart of PRESERVED.

More than that, I survived because He didn't just save me; He fathered me. He didn't only rescue my body from death; He reparented my soul. He filled the void and quenched the longing for the love of a father that consumed me. Galatians 4:6 says, *"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"* I didn't understand that as a boy, but this book is proof of what happens when the Father steps in where earthly fathers fail.

If you're familiar with the ACEs test for childhood trauma, I hit 8 or 9 out of 10. That score is supposed to spell doom as it predicts addiction, broken relationships, depression, disease, incarceration, and an early grave. But God rewrote my prognosis. In the world of child psychology, that's considered nearly impossible to recover from. Yet, I am standing here as living evidence that the same God who raised Lazarus from the dead specializes in impossible odds. So, let me remind you: nothing is impossible with our God. If you're reading this wondering whether your story can still be redeemed, this book is your answer: yes, it can.

Why am I telling this story now?

This question has lingered in my mind for years, refusing to go away. Honestly, I never planned to share it, but the more I carried it, the

more I realized it needed to be told. I thought the details of my childhood would remain buried, tucked away where no one could ever reach. However, a moment came that changed everything. And that changed the course of my life. One of my pastors, Paul Marc Goulet, a man who carried both the wisdom of scholarship and the heart of a pastor, asked us to do something so raw it felt impossible. He told us to share a story of childhood trauma with the eight people at our table and then ask the Holy Spirit to redefine it.

I sat there torn and scared. Maybe you know the feeling when your heart races and your throat tightens because you are about to speak a truth you've kept hidden for far too long. For most of my life, I had worn silence like jewelry, believing it was safer to keep my hurt hidden than letting people know the depth of my pain. Yet something inside me nudged, telling me this was the time to let go of the burden I had silently carried all my life. I contemplated on what story to tell them as I had so many. I didn't choose the most horrendous nor the least impactful. I found one in the middle. So, I opened my mouth, and for the first time in that setting, I told my story. By the time I finished, I looked around and saw eyes wet with tears. There wasn't a dry eye at the table. And in that room, surrounded by peers and strangers, I realized that vulnerability has the power to unlock healing not just for the teller but for the hearers too.

Then came the part I could never have scripted, the one I never saw coming. As we asked the Holy Spirit to redefine our trauma, the Holy Spirit cut through the noise of my own shame and spoke one word to me with a force I could not deny: victorious. He didn't call me broken, abandoned or worthless. He said I was victorious. That one word reshaped everything I thought I knew about myself. It was as if God Himself was declaring over me, *"This is who you are. This is how your story will be told."* And that is why I am writing this book now. Because if God can take the ashes of my childhood and rename them victory,

then He can do the same for anyone who dares to bring their wounds into His presence.

When the exercise ended, something unexpected happened. A few classmates, people I had sat beside for months, maybe years, without ever going deep, came up to me quietly. Their faces said more than their words. They told me, “I never would have guessed you’d been through all that. But your story touched me. It healed me. You need to write a book.” It wasn’t just one voice; it was three. Different people, yet the same message. That repetition was no accident. I knew it was confirmation. I knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking through them.

In that moment, I realized how easy it is to underestimate the power of our scars. We think survival is private, but in God’s hands, it becomes testimony others desperately need. My classmates were not reacting to polished words or a perfect delivery; instead, they were responding to the raw presence of God in a story He had redeemed. It was the kind of response that tells you: “You’ve just walked into your assignment.” Their tears and their encouragement became a mirror reflecting back to me what I had long ignored. It dawned on me that my story was not just mine to hold; it was mine to share.

That day something shifted in me. The assignment was not just about revisiting the past; it was a divine invitation to step into purpose. I saw clearly that what I had once called trauma, God now called testimony. What had once chained me in silence was now meant to be declared so others could find their freedom and peace.

So, here I am, writing. Not to rehearse the pain, or to gather pity, but to extend hope. To help you see that healing and restoration are not just possible; they’re promised when you let God rewrite the chapters of your life. This book is my offering, my way of saying, “chains can break, wounds can mend, and what the enemy meant for evil, God can turn into victory”.

If you've ever been abused mentally, physically, financially, emotionally, spiritually, or sexually, this book is for you. If you've ever experienced deep loss, this book is for you. If you've ever questioned your worth, this book is for you.

You may see yourself in my story not because we share the same exact wounds, but because we share the same pain. Finally, I want you to remember that I am not telling this story from a place of brokenness. I am telling it from a place of victory.

You can overcome this! You can break the chains that have kept you down and made you feel ashamed or afraid! You are the key to ending the cycle! This is not just my story; it's an invitation to rise, to heal, to soar and to declare that it ends here, with you.

It ends with you! Praise God!

*“When God preserves your life,
He’s preparing your legacy.”*

- Dr. Robert Bess

Chapter
ONE

Dr. Robert Bess

Fragmented Beginnings

Before I could make sense of life, God, family, or even myself, I was thrown into chaos. My childhood was not filled with the laughter of carefree days or the simple joy of learning and growing. Instead, it was marked by instability and confusion, by trauma that left scars too heavy for a child to bear, and by violence that stole any sense of safety. I did not grow up in the warmth of a home; I grew up in the storm of survival. What you are about to read is not just a collection of memories but the unraveling of a boy before he ever had the chance to truly be one. These fragmented beginnings influenced everything that followed.

1.1. A Family Torn Apart

Most of what I know about my early childhood, especially before I turned six, comes from stories I was told. My mom and dad's relationship were turbulent from the beginning. She once admitted to me that she married my father, Bob Bess, not out of love but to spite her parents, Phillip, and Marion, because they had forbidden her from being with the man she truly loved. That choice, born out of rebellion, seemed to set the tone for many of her later decisions. Looking back, it seems many of her choices came more from emotion and defiance than by stability or wisdom.

I knew very little about my father in those early days. From the stories I heard, he was wild. He was a motorcycle rider, and maybe a drinker. Eventually, Mom became pregnant with my older brother, Doug, and marriage was forced. Even before I was born, the relationship was already falling apart. My Aunt Pam once told me that she and her husband had offered to adopt Doug when he was only a year old, an early sign of just how fragile things really were at home.

By the time I was born, the turmoil had only gotten worse. I grew up hearing that my dad cheated, and the story that stuck the most was about him and our fifteen-year-old babysitter, Kathy. The way it was told, when Mom found out, she lost control and drove her car into Kathy's house. I cannot say for certain if that story is true, but it stayed with me all the same.

When the marriage finally collapsed, I was three and Doug was six. Kathy was only nine years older than Doug, and years later he admitted that he had a crush on her at the time. Maybe that crush made it easier for him to choose to live with Dad. Mom, on the other hand, insisted I stay with her. She said I was too young to leave. Looking back, I don't think either of them stopped to consider the selfishness of splitting us apart or what it might do to us. The effects lasted for a long time. To this day, I still feel a deep longing for the closeness of a true blood brother.

As we grew older, both my father and Doug began treating me like an outsider. Doug would tell me straight out that I wasn't really his brother, that I was just the product of an affair. Hearing that as a child, especially from my own brother, left me feeling abandoned, believing I didn't belong anywhere and that I was living under a shadow of lies cast by one or both of my parents.

I didn't hear those words from my father until after my mother had passed and could no longer defend herself. Still, the doubts lingered. Strangely, when people saw my dad and me together, they often remarked how much we looked alike, as if we were twins. Doug, on the other hand, didn't resemble either of us, which only added to the confusion and left me questioning what was true and what wasn't.

Between the ages of six and sixteen, I remember seeing my dad and Doug only about four times. Maybe there were more, but those are the ones that stand out. What I did hear often came from my grandparents and my mom, who spoke of how abusive my father had been. Their stories painted him violent, describing incidents like broken fingers and punches to the stomach, even while my mom was pregnant. When I was eight, she had her spleen removed after doctors said it had swollen to the size of a basketball from repeated trauma.

Doug later told me that as a teenager, he and my dad would sometimes settle arguments with fistfights right out in the yard. Violence seemed to run through the family line. It didn't stop with my dad. My grandfather, Robert Bess II, also had a reputation for being abusive. I never saw him hit my dad, but it would not have surprised me if that was where the pattern began.

At some point during the divorce proceedings, a judge supposedly ordered my dad to join the Marines. Whether it was mandatory or strongly suggested, I never really knew. My dad always told the story with a heavy bitterness, insisting it was not his choice.

What I do know for certain is that he refused to pay the sixty-four dollars and fifty cents a month in child support, leaving my mom

and her parents to carry the weight. My grandfather, Philip, even stepped out of retirement to help provide for us. But out of that struggle, he ended up creating something that gained national attention. He founded an organization called S.A.I.D. (Sentencing Alternatives in DeKalb), which built a framework for modern child support enforcement. His approach was simple and direct. He made irresponsible fathers work hard at humiliating jobs, like cleaning garbage trucks and dumpsters, until they paid what they owed. The model worked so well that other cities and counties invited him to help them establish similar programs.

After my parents split up, my mom and I lived with my grandparents, Marion, and Philip, or as I called them, Mimi, and Papa. Their home became my safe place. It was filled with love, peace, gospel music, and prayer. My grandmother sang constantly, whether in the choir or around the house. My grandfather, on the other hand, led Bible studies with the same steady, unshakable voice he carried in everyday life. Their home was the complete opposite of the chaos I experienced in nearly every relationship my mom entered.



1.2. Early Childhood Nightmares

The darkest chapter of my early life began when I was about three and a half years old. That was when my mom remarried a man named Jim. He was a country boy from Winchester, Tennessee, serving in the United States Air Force when they met. My first impressions of him are unsettling, brutal, and terrifying.

One of the clearest flashbacks I have of him is tied to drinking beer. I must have been no older than four when I asked him what it tasted like. Any other adult would have brushed it off with a laugh or a simple answer. Not Jim. Instead of giving me a simple answer, the

way any adult should, he locked me in a closet with a six-pack and told me I could not come out until I finished it all. At that age, I did not understand what it meant to be drunk. All I knew was the dizziness, the nausea, the vomiting, and the shame of wetting myself in that dark, suffocating space. That was my first real memory of Jim.

For all the noise that filled those early years, there came a moment when the entire world went completely silent.

I must have been about four years old. My mother later told me the story, though fragments of it remain etched in my own memory. One evening, I was in the bathtub playing with my toys, lost in the kind of imagination only a four-year-old can summon, Mom was in another room calling for me, probably telling me it was time for bed, but I never answered. She called again, louder. Still nothing.

Thinking I was ignoring her, she stormed down the hallway, ready to scold me, but when she came into the bathroom and saw me sitting in the tub, splashing quietly, I did not even flinch. She stood next to me, said my name, and I just kept playing. No response. She leaned closer, her voice rising with irritation. “Robbie, get out of the bath and get ready for bed!” Still nothing. It was only when she tapped me on the shoulder that I looked up, smiling, completely unaware that she had been speaking to me the whole time.

She told me later that fear shot through her like electricity. I was not ignoring her; I genuinely had not heard a word. The next morning, she took me to the doctor, and after a few simple tests they confirmed what she had feared. I had almost completely lost my hearing, ninety percent in one ear, and the entire hearing in the other. I was only four years old and living in a world that had suddenly gone quiet.

The doctors could not say exactly how long it had been that way, but they did know the cause. My tonsils and adenoids were so severely swollen that they had blocked the Eustachian tubes, cutting off airflow and trapping fluid behind both eardrums. Surgery was the only option: a tonsillectomy and a myringotomy to drain the fluid and relieve the pressure. It had to be done right away.

I remember the hospital in flashes. The white walls, a smell like rubbing alcohol and lemon cleaner, nurses' shoes squeaking on the floor. They gave me a stuffed animal to hold before they rolled me away. I can still see the lights passing overhead as they wheeled me down the hall. For a child who had already lived through yelling, chaos, and uncertainty, the hospital felt strangely peaceful. No shouting. No crashing. Just silence.

When I woke up after surgery, my throat was raw and my ears ached, but beside my bed were more gifts than I had ever seen in my life. Airplanes, toy cars, puzzles, things I had never owned before. I did not understand why I was getting them, only that it felt like Christmas. Every time I blinked awake, there was something new on the tray table beside me. Later, the nurse brought me a small cup of rainbow sherbet, and it became my entire world. I ate one after another until my tongue was numb from cold. To this day, sherbet still reminds me of healing.

Mom came to visit, along with Mimi and Papa. I do not remember much of what we said. I probably could not hear it well, but I remember the way Mimi held my hand, the way Papa smiled at me like he knew I'd be okay. There was no chaos there, no fear, just a calm assurance that I was safe. I didn't realize until much later that this was one of the first times in my young life, I had ever seen faith in action.

Over the next few days, the world slowly began to return. Sounds came back faintly at first, beginning from the soft shuffle of nurses, the beeping of machines, and the hum of air conditioning. Each day the volume turned up a little more until one morning I woke to hear the steady flow of my own breathing and the comforting sound of my mother's voice. It was like the world was being remade, sound by sound.

I don't know if I understood it then, but looking back now, I recognize that moment for what it was: my first true preservation. Before I ever understood God or called on His name, He was already at work. The same God who would later pull me from wrecks, and despair was there in that little hospital room, restoring what I'd lost. He let me experience silence so that I would one day recognize His still, small voice in the noise of life.

When I finally went home, everything felt sharper, the sound of the car tires on gravel, the ticking of the kitchen clock, even the tone of my mother's laughter. For the first time, I was aware of what I'd almost lost. I didn't have words for gratitude yet, but I felt it deep inside. And though the healing was physical, something spiritual had also begun, a seed of understanding that preservation wasn't random. It was purpose.



Life 1 The Pool Party That Almost Became a Funeral

I turned four that day. There were balloons, ice cream, and a few presents. It was a simple pool party, just the kind you'd expect at an apartment complex in the seventies. Some neighborhood kids came to celebrate and for a little while, it felt ordinary.

But the party ended before it ever really began. I had already taken

my “birthday spankings.” That’s what Jim called them. Only they weren’t playful swats. He used a wooden canoe paddle with a full windup, swinging it in a baseball-style until it sent me flying across the room like a ragdoll. That was his idea of fun. By the time we headed up to the pool after cake, I was already shaking. I thought the worst was behind me, but I was wrong.

I didn’t know how to swim. Let me say that again. I didn’t know how to swim. That didn’t seem to matter to Jim. He didn’t offer floaties. He didn’t stay close. He simply picked me up and threw me into the deep end. The water swallowed me whole.

Somehow, I managed to dog-paddle, though not well, but just enough to fight for the surface. I gasped and sputtered, kicking, barely keeping my nose above the water. A few kids swam toward me, reaching for my hands as I flailed. I grabbed at them, desperate for something solid that could keep me from going under again.

Then I saw him. Jim had taken the life-saving hook from the fence. For a split second, I thought he might pull me in. Maybe he realized I was in trouble. Maybe something human in him would show.

But he didn’t help. As I reached for the hook, he deliberately shoved it down without hesitation, driving me to the bottom with it. I sank like a stone. At first, I was confused. Was this a mistake? Was he trying to help? But the deeper I went, the clearer it became. He wasn’t helping, instead he was holding me under and trying to kill me.

I clawed my way back up, burning for air. I barely broke the surface and gulped a half-breath like it was the world’s greatest prize.

Then came the hook again, pressing me down, down, down. Every time I surfaced for air, he drove the pole into me like a weapon. I

could hear screams from the other kids and maybe some parents. I could only hear them. I couldn't see them. All I could see was a blur of water and rage. All I could feel was the pure blind panic of a small boy who realized he might not make it back up again.

Just when I thought I was going to die, really die, at four years old in front of my friends, another man suddenly jumped in. It was one of the other kids' dads. I didn't see the fight that followed, but I knew something had happened. The hook was suddenly in different hands, and this time it was used the right way.

He pulled me from the bottom, dragged me to the pool's edge, and lifted me out of the water. I collapsed on the concrete, coughing, trembling, and confused. I remember thinking, "Is he trying to kill me?" I didn't yet have words for abuse, sadism, or generational violence, but I knew something was very wrong. I knew Jim didn't just want to hurt me. He wanted to erase me.

Looking back, I understand more now. That moment wasn't only about a violent man; It was about something darker. It was an assignment being carried out, an enemy trying to destroy me before I could become who I was created to be. But it didn't work. Even at four years old, Jesus pulled me out.



Jim often took us to visit his family's farm in Winchester. At first, to a little boy, it was magical. The wide-open fields stretched forever, the sweet country smell of hay, and the animals roaming freely gave me a sense of wonder. I especially loved a cow I had grown fond of named Blossie. But this feeling didn't last long. One day, when I asked what had happened to Blossie, Jim smirked and told me I was eating her for dinner.

The cruelty didn't stop there. I remember him grabbing a chicken, wringing its neck, slicing it open, and cutting out its still-beating heart. Then, as if it were a prize, he handed it to me. That was the kind of twisted lesson he specialized in: turning torture and death into a game.

When thunderstorms rolled in, I was terrified of the lightning and thunder. Instead of comforting me, Jim dragged me onto the balcony in the middle of the storm and demanded that I “man up.” Lightning cracked across the sky as rain poured down, and I stood there trembling. Whenever my mom tried to intervene, she paid the price. He would beat her for trying to shield me.

His punishments were relentless. If I didn't like certain foods, or if I vomited while trying to eat them, he forced me to eat the vomit. Once, it was Brussels sprouts. Another time, it was raw onion. Even now, I can't bring myself to eat onions. It isn't their taste that turns me away, but the memory they carry.

Jim beat me for anything and everything. He would hide objects and tell me to find them. When I couldn't, he punched me. One time, while he was chopping wood, I was leaning against a tree nearby. He grew angry and swung the axe at my hand. I pulled away just in time. If I hadn't, I would have lost it. That could have been my end.

In our second residence together as I was starting first grade, the unspeakable was happening. I was raped and sodomized repeatedly. My mom would later tell me that Jim and his boyfriend used me as a sex toy. His boyfriend lived across the street. He was married and had a daughter who was the same age as me. There was also another lover who was the son of one of my great-uncles. Deep down, I feared I had been involved in that as well.

I didn't remember the sexual abuse for years, though flashes surfaced. I remember being under the kitchen table with the neighbor's daughter, who was also my age. We had our pants down, and we were doing things no child should ever know. I was punished for that incident, but no one ever asked how I had learned such behavior at five. I always remember hiding under my bed whenever he came home, because I was terrified of him. There are many clear memories I still carry from that time, yet God in His mercy locked away most of the sexual abuse trauma deep within my mind.

We moved a short time later near a fairground where I continued in first grade. On my first day, my teacher noticed something was wrong. She took me to the principal's office, where they asked me to undress. My body was covered in bruises, cuts, and split lips. The police came to the school and then took me home. I thought I was in big trouble. They stayed for a long time. But after they left, Jim found me and beat me with several blows to the head until I lost consciousness.



Life 2 Hiding Was not Safe Either

By the time I was five and a half, I already knew I had to hide. Not just emotionally but physically. Whenever Jim came home, whether from work, errands, or anywhere else, it became routine for me to run for safety. I disappeared into closets, under beds and behind couches. I trained myself to be invisible, because when he saw me, dreadful things happened.

This very day began like so many others. Jim had returned from being out, and I was on edge. I slipped into a closet and waited for

the storm to pass. Somewhere along the way, I must have fallen asleep. At the time, I was too young to know how long I had been in there, but later, I realized it must have been hours.

What I do remember is waking to chaos. There was a lot of crying, shouting, and my name being called from different directions. My mom's voice was raw and desperate; footsteps pounded across the floor, and the crackle of police radios filled the air. I knew something was terribly wrong.

Still groggy, I rubbed my eyes, pushed the closet door open, and stumbled toward the living room. That's when I saw them. Police officers were everywhere. My mom turned, spotted me, and gasped. "Rob?" She ran to me and collapsed around me, holding on like she hadn't seen me in years. She was shaking and sobbing as she clung to me.

I didn't understand what the big deal was. To me, I had just been hiding. But what came next was one of the worst beatings of my childhood. The moment the police left, and the relief drained from the air, Jim made it very clear what he thought of the situation. As soon as the door shut, he unleashed hell.

He didn't care that I was only five. He didn't care that I was scared. He didn't care that I hadn't done anything wrong. He punched me in the face, in the head, in the stomach, over and over. He didn't stop until everything went black.

I don't know how long I was unconscious. When I came to, I was lying in bed, dizzy, dazed, and aching from head to toe. My mother was on her knees beside me, weeping as if I had died.

When I opened my eyes and whispered, "Mommy..." she screamed, not in fear, but in shock. "Oh my God, you're alive! Praise God you're

alive! Thank God you're alive!" She kept repeating it. I had been out so long, hit so hard, that she thought I was dead. And honestly, she wasn't far off.

My lips were split, top and bottom. My ribs ached. My head throbbed. I couldn't even sit up on my own. It was the kind of damage you don't simply walk away from, not just physically, but spiritually.

And yet I did. I survived. At the time, I didn't have the words for what had happened, but looking back, I knew something supernatural preserved me. That wasn't just a beating; it was an execution in progress, and the enemy almost succeeded.

But God stepped in again. He intervened quietly, without fanfare. No lightning. No angels. Just another breath in the lungs that should have stopped working.

I lived. I shouldn't have. But I did. And I am here to tell the story.

Snapshot 1 Jim and His Father

During my time in Winchester, Tennessee, at Jim's family house, I remember one night hearing a lot of yelling and screaming from downstairs. I did not know what was happening. The upstairs of the house was a giant oval that overlooked the living room below, with balconies running along the sides. I was standing at the top of that oval, looking down, when I saw Jim and his father near the front door, locked in a serious argument.

Jim towered over his dad. He had to be at least six feet six and probably 250 pounds. His father, on the other hand, was maybe five-foot-eight, a hundred and seventy at best. The size difference made what happened next even harder to watch. Jim's father

suddenly slapped him, then struck him repeatedly, and before I could process what I was seeing, he balled up his fists and began punching his own son.

I remember standing there frozen, unable to move, just watching. In that moment, a small part of me understood something I had never been able to name before: that what I was receiving from Jim in my own life was the same thing he had received from his father. It was yet another example of how pain passes from one person to another, generation after generation, until somebody finally decides not to carry it forward.

Eventually, my mom left Jim. She waited until he was gone one evening, either at work or out drinking, and we moved back to Atlanta in the middle of the night with the help of my grandparents. I remember being so happy, though I didn't fully understand why.

But even after we escaped, he didn't let us go. He stalked us relentlessly and even followed us to Atlanta. Sometimes, I would see him at the playground, at school, or outside our house. My mom and I lived in constant terror until she eventually involved the police, and I believe that's when she was finally able to obtain a restraining order.

I will never forget the day I saw him again with another woman who had four small children. My heart broke for them, knowing firsthand the darkness that likely awaited them behind closed doors. It was a sorrow deeper than fear, born from the painful knowledge of what it meant to live under the same roof as him.

Not long after that season, I found refuge again with my grandparents. While living with them, we attended Mount Paran Church of God. At six years old, during Vacation Bible School, I gave my life to Jesus and was water baptized. God had held me through it all and was already beginning to restore what had been shattered.

What Cannot Be Forgotten

The end of Chapter One marks a point where my six-year-old self has just endured terrifying, deliberate acts of malice. To leave that moment and immediately claim life-changing wisdom or lasting peace would be an act of literary dishonesty and a disservice to the brutal reality of the years that followed. At six years old, I had no way of understanding generational trauma or divine redemption; I had only the overwhelming sensation of fear and the raw instinct for survival. When I look back now, I see a child who never got the chance to just be a child. My reflections on that period, the understanding of cycles, the revelation of faith, the recognition of internal strength, were not easy discoveries. They were truths I had to fight for, scrape for, and discover over the subsequent decades of my life. What I can offer now, as an adult, is the clarity of hindsight. I can now look back at that small, confused child and see the intricate thematic structure being laid down, a foundation of suffering that would eventually transform into a guide for strength.

The first thing I can finally admit, looking back, is that abuse leaves scars that never quite fade. They are not merely faint lines of memory; they become marks you feel even when no one can see them, indelible marks reminding us of the paths we've endured, even in moments when we desperately wish to forget. From an overwhelming beginning as a young child, having gone through severe trauma and repeated emotional torment, I have come to fully understand that every heart that suffers an early devastation, every heart with a broken or an emotionally shattering starting point, will always carry marks that one can never completely forget in a lifetime. These were not simple wounds that would heal with time;

these were wounds that changed who I was.

The abuse I was exposed to, the daily violence, the constant rejection, and the violation of trust, did more than just cause immediate distress. It subtly and persistently sowed strong seeds of insecurity and doubt. This fundamentally influenced my entire perception of myself and my relationships with others. Although these unyielding early experiences caused me unbearable torment, a suffering that seemed boundless, I have now, as an adult, come to the stark realization that they were, in a grim and twisted way, building me. They were not just destroyers. Instead, they were twisted teachers that built reflexes I didn't ask for. This gave me an unanticipated determination. But with the passage of years, I see it differently. It was actually a dark, arduous, and terrible form of training, teaching me how to survive the worst, how to initiate recovery, and how to rise again from everything I went through.

The most agonizing lesson I learned, and one that required years of observation and healing to fully grasp, is that trauma never stays contained; it spills over, contaminating everything in its path. This pattern of abuse, assault, and abandonment doesn't end in one single life or one single experience. It never stops passively; rather, it actively replicates itself, moving with chilling precision from one generation to the next. The cruelty never truly breaks until someone (a solitary figure, weary of the crushing weight) decides to take on the incredibly difficult task and bear the lonely responsibility of putting an end to such a cruel, self-perpetuating lifestyle. The cycle only truly breaks when one person makes the conscious decision to carry the heavy burden of saying “*enough.*”

As I watched Jim's father beat him, I realized for the first time that abuse doesn't begin with the person who delivers it. Jim wasn't just

angry; he was repeating what had been done to him. It didn't make his actions right, but it helped me understand that cycles don't break until somebody finally refuses to return the blow.

This simple refusal is the ultimate rebellion. It means standing firmly in the ruins of what was handed down such as the legacy of violence, fear, and neglect, and choosing, against all odds and against all previous training, to build something entirely new. Yet, it is also the quietest kind of love imaginable: the courage to refuse to pass on the ingrained cruelty, and the sheer audacity to terminate what has long pretended to be fate.

In the midst of that harsh reality, I also caught sight of a different, parallel path. I was fortunate to experience moments of pure peace, love, and steady faith, often centered within the refuge of my grandparents' care during those times when I was at my weakest and most exposed. That overwhelming contrast made one thing devastatingly clear: it is entirely possible to break the chain of anguish.

The chains can be broken off if just one person, my grandparents, in this case, chooses to live in a fundamentally different way, regardless of how little or insignificant that choice may have seemed to them at the time. The act of showing love could be a simple kind word, a patient gesture in the face of chaos, or a firm refusal to repeat the old patterns of torment. One person's choice to love instead of wound, to nurture instead of abandon, can literally redraw the map for generations to come. Through their example, I learned a crucial, foundational truth: stability is one of the greatest, most precious gifts an adult can offer a child. Stability is not merely the presence of a roof over the head or food on the table; it is the absolute, soul-deep assurance that tomorrow will not suddenly, or violently collapse into chaos.

For me, I eventually found a tentative, fragile peace living in my grandparents' home, a sanctuary where they always prayed, read the scriptures aloud with conviction, and replaced the omnipresent threat of violence with music that soothed the soul. Those concentrated, steady moments became my essential safe space, the place I could breathe. There, I saw life afresh, realizing that one could truly laugh heartily, breathe freely, live, and love without any pervasive reason to be scared. Though things became difficult again after a while because the cycle is tenacious and cruel, the memory of how secure I was with them became my proof that safety exists. It was a solid reminder that peace was not a myth but a reality I had already tasted, and therefore a reality I could hope to find, or even build and create, again in my own future.

The journey of faith also played a huge, defining part in my story, though it was a path I could only walk as an adult looking back. As a child, too young and already too wounded, I found it difficult to fully comprehend the true personality of who God was or truly understand His concept of love. But my grandparents, in their words and their consistent, gentle actions, demonstrated the Godkind of love in such selfless, ordinary kindness that it simply stuck with me. I could never forget the impact of their selfless service, their sacrifices, and their wholehearted devotion. The testimony strongly convinced me that there was something far greater than the disorder I was born into. I was reminded that beyond the chaos, something greater and someone loving was waiting patiently for me to realize His presence.

Faith was not a routine or a formal rite as the church or society might define it. It became the ultimate source, the one true place where I found my adult strength, and where I could finally and truly see who I truly was when everything else was out of place. And

in that sacred space, I finally found a place to breathe again. I found the deep, quiet courage to see myself not merely as a victim of brokenness but as someone powerfully held, divinely guided, and unconditionally loved. Faith became my way of seeing meanings when everything around me was falling apart, and it reminded me that even in the darkest, most terrifying places, a powerful, protective light was never far away.

Whenever I reflect on my childhood days, the adult in me sees far beyond the simple description of hardship. I see more than the daily struggles and torment I fought through. I see how my fundamental value, my budding innocence, and my very identity were under attack before they even had a chance to be fully expressed. As little as I was at the tender age of four, I literally never knew what unconditional love or consistent protection felt like. All I knew at that time was unrelenting maltreatment, assault in various forms, crushing neglect, and deliberate attempts to take my life. The incident at the pool was not Jim being carelessly irresponsible; it was a deliberate attempt at cutting my life short. I was hated for reasons utterly unknown to me, an innocent child. Yet, looking back now, I see not only the terrifying pain but also the unmistakable, protective thread of grace woven through my story, proving that even when darkness pressed hard against me, there was still a light holding me, refusing to let me go.

Not surprisingly, the following years did not get better. Instead, the abuse deepened, growing sharper and heavier with every passing day. I was tormented mentally, physically, and emotionally. In every place I found myself, I never found a true moment of peace. I was brutally punished anywhere and everywhere. On the farm, I was savagely beaten in ways that tore my young body and shattered my spirit. The sexual assault I suffered left me with wounds far too deep

and complex for a child of my age to bear. Those experiences left scars no one could see, yet they shaped every decision, every reaction, and every defense mechanism I used to move through the world.

And yet, despite these dreadful, ceaseless happenings, a greater force was at work. Strangely, I did not clearly remember some of the most horrific details; it was as if a divine shield had consciously covered me from the excessive burden of the memories until I had enough adult capacity and emotional scaffolding to finally face them. It was as if God Himself knew that I simply could not bear the full weight of that trauma at that time.

In times of solitude, when I reflect on those years, it dawns on me afresh that we often live out intense misery long before we actually have the vocabulary or the understanding to name what it is. Pain does not always arrive with a clear name tag. It reveals itself slowly in subtle ways: in the broken mindset we carry, in the flawed dynamics of our relationships, and even in how we conceptualize and relate to God. Yet, one constant fact remained and never changed during my years of struggle: being a survivor was never a game of luck or mere chance. If I am alive today, it is only because God preserved me from the relentless, unpleasant events set against me, though everything around me was specifically designed for my destruction. My first encounter with survival showed me that, though evil was desperate to cut me off, God kept me breathing. His plan quietly resists the overwhelming darkness and preserves what He intends to flourish.

The constant exposure to distress and torment births wounds that words often fail to fully contain. The torment no one can point to is heavy enough to permanently bend and distort life. As a child, I desperately believed that the only guaranteed way to survive and stay alive was to hide. Running away became my most immediate

defense strategy, but that coping mechanism ultimately crumbled when I realized that being hidden was not a genuine guarantee of safety. Even though I hid, I could not entirely avoid being tortured.

I am certain that many people who read this understand exactly what it feels like. They know the unique difficulty of living with the reality of knowing that a permanent escape is not a possibility. They know how devastating it feels to be constantly reminded that the environments where you were designed to be protected such as the home, and the family structure, have instead turned into spaces of constant, paralyzing terror. This was my perpetual reality, and a constant fear always overshadowed my natural will to live.

Abuse does not only cause physical injury visible to the human eye. Its greatest victory is that it attempts to destroy one's uniqueness and makes a person believe the cruelest lie about their own worth. Being beaten until I lost consciousness or being stalked long after I escaped left lasting traces of grief and trauma that people could not see. Living in those moments taught me a painful lesson: the feeling of being protected can vanish in an instant. It made me believe that joy was too delicate to be experienced and that trust could be destroyed without any prior warning. However, in those times when it seemed like I was on the losing end and when it looked as if death had the upper hand, God kept me. Every single breath that filled my lungs against all odds was proof enough that I was not left entirely to myself. Each moment of my survival was a quiet sign of His unfailing presence, a stark reminder that even when everything else had fallen away, I was not abandoned to face it all alone.

To anyone still crushed under the present weight of the past, the adult survivor in me wants you to know one thing: your survival is the living evidence that your life still carries real measurable worth.

The simple, powerful fact that you are still here, breathing, enduring, and standing, is enough to keep going. You are alive because you are important, and you are immensely valuable.

I also want you to know this: it is entirely possible to heal and fully recover from all your torment. Even though restoration does not wipe away the painful ordeals you have endured, it grants purpose to what was once meaningless or void. Your pain can be transformed into strength, your story into a compelling testimony. The enemy tried desperately to destroy me, but God preserved me, and that same preservation is available to you, too. You are not forgotten. You are not beyond hope. The fact that you are still here is the absolute beginning of your healing. It is a powerful sign that your story is far from over, and that a future is still waiting to patiently unfold.

Trauma rarely ends with one person. Its indelible marks do not fade after a single lifetime; its prints keep replicating across subsequent generations. I did not only feel despair for myself; years later, I felt heavy sorrow for the innocent, naive, and little children I later saw trapped in the hands of the same abuser and caught up in the cycles of pain I knew all too well. No matter how much I tried to hide, I could never be truly free from harm, but God's covering kept rescuing me. Running into closets, staying behind locked doors, or even getting a restraining order to keep me from being followed could not protect me the way His hand did. Time and again, it was His unseen protection that stood quietly but firmly between me and destruction. If He could keep me out of danger's way, He can do the same for you too. The past may explain and validate the flaws and defense mechanisms you carry, but it does not have to define what your future will look like. What was meant to break me became the ground where I learned to stand. Therefore, what was once designed

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to break you can become the very ground where your strength, your peace, and your faith can begin to grow again.

Your scars will not always be a reminder of your suffering; one day, they will remind you of your formidable strength, how much you endured, how deeply you persevered, and how fiercely you survived. And in that moment, you will see that what once nearly destroyed you has now become the undeniable evidence of your boundless strength.

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THE BOOK

Thirteen Times Death Came, and Thirteen Times God Said No

A True Story of Survival, Abuse, and Redemption

He should be dead. That is not exaggeration, it is fact. Thirteen times, Dr. Robert Bess stood on the brink: drowning, crushing falls, violent attacks, a contract hit that never arrived, a car crash that should have ended him. Every time, he survived.

This is not a memoir of despair. It is a testimony of divine rescue, relentless faith, and a mission that could not be silenced. From the scars of childhood abuse and rejection to thirteen near-death encounters, Robert's journey is both raw and redemptive. He refused to remain a victim. He chose purpose.

You will travel with him through the vine swing that nearly snapped his spine, a robbery that threatened his life, a gun pressed against his chest, and a crash that should have left him buried in twisted steel but did not. You will witness the moment when survival ceased to be an accident and became destiny.

If you believe in second chances, in great purpose, and in the God who intervenes, this book is for you.

Why readers love this journey:

- True stories of survival and redemption
- Firsthand testimony of faith rising above trauma
- An inspirational memoir for those breaking cycles
- A powerful narrative for readers of Christian biography, spiritual warfare, and Kingdom purpose

Begin reading, and you will wonder: *What assignment kept him alive?*

THE AUTHOR

Dr. Robert Bess is a survivor, builder, and visionary whose life bears witness to the power of God's redemption. Scarred by childhood abuse and rejection, and tested by thirteen near-death encounters, he carries those scars not as shame but as proof that the cycle is broken and a greater purpose remains.

As CEO of DayOne Solutions and Global Building Technologies, he has pioneered world-class construction projects while mentoring Christian entrepreneurs through Kingdom Wealth Managers and leading The RoarFest, a movement uniting believers in prayer, worship, and outreach. At his core, he is a worship leader, author, and devoted father who believes business can be a weapon for transformation. Above every title, his greatest joy is being Dad to Sophia and Philip, living proof that a new legacy of blessing has begun.



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