



I tell my son's
by Gregory Vowell
story

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FOREWORD

The Devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour. The devil walked the garden and was present when mankind fell. In this present world we wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness.

One day the Devil will be bound and his devils with him. We will see that man left of his own devise is capable of great evil.

Today, in America, the illicit drug trade is destroying more young people's lives than ever before. The fact synthetic drugs—man-made drugs created to mimic the effects of controlled substances—are packaged and marketed specifically to teens is undiluted evil.

This story moves quickly touching my son's struggle with drugs and alcohol. This small book records the fact *sin* will cost you more than you want to pay, take you further than you want go and keep you longer than you want to stay.

The following chapters describe dramatic events I experienced and observed in my son's life—it does not record the day-to-day battles Corey faced. I can't write of the things I did not witness—the days and weeks Corey was homeless, living in another city or behind bars were left to my fears during sleepless nights.

At the time of this writing it remains to be seen if Corey will for the rest of his life walk with God.

God is good. So many wonderful Christian brothers and sisters have prayed for my family.

CHAPTER

1

We sat stopped at a red light. My hands had a strangle hold on the steering wheel. Kathryn sobbing, we both were emotionally exhausted. “How did we get here?” I said. We were en-route to pick up our son from jail and deliver him to a detox facility. It was the first time but, it would not be the last.

Kathryn and I married young, she was 21 and I was 20 years old. It was just us for five years and then we decided to start a family. Our first born was Corey, a healthy baby boy. It took five more years to have Cody, another healthy baby boy. We thought we were finished and then...surprise! Our princess, Courtney was born a little over two years after Cody.

We didn't have much, but the kids were priority. Kathryn stayed at home while I worked. We did all to give them a healthy home with Christian values. [EPHESIANS 6:4](#)

We made the decision to relocate to a better school district while Kathryn was carrying Courtney. To find affordable land, we had to live further out, which makes everything more expensive when you figure in time and fuel. We told friends to bring milk and bread if they were headed our way.

Corey began kindergarten at Chaires Elementary and was a very sweet, teachable student. He would graduate fifth grade at Chaires and start sixth grade at Swift Creek Middle School. Cody would attend kindergarten through fourth at Chaires and fifth with Courtney at Roberts Elementary, a new school. Corey's schooling was never in sync with Cody and Courtney since he was older. He was without siblings on any campus.

Corey was an “A” student and played soccer from middle through high school. We also played travel-team soccer—I say “we” because when you play on a travel-team, the whole family travels. The U-14

boys were a handful at a hotel and although the coach preached 'hitting-the-sack' early, the boys did not. I would find myself, like other parents, looking for my child past midnight. I was amazed how well the team performed the next day after so little sleep. Our club won many matches and a few tournaments. Corey's closest friends were his soccer mates.

When your children begin school and extra-curricular activities, other values begin creeping into their lives. Looking back, I believe at this time—team travel and hotel stays—a rebellious attitude entered Corey's life.

Corey had friends in his youth class at Monticello First Baptist but they were older. Our church began a new youth pastor search just as Corey entered the student youth program. This may have disrupted Corey's spiritual growth and closeness to other Christian young people. Corey continued to be teachable and soft hearted. [PROVERBS 19:20](#)

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Corey, Cody and Courtney. Please give me wisdom beyond my years to raise them.



Courtney, Cody and Corey.

CHAPTER

2

I'm not sure at what age Corey first tried drugs. He said he was first offered a joint by another boy in his church youth group. My first encounter with Corey and marijuana was at our home. Corey was 14 years old. I found a makeshift smoking pipe on a shelf in my tool shed. I correctly assumed it was Corey's and confronted him. Corey as a child and pre-teen was very reasonable and attentive and received correction.

I began to explain the dangers of drugs and marijuana and the road it would take you down—about the hurt it would cause and to stop using it. Corey listened but did not hear my words and only got better at hiding his use. [EPHESIANS 5:11](#) I know now finding a pipe meant Corey was further along in drug use.

I did not realize at the time Corey was not made like me. I have no addictive trait or whatever you may professionally term it. I had no desire for beer or whiskey—the taste was horrible. I tried marijuana more than once with a close friend but never sought or purchased it. I never had marijuana in my possession. I knew it was stupid—I would not continue its use. Spiritually speaking, by the grace of God, tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs never got their hooks in me. I also did not want to be like my father.

*My dad was a hell-raiser, fueled by alcohol and every drug imaginable in the 60s and 70s. He left my mom when I was six years old. I had purposed in my heart I would never drink or do drugs, though I would eventually try **to** both.*

Corey had an addictive trait and he was at risk of addiction to psychoactive substances. (This is purely from observation and experience). Corey obsessed in everything. He fixated over anything new. Corey is “all-in” with anything. Telling someone with an addiction to stop has no effect, they cannot. I did not learn this early.

I believe Corey fought demons and peer pressure early. [EPHESIANS 6:12](#)

I recall a time in his freshman year he said, “Dad I don’t know how much more I can say no” (this was to drug offers at school). I told him he could say no and to walk away. This worked for me. Corey wanted the drug, he was becoming an addict. If I could do it all over, Kathryn and I would have home-schooled Corey—removed him from the pressure and availability of drugs. I found out later that Corey was supplied marijuana from one of his teachers.

We home-school Cody and Courtney’s high school years.

Corey was eager to drive and earned his learners permit within days of turning 15 years old and would go on to get his driver’s license one year later. This new independence would require more critical decision making for Corey and our family.

My brother gave Corey his old Mazda truck. We fixed it up real nice with new paint, 17-inch wheels, stereo, tinted windows and lowered all around. It was a hit at Lincoln High School (LHS) and with the extra-cab, Corey found he could fit many kids in his custom truck—they would go off campus for lunch.

LHS has a very successful soccer program. Corey did very well in soccer and lettered in his sophomore year. One tournament of his junior year in Panama City, Florida, Corey fractured his leg. It was a vertical fracture at the front of his right femur. Unable to practice or play, Corey sat the bench watching. Soccer was structured and required so much of Corey’s day, without soccer he did not know what to do with the extra time.

As mentioned, Corey was an “A” student and did not have to study to make the grade or test. The red flags were not there on his report card. The rebellious path he chose began in breaking curfew. Corey was 17 years old and coming in at 2 a.m. You may say, *He’s a kid. Put your foot down.* or *Take his keys away* and *You’re the dad.* All true, but with a rebellious and belligerent child, a father’s voice falls on deaf ears. [MATTHEW 11:15](#)

Corey was defiant to the extreme. He would ride a bike, walk or hitch a ride from strangers. Corey refused to listen to counsel or obey his mom or me. [EPHESIANS 6:1](#) Corey was high or thinking of getting high 24/7 and he was controlled by his next fix.

I had once prayed, "God, don't allow my kids to get away with anything." This may not have been the best prayer, but the intent was for them to quickly be corrected in whatever they were doing wrong.



I tell my son's story



CHAPTER

3

Corey and a few buddies planned a party. For them, to party meant to have some beer and they all were underage. Standing outside the automatic doors of a convenient store with engines running in their trucks, each dashed into the store and grabbed a 12-pack running back to waiting trucks. The store clerk did not see it coming, the heist happened so fast. Corey was the lone, identified suspect and would be arrested. I was contacted by the police and called to the station. I watched as they cuffed Corey, placed him in the back of a patrol car and drove him to juvenile detention across town. My eyes filled with tears as Corey looked through the glass at me. It hit me then, Corey is going bad, *and fast*. [1 CORINTHIANS 15:33](#)

The next police call would have me meet officers at a neighborhood park pavilion. Another party with underage drinking and drugs. All other kids fled the scene into the woods leaving alcohol, personal belongings and cars at the park. Not Corey. He stood there in rebellion to authority. The officer asked him for ID and Corey refused his request.

The police felt it unfair to charge only Corey seeing that the others involved ran away. Authorities released Corey with a warning. The lead officer pulled me aside saying, “Your son is very disrespectful to law.”

Corey slid into the front seat of my car, leaving his truck there. Corey wanted to make a stop at a house where he was certain some of the party goers ran to. He was right. They were gathered in one place giggling—Corey was hot. He told them, “If you are gonna run with me, we ain’t running from the cops. If you not willing to do the time, don’t do the crime.” This exchange let me know Corey was the Alpha in this group—he was in charge.

Corey has charisma. Corey has the ‘IT’ factor. He is a natural born leader like my dad. Like my dad, Corey surrounded himself with bad people. My dad was the leader of a motorcycle gang in Western Kentucky. He did time, and his last stint was seven years in Kentucky State Penitentiary.

Another time, Corey was a passenger and pulled by police. A lit joint burned in the ashtray. Corey and the driver were arrested for possession. The sentencing introduced us to Drug Court.

Drug Court is a specialized, 60-day court docket probation/program. It requires parents to “chauffeur” their child twice each month to the courthouse to appear before the judge, clerk, recorder and deputy sheriff. Everyone in the gallery is there on a drug-related charges. We all watch and wait as each underage drug user stands before the judge and is questioned on compliance to conditions of probation. During the two weeks between court appearances, participants submit to urine tests and questioning. In the courtroom, some are compliant and shorten their probation period. Others are non-compliant, handcuffed by the deputy, seated and wait to hear further instructions from the judge. During the two-month program, Corey was cuffed each time he attended. When Corey finished Drug Court, the judge said, “Congratulations Mr. Vowell. You sir, have taken the longest of anyone to comply.” Corey was in the program for 267 days. The only thing positive from Drug Court was the judge-ordered GED requirement, which Corey completed. The instructor told Kathryn that Corey’s scores were very high. Kathryn replied, “Well, we have never questioned his intelligence, only his common sense”.

One day, Corey wrecked his truck in front of school while leaving for the day. He ran into the rear of another car, no drugs or alcohol involved. After the wreck Corey was through with the truck. He purchased a Suzuki GSX-R600, the fastest bike on the street. Corey adjusted naturally to the power and speed. I think Corey is also a risk-taker. He thinks only of today’s thrills, not the associated dangers. Corey creates significant public health hazards for others as well as himself.

I found myself observing other families, other kids and they passed through this drug experiment stage. It was only reasonable after being caught, arrested and in trouble with the law that these young people pushed through the drug scene, leaving it behind. Not Corey. This was his lifestyle; he owned it. He once told Kathryn he was a “drug addict and wanted to be a drug addict”. You are not aware you are enabling. You tell yourself “today is the day he gets through this.”

CHAPTER 4

Corey met Paige at LHS—she was a very cute girl. Corey and Paige began dating and ran off and lived together in Panama City. One evening Corey made a call home to say Paige was pregnant. They got married at the courthouse. Kathryn and I were unaware of the ceremony.

Once after visiting home, Corey headed back to Panama City on his Suzuki and was clocked too fast on the highway. A police chase ensued. I read in the report Corey ran six police barricades reaching speeds exceeding 135 mph and he was taken down with a police car ram tactic. Corey was charged with Felony Fleeing and Alluding. The courts revoked his driver's license and impounded his new bike. Corey said he “ran because he could” meaning he had a fast bike and they couldn't catch him. Obviously, they did. The law always catches up with you. Sin always catches up with you.

II CORINTHIANS 2:14; NUMBERS 32:23

Later that year, on December 4, 2006, Shane Gregory Vowell was born.

*“This will do it,” I told myself when Corey and Paige were expecting.
“When a young man becomes a father, he makes the change. He matures and steps up to care for his family.”*

Corey was working for an electrical outfit and Paige was an administrator at an office design and furniture company. They were still behind the eight-ball financially. Corey and I built an apartment behind our home. It was small, 500 square feet, but, it was only temporary, right? The layout was a loft with kitchenette, living area and bedrooms. They used the bathroom in the main house. This would work if all parties were respectful of each other. Cody and Courtney needed space. Kathryn and I had rules.

Corey and Paige violated every rule instituted, and instead of saving funds for a move to their own place, they wasted the opportunity. It was so stressful, Kathryn moved out and lived with her sister across town for three months. It was my house but now Corey and Paige were in charge.

The 2008 recession hit our area hard. Paige was laid off and enjoyed

the unemployment checks more than looking for a job. Corey's drug and alcohol abuse led to his firing. We couldn't take any more.

Corey had been put on notice at work—you can't be high in the electrical field. People's lives and property depend upon quality work. Corey was unemployed and depressed.

One evening Paige came running from the apartment. Corey was talking of suicide. We sought some professional help over the phone and after some discussion with Corey late into the night, we all retired somewhat confident the idea had left him.

The next morning I left for work. Needed errands took Kathryn away from home that afternoon, leaving Cody and Courtney at home. While in town, Kathryn received a call from a friend educated in suicide and aware of the previous night's event. She asked Kathryn where she was at the moment, Kathryn replied, in town. She told Kathryn that if Corey was serious, studies shown he would attempt again within 24-hours. As Kathryn left town heading home, Cody phoned in, "Mom get home quick! Corey is in a pool of blood on the front porch!"

Oh God, we desperately need you. Let Corey be okay. Be with Cody and Courtney at this time. Grant Kathryn traveling mercy. I know she is racing home.

Kathryn phoned 911 then me. All parties were in route. Corey slit both wrist. Rural fire station EMT's arrived first and stabilized Corey. By the time I arrived home an ambulance and several deputy sheriff's cars lined the drive. Corey was sitting up on the mobile-stretcher in the back of the ambulance. He was crying—I then began crying. I placed my hand on the back of his neck, pulled into him, pressing my forehead to his and said, "I love you."

A few questions from the deputy for me then we followed after the ambulance to the hospital. Under the Baker-Act, Corey was on watch and then to detox.

The same evening Cody was to perform classical-guitar at a recital.

Life goes on (nothing stands still when tragedy hits you). In the midst of trial you still report to work—the bills have to be paid. Time moves—I

am paralyzed—can't move on, can't go back. Corey mends and then the roller coaster ride begins again.

The lying, the drugs, the alcohol, Shane's neglect, and not to mention the costs of our grocery and electric bills is wearing. Corey believes Kathryn and I exist solely to provide for his wants.

Cody stayed in his room and Courtney despised Paige. At the time we didn't see it falling apart. We locked the back door to control Corey and Paige's bathroom and kitchen visits. Corey and Paige broke-in and, it was our fault for locking the door. Enough is enough! We sent them to Paige's adoptive parents, the Bartons.

The Bartons are smokers, drinkers and abusers of prescription drugs. They live in a beautiful neighborhood—winner of several city awards. The Barton's house has the overgrown lawn with cars parked off the driveway. A rotting roof and rotting, sagging window garden-boxes are visible from the street. The inside of the home is worse with food and dishes piled high in the kitchen, mold and mildew in the bathrooms, unmade beds and you can't see the floor for the piles of items. Paige's older brother has just been arrested for home burglary in the neighborhood and is later sentenced to three years in prison. Dave, Paige's dad, has a special refrigerator for beer.

PROVERBS 20:1

God, this is my grandson's new home. Guard him Lord.

It doesn't take too long for Corey to upset even the Bartons. Dave demands they vacate. Corey and Paige ask Kathryn and me if they can return to the apartment with promises of change—we are worried about Shane. They return and written rules are handed to them and placed on the refrigerator. Corey gets on with another electric outfit and enjoys it there for about four months. Paige is still unemployed—Shane is sweet and a joy to have in the house. During all this time, Corey, Paige and Shane demand our attention, and our two wonderful children, Cody and Courtney, are functioning at home, doing what normal teens do. Home-schooling, learning guitar, part-time jobs and observing Corey and Paige (C&P).

Kathryn and I now say C&P for Corey and Paige because Shane is beginning to listen.



Corey and Paige.

CHAPTER 5

I get a call from an unknown neighbor. “Your son has been involved in a wreck, can you come?”

It's after 2 a.m., I knock on the apartment door. Paige answers and I give her the news. She is unaware Corey is out. Corey does not have a driver's license. Shane is given into Kathryn's care.

Paige and I drive four miles to the spot described. A patrol car's lights are flashing red and blue far in the distance we see Corey standing with the unknown man and a phone. Corey is shirtless and bloody. About 500 feet off the road, in the woods, rests a twisted, silver Honda Accord. Tail lights are on and the right turn signal is slowly flashing. A fender, front windshield, a door and personal items are scattered around broken shrubs and trees.

Paige and I are both stunned. I am amazed Corey is alive. He is drunk, bleeding from his head, hand and arms. Paige begins hitting him, not to hurt but pounding his chest. “What the f____, Corey, what have you done?” It is a horrible scene.

After a short line of questioning, the deputy gives Corey a warning. “Your injuries and a destroyed car are punishment enough, if you don't learn from this, you won't ever learn.” I immediately remember he lost a new Suzuki street bike. I left the deputy, C&P on the side of the road. I'm not sure how C&P got home. Weeks later they get an insurance check and purchase a used car.

I now have to drive Corey across town in the opposite direction of my work to join his electric crew each morning. C&P are abusing their stay again, we demand they load up and move out. They agree but, only because they don't like living here anymore, and not before Paige takes a skate board smashing into the sliding glass-doors breaking them and other windows in the apartment.

C&P get a duplex closer to town. It is nice. Corey always likes to make a

nice place with cool furnishing, wall art and he keeps it clean. Shane has a nice room. I immediately deduce by the size and location of the duplex, it is too expensive for their budget. Did I tell you their stay with us was free? Not because we did not charge rent, but because they weren't paying.

Corey passed marijuana years ago and boasted of trying "everything out there." He flaunts his drug and alcohol use like a badge of street honor and credibility. [II TIMOTHY 3:2](#)

Kathryn and I worry about Shane. We have not seen him in three weeks.

God, I don't understand. Help me trust and obey. God let my will be lost in thine.



Newborn Shane Gregory Vowell.

CHAPTER 6

Kathryn and I had been asked to watch Shane for the weekend. It was past time to pick him up and we had not heard from C&P. We called the Barton's and asked if they had seen or heard from C&P. Both families began a search for C&P and Shane. Someone, I don't remember who, found Corey on a major highway close to an interstate ramp half naked, high and out-of-mind. He was cuffed by local police, taken to the emergency room and later admitted into a detox center. Paige turned up in a hotel room near the same interstate ramp with three drug dealers and was taken to a local hospital. But, *where was Shane?*

C&P were both arrested on drug-related charges. Kathryn and I were awarded temporary custody of Shane while C&P began treatment and programs under Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) services to restore parental rights. Paige moved back home. Corey lived on the streets, now homeless.

Once while the rest of the family was eating at a local sandwich shop, Corey walked past the restaurant window. He was heavy-bearded, sunburned, dirty and scruffy. Another time, I saw Corey walking the streets very thin and dirty. My heart broke, seeing my child struggling this way.

Paige did the minimum DCF requirements to get Shane back. Corey never completes the program and DCF closes his file.

While living on the streets, Corey found a credit card, purchased a \$6 meal at a Subway chain and waited on police to arrest him. He was charged with felony credit card fraud and sentenced to six months in the county jail. (Corey has done time in the following county jails: Bay, Franklin, Leon, Wakulla. While locked-up, Corey has missed four of Shane's birthdays.)

I visit Corey in jail; no one else cares to go. It is difficult to get on the

visitation list. Kathryn does make a few visits but, it hurts her heart to go.

I watch Corey walk up to the glass window. The whole idea of visiting my son in jail is difficult, but is becoming a routine, and I begin to find comfort in knowing Corey is locked away from the drugs, alcohol and living on the streets.

We talk and when he leaves the window, I look for the scar on the left side of his head. Corey keeps his head shaved and the scar is visible. He got that scar when my teeth struck his head in a car accident several years ago. Corey received two stitches and the mark remains today.

Corey finished his time. Release is midnight but, it takes 'til 1 a.m. to leave the gates. We drove down Tennessee street and Corey asked to stop at a convenient store. His first order of business was to get some smokes.

Really? Corey has not smoked a cigarette for six months but, he is going to start the habit again.

It's not too long and Corey is arrested again on drug charges and fighting, and spends more time in county jail. [PROVERBS 20:1](#)

Corey asks to enter a drug rehab treatment facility. Kathryn and I find a faith-based program with an opening in a neighboring county. Corey enters the facility and does well. We visit on Sunday morning once a month for preaching and a meal together. It is a wonderful time of fellowship with Corey and other men who want to leave drugs and alcohol, follow God and rejoin their families. Paige made a visit and slipped Corey one of her prescribed Xanax capsules. Corey was kicked out of the program, and on the streets again in no time.

I love Corey, it's killing me to see what he is doing to himself. Corey is missing out on the best years of Shane's life.

Oh God, I was sure Corey would return to you by now. Please watch over him, watch over him on the streets. How long, oh God?

CHAPTER 7

Did I tell you Kathryn and I have two wonderful children at home? Cody graduated high school and is working full-time at an auto repair shop. He is the pride of his employer and experiences success in all endeavors. He met the girls of his dreams in Sara. They dated, exchanged wedding vows and purchased their home. Cody helped Sara finish nursing school, and left the auto repair shop; and Sara in return helped him complete nursing school.

Courtney dual-enrolled and graduated high school with an AA degree and then completed a 2-year program in respiratory therapy. Courtney married the same year as Cody & Sara. Her marriage failed after one year. Courtney was hurt and there was nothing I could do to stop the pain. She has never failed in anything.

God will you come close?



I tell my son's story



Corey and Paige with Shane at 1st birthday.

CHAPTER 8

Back home in his old room, Corey slept with lights and TV on. It was part of his conditioning to incarceration. He was beginning to change with institutionalization. Corey did good for a while. Paige was with another man while Corey was in county jail. It was hard for Corey to move past this. Corey was beginning to realize Paige was not good for him, but he loved her. Corey left our home and joined Paige at hers.

C&P were living at the Barton's but were soon asked to leave. They gathered their belongings and move into a mobile home park on the opposite side of town. Shane stayed with the Bartons so he wouldn't have to move schools. Once again Corey made his place a home with nice things. Corey returned to work with a previous electric company. I purchased a used washer and dryer set for them. Shane visited his parents Friday afternoons through Sundays. All was going well. Kathryn and I wait for the other shoe to drop. It was a cycle we'd grown to expect.

C&P were behind in rent. Corey borrowed very little money from us at-a-time. Usually \$10 here, \$20 there, but it added up over the time it became shocking.

The mobile park manager liked Corey—everyone likes Corey; he is fun to be around but, the manager asked C&P to leave. Paige moved back to the Bartons. I helped Corey load up their belongings, furniture and appliances. We placed them in the empty apartment. Corey stayed with us for two weeks, sleeping in his old room. Then he moved back with Paige at the Bartons. Remember the beer refrigerator?

Oh God, your silence is not comforting. Please hear me and know my heart. Thank you for patience with me—I need to trust you Lord. Thank you for your mercies toward Corey

I tell my son's story



Shane three years old.

CHAPTER

9

It was July 4, 2015 we had Shane for the week. As the day moved along, plans were made to attend fireworks that night. It was a wonderful display as we celebrated our country's independence.

July 5, 2015—late-night and early-morning phone calls are never good. With our history, these calls can mean life or death. **The news:** Corey was in county jail. **The charges:** attempted murder. I felt sick to my gut. **The sketchy details:** C&P with Rhonda, Paige's younger sister, attended a July 4th party. Corey said he protested to Paige and Rhonda about going. He did not want to go. Rhonda gave Corey a Xanax and they headed off to the event. Prescription drugs and alcohol do not mix well. The host confronted Paige and Rhonda, asking them to leave because they were too drunk and making a scene. Corey got involved. Punches were thrown, chairs were thrown, Paige broke some windows—again. Corey pulled a knife and stabbed the guy in the chest, just missing his heart. Everyone was in a panic and this guy's crew was looking for Corey. Police found Corey down the street and make the arrest. Corey spent a year in county.

It was a case of conflicting testimonies and no weapon was ever recovered. A week before trial, Corey pleaded to Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon. The sentence was three years with time served. Corey would go to prison for 24 months. It was a light sentence for such an ugly crime. Corey would miss three more of Shane's birthdays.

Corey was in the Florida Correctional Institution (FCI) system, serving in Gadsden County. He was moved three more times for fighting and not following rules. He served time at the following correctional facilities: Central, Gadsden, Liberty, Escambia, Mayo. He accumulated fines, fees and restitution in the amount of \$9,000.

Shane waits; he is serving time too.

We began once-a-month visits to see Corey, taking Shane with us. Visiting the state prison was better than the county jail because you were in the same room, at the same table and had human touch. Inmates were on one side of the table and visitors are on the other. There was liberty in greeting and saying goodbye. A mom or wife can give a kiss. A dad or child can hug. There is a canteen open offering plenty of food, drinks and treats. Also available are board games, books and playing cards. The visits are strangely wonderful. I have never felt fear on any visit.

In our first visit Corey told me “I can handle this”. [GALATIANS 6:3](#)

Prisons are filled with some talented men from creative writers, artist, barbers, lawyers and small electrical appliance geniuses. To survive inside and have basic staples and hygiene products, inmates receive money from outside or create a ‘hustle’ inside to exchange goods and have money. It’s not good to have a hustle and receive outside funds. Corey works both systems. Corey breaks prison-rules, inmate-rules which leads to fighting. If you disrupt and can’t comply you move to a harder facility.

In the next prison, Corey was asked to join a gang and that meant sharing your outside money with a “brother”. Corey refused this offer and had to fight for the right to say no. The consequences sent him to another more dangerous prison. Corey after fighting in the same prison again, requested to be placed in confinement. Having completed sixty days in a 6-by -9-foot cell, Corey was moved to another prison. In a phone conversation, Corey admitted he couldn’t do this, he couldn’t survive inside. I believe this is when he started looking inward. He considered the reason he was there, his actions and decisions that brought him to that place. His eyes were opening to the truth, and then he began looking upward. [PROVERBS 3:7](#)

God, you have Corey’s attention. Open his eyes, draw him to yourself. Let me see Corey living for you. Lord don’t let me be as my grandmother, never to see my dad walk with you.

Friends and family were praying and God was beginning to work on and in Corey. Kathryn and I watched the change each visit. In another visit Corey said, “I am glad I am here. This has brought me closer to God and He has saved my life.”

In the following weeks Corey shared he's found his life's verse. Philippians 1:22, "For me to live is Christ to die is gain." And, he didn't want to be a drug addict, and for the first time wanted to live for God. Corey repeated this apology face-to-face with his mom at another visit.

[ROMANS 12:2; JOHN 8:23; EPHESIANS 6:2](#)

Each visit Corey was more determined to live for God. Corey was in God's word, praying and living it out in prison. He was complying with the prison rules and guards. During this time, gang activity was high between cell blocks. Two inmates had been attacked in gang retaliations, both helicoptered to emergency care. Corey witnesses one attack close to him in chow line; so close in fact, he had blood on his prison blues. In answer to prayer, God's hand of protection moved Corey from the maximum security with 1,500 inmates to work release camp with minimum security, and a population of 350. Corey dropped from maximum, to minimum to community security in six months.

A Haitian gang leader tells his members to leave Corey alone. Because Corey is doing his time and is walking what he believes. This same inmate gives Corey a new pair of boots.

In weekly phone calls, Corey described how he saw God working and answering his prayers. I saw a relationship being restored. [PSALMS 51:10](#)

On the outside, Paige continues to spiral out of control. Shane has not seen her in months. Paige has not reached-out to arrange to see or speak with Shane. Corey had divorce papers drawn up by an inmate who is a lawyer. Corey is concerned how Shane will be affected by it all. Shane will one day have to reflect on his childhood and the absence of a mother's love and his father's care—his parent's incarcerations.

It is because of the prayers of family, many Christian friends—the leadership at my church pray for Corey daily—that I see hope in my son. Will hope prevail?

I once asked for all our family and friends to pray God would take Corey back to a time when he was close and walked with him. This would have to be when Corey was very young. Two weeks later Corey called and told me of the new song he heard on Christian radio. This

new song was now *his* song. Read the lyrics below and tell me how God hears and answers prayer.

I want to go back

– By David Dunn

*When I was a kid I was sure
I could run across the ocean
And I was gonna be an astronaut*

*When it was You and it was me
I had everything I needed
Faith could even move a mountain top*

*And then I grew up And then I got older
Then my life got tough And we grew apart
I wanna go back To Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me For the Bible tells me so
I wanna go back To this little light
Gonna let it shine Gonna let it shine
I wanna go back*

*When I was a kid
I didn't care to keep up with the Jones's
I was just happy that they lived next door*

*When it was You and it was me
I had everything I needed
Your hands were big enough to hold the world*

*And then I grew up And then I got older
Then my life got tough And we grew apart*

*I wanna go back To Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me For the Bible tells me so
I wanna go back To this little light
Gonna let it shine Gonna let it shine
I wanna go back*

I wanna go back, back to Yes, Jesus loves me

CHAPTER 10

Kathryn and I are now in a battle with the Bartons over Shane. Shane is 10 years old and will soon be entering fifth grade. The filth and lifestyle is affecting Shane's well-being. Paige only lives at the Bartons when she is not bouncing around with friends or boyfriends. Paige has abandoned Shane to her parents. I cannot create a visual picture of the conditions Shane is living in. I can relate one incident for example. Shane's last dental check-up was very bad with several cavities and oral neglect cited. Kathryn consistently reminds him to brush his teeth and to do so at the Bartons, too. His response, "Nana I would brush (at the Bartons) if bugs weren't on my toothbrush." Shane is the dirty kid at school. Shane is failing 4th grade. Shane turns in no class-work or homework. Shane has 16 unexcused absences. The Barton house is 1,000 feet from the school and Shane is habitually late.

Kathryn is forced to deal with the Barton's daily. Kathryn is the strongest person I know. She is relentless when right.

We have no phone line at home. Therefore Kathryn conducts all communications by text and conversation with the Bartons and Paige. She only does this out of love and safety for Shane. There have been too many times to count the abuse, misunderstanding and untruthfulness of these communications.

In any confrontation with the Bartons, Kathryn and I are challenged with the words, "I thought you all were Christians". The Bartons don't know how many times I restrained what I wanted to say or do because *I am a Christian.*

My God and Heavenly Father, watch over Kathryn this day. Bless her in every way because of who you are and how much you love her. Sustain her through it all. Be her strength today.



Corey and Shane.

CHAPTER

11



On the morning of May 9, 2017, we had just turned on Highway 59, when over the radio, at the bottom of the news hour, came the report of an arrest of Page Briggs, a suspect in the brutal slaying of Hoyt Birge.

Kathryn looked over at me **than** back to see if Shane was paying attention. “Page Briggs, that’s Paige’s new boyfriend” she said.

“More suspects and arrest to come,” the reporter continued. The breaking news through the day reported a plan to lure, rob and kill a crystal-meth drug dealer and, Paige, Shane’s mother, was right in the middle of it all.

The rest of the week and in the following weeks, the investigation led to the arrest of eight suspects in Hoyt’s murder. Four were charged with First-Degree Murder and four with Accessory to Murder. Paige received the latter charge. All suspects were booked in county jail, four were held without bond and three bonded out. Paige was one who, with the help of her parents, posted \$2,500 on a \$25,000 bond. Paige being out was a danger to Shane. Hoyt’s family, girlfriend and crew wanted retaliation to all involved.

Kathryn and I had a lawyer on retainer and moved in quickly for emergency custody. A motion was made and the judge agreed to Emergency Custody and later gave Temporary Custody. We now have Shane in our home to raise up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Shane would now sleep in his dad’s old room. [EPHESIANS 6:4](#); [PROVERBS 22:6](#)

The Barton’s were not too happy about the new arrangement and continued to fight us. Kathryn receives ugly and vicious text messages daily.

God delivered Shane and conquered many fears we had for him: school attendance, school-grades, health, hygiene. Shane was exposed to alcohol, drugs, family dysfunction, laziness and depression. Shane had no space of his own and slept on the floor, couch or wherever he fell asleep.



Shane at 10 years old in his soccer uniform.

CHAPTER

12

Paige is not the cute girl Corey first met in high school. The use of drugs and alcohol have dramatically changed her. Paige is awaiting trial. The evidence is strong for the State. She will no doubt be given a stiff sentence under the guidelines. [GALATIANS 6:7](#)

Dear God, watch over Shane. Draw him to you. Lord let him know your love. May the understanding of the Gospel lead Shane to receive within his heart your gift of salvation.

Shane is loved by God and, God has answered prayer, guarding his heart, mind and emotions during these neglected years. It seems rare that both parents and his maternal grandparents all would be abusing these “adult beverages,” prescription and illegal drugs.

I have read several “help” books about addicts and their addiction. I quickly scan the table of contents. I have never once read this chapter title:

- Adult child dependent on alcohol/drugs**
- + spouse on alcohol/drugs**
- + with small child in household**
- + maternal grandparents on alcohol/drugs**

The compound drug and alcohol abuse is staggering. In the event one desired to quit or seek help there is no support to do so from the other member.



Shane Nana and Papa 2016.

CHAPTER

13

The previous pages do not record all the prayers, all the tears, the sleepless nights, the physical toll, emotional turmoil and financial waste we experienced these many years. I omitted the heated arguments with my son and the ugly exchanges he had with his mother. Drugs and alcohol so altered my son's mind at times I did not know Corey anymore.

To let go and let God deal with my rebellious son was difficult. I asked my friend to pray the words I could not say. John bowed with me, placing his hand on my shoulder saying, "Whatever it takes Lord, short of killing Corey, whatever it takes". Phillip, a dear friend at work who is going through similar issues with his kids, has also been a prayer warrior for me and my family. Another dear friend at church Judy, has always been available to listen to Kathryn's hurting heart.

Kathryn and I have spoken to many broken-hearted parents with the same experience. We've sat in on support groups and listened as a mother praised the Lord her son was arrested and doing five years. I did not understand her praise. I know that mother's heart now.

I have talked with several addicts and alcoholics about recovery, their turnabout and return to God. I was interested in the time-frame, how long it took to get back. You always hear about hitting "bottom". I'm not sure about that event—I am not an addict. [LUKE 5:17](#)

Kathryn and I have hope for Corey. He is so determined and has purposed in his heart to live for God. [ROMANS 8:29](#) He does not look like a Christian. *What does a Christian look like?* [1 SAMUEL 16:7](#) Corey looks like a sinner saved by grace. A church member and friend, Doris once told me, "As long as there is breath in him, pray. Don't quit, never stop in your attempts to reach him." Corey is still with us. God has a purpose for Corey—seven of his friends have died by overdose, DUI accident or suicide.

Corey turns 31 years old this Fall. He has been on this prodigal path for 17 years. At 31 years old Corey is young and can make a great life for

himself and Shane. He can't change the past—yet we have so much love in us, given to us from God who is love. Corey can pour all his love on Shane and do double-time as a single parent.

My brother and I were raised in a single parent household. My mother worked twice as hard at raising us and providing for us. She gave so much love to us. I can never repay my mother for all the life lessons I learned from her.

When Corey was nine years old, Kathryn and I led him to the Lord, praying together on our living room couch. We made sure he understood God's love for him, his need and the purpose of the cross. I believe Corey was saved that day; at the least God's love and the Good News was planted in his little heart. He is an addict determined to rise above his addiction and live for God. Corey is locked up and faces consequences of bad behavior. What he does with freedom from prison bars is yet to be seen. [GALATIANS 5:17](#) We pray God will finish this work in him. We led Cody and Courtney to God too; they were both wonderful kids and teenagers with no rebellious problems. Today Cody's integrity matches his mom's and Courtney is starting to believe in love again. [II TIMOTHY 3:14-15](#) Our children are not perfect. I pray they remember the teachings of God from home and church. [III JOHN 1:4](#)

LAST CHAPTER

I'm not sure what I would have done differently. I remember plenty of times failing as a husband, dad and leader of my home. Kathryn is the strong one and always chooses right. We are very jaded, not because God's grace was not sufficient, but because we focused on our problem, the trial, too long. [HEBREWS 12:2](#)

Through this struggle with our son, I have grown closer to God. I named my kids Corey, Cody and Courtney, gave them close names so they would be close. They are not. Resentment lingers, but time heals all wounds. Cody, who has made a point to stay away from Corey over the years recently said, "I would love to have my brother back." His words give hope of soon-to-be family time together.

Over the past 17 years I have experienced, heart-ache, heart-break, anger, sorrow, grief, distrust, disgust, shame, guilt, sense of loss, uncertainty, indecisiveness, doubt, fear, embarrassment, despair, woe and hopelessness. I have experienced all these emotions in the moments of just one day. Through it all, I have not once stopped believing that my God, in an instant, could change it all. God owes no explanation to me. If you live long enough you will experience heart-ache, which are the reasons for Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:4.

Music and inspired lyrics lifted me up many times. Christian radio and Wednesday evening choir practice got me through rough weeks. To lay aside the struggle, focus on God in songs and ask for prayer from fellow choir members has been a wonderful ministry to me.

In closing, I know "we live in a broken world". I also know the previous phrase is used by Christians when we can't explain or don't understand what God is doing. I know God is in control but, I struggle to understand at times. There is a line in a current song that says "how is my broken heart part of your plan?" I had difficulty in learning what God was doing. I had

to remember Jesus felt heartache of God's plan to the point of sweating drops of blood.

I know nothing can separate me from God—ultimately, I will be in His presence conformed to the image of the Son. I, too understand a prodigal son's heart will not be easily returned to his father. To watch your child fall into sin and choose to remain there hurts deep. To watch your grandson suffer because of his father's selfish addiction to drugs cuts deeper.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't wallow in the struggle. Pray and pray and pray some more. [HEBREWS 12:2](#); [1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31](#); [II CORINTHIANS 12:9](#);

[I THESSALONIANS 5:17](#); [1 JOHN 5:14](#); [1 JOHN 5:15](#); [1 CHRONICLES 16:11](#); [EPHESIANS 6:18](#); [JEREMIAH 29:12](#);

[MARK 11:24](#); [PSALM 17:6](#); [ROMANS 12:12](#); [ROMANS 8:26](#)



DC #: Q18123
Name: VOWELL, COREY S.
Race: WHITE
Sex: MALE
Hair: RED OR AUBURN
Eye: BLUE
Height: 5' 7"
Weight: 150 lbs.
Birth Date: 09/08/1986
Facility: MAYO CORRECTIONAL

I tell my son's Story

by Gregory Vowell

I knew writing this story wouldn't be easy. It brings to surface memories I'd rather forget but, watching my son's recovery taught me that a grim past can help other dads in similar situations. There was a purpose for his addiction, self-destruction and incarceration. Where was God? In the midst of the storm I did not always see God—looking back I see God *through it all*.

If you have a prodigal child or a child heading down the wrong path, never stop praying. As long as they have breath in them there is hope.

Feel free to share this short book.
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