

I STILL BELIEVE

*Discovering hope and healing in
the midst of life's deepest valleys*

JEREMY CAMP

with Phil Newman

Jeremy Camp is an extremely talented artist. But what many do not know is that he has suffered greatly in life. Out of this suffering many of the songs we have come to love have been born and have brought encouragement and comfort to untold thousands around the world. Now, for the first time, Jeremy Camp tells his whole story. This is a book you will want to read and then pass on to a friend. I heartily endorse it.

..... **Pastor Greg Laurie**

Senior Pastor, Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California

Cancer. Love. Hope. Loss. Where do you turn when life is hard? In his new book, I Still Believe, Jeremy Camp shares his story—personal, painful, and promise-filled. If you need hope in the midst of a hard season in your life, pick up a copy of this book. It will encourage you, challenge your faith, and point you to the One Who is Hope, Jesus Christ.

..... **Dr. James MacDonald,**

Senior Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel

Jeremy's music has always had a powerful impact on me, and now I know why. Behind his voice is a heart that's uniquely connected with God. Through his pain, grief, sorrow, and loss, his life has become a crucible where the Lord's love and mercy are real revelations. Reading Jeremy's story has reinforced my faith in He who is able and alive!

..... **Bob Coy**

Senior Pastor, Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale

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foreword

I remember where I was when the walls came crashing in. Sitting in my office staring at my computer and a file of payroll documents realizing that the impossible had happened. I had been embezzled out of more than \$40,000. It wasn't the loss of funds that caused the blood to drain from my face that afternoon. Rather it was the fact that the loss had come at the hands of someone I had trusted.

In my life I can count on one hand the times when I felt my world tilt hard off its axis, when breathing required my concentration and all logic and order spun crazily out of control. This was one of those times.

Back then, I didn't know Jeremy Camp as a friend the way I do now. But I knew him as a musician, the depth of his music and the hope in his story. I was aware of his very great loss in watching his young wife die of cancer, and I was moved by his determined effort to praise God anyway.

For that reason, as I stared into the screen disbelieving what I was seeing and trying to slow my racing heart, a single

thought came to mind: I needed to hear Jeremy's music. I needed it like I needed to breathe. Without waiting a moment longer I went to my computer where my iTunes library is stored, and I burned a CD with just three songs—all by Jeremy: "Walk by Faith", "Give Me Jesus", and "I Still Believe." As the CD popped out of my computer, I grabbed a Sharpie and wrote just one word across the silver disc:

Help.

See, many times that's how the Holy Spirit works among us, by reminding us that someone else survived a loss in the power of God. And so, we can be certain that He will help us do the same.

That night we had tickets to a basketball game. I was so devastated by the revelation of this theft in my life that I didn't tell the kids. I couldn't. My brain barely allowed the reality to work its way into my conscious. I told just the bare details to my husband, assuring him I would go into depth later. The truth was, I couldn't bear to go into detail then. Not while my world was still collapsing around me.

Instead of talking about it or examining it or trying to imagine how something like that could have happened, I played my *Help* CD loud and long, over and over and over again. *I will walk by faith...even when I cannot see...and I still believe in Your faithfulness...I still believe in Your truth...I still believe in Your Holy Word...even when I cannot see...I still believe.*

Over and over and over again.

By the end of the night I was OK. My world was right-side up again and I could factually grasp the idea that a trusted person had stolen...not from me, but from God. That person would have the Lord to deal with, and God would protect me, my family, and my ministry. With God on our side, we would

get through this—the same as any of us can get through anything that comes our way as long as we still believe.

I will never forget how Jeremy’s story, his music and his testimony helped me through that time in my life. We have choices when life hits us with a tsunami of tragedy or despair, crisis or loss. That’s the message of Jeremy Camp’s book, and it’s the reason you will find hope and healing by journeying through the pages of his story, his personal tsunami.

Take this book slowly. Savor the real story and the way God carried Jeremy through it. And as you do, remember to sing these words in the darkest of nights:

Even when I cannot see...I still believe.

—Karen Kingsbury

New York Times bestselling author Karen Kingsbury is America’s Favorite Inspirational Novelist and author of *Unlocked* and *Shades of Blue*, along with the *Baxter Family* series. She has written more than 50 of her *Life-Changing Fiction™* titles, and there are nearly 15 million copies of her books in print. Learn more about Karen at KarenKingsbury.com or on Facebook.

PROLOGUE

It's Time

I'm not exactly sure how many minutes had passed when one of the friends gathered next door peeked into the room where I lay sprawled on the floor, crying out to God, weeping and longing.

"Jeremy," my friend said softly, "it's time."

I rose and walked back toward the other room, crying all the way. I couldn't believe it, but I knew: The moment had arrived to say goodbye to my wife.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

Hoosier Sweet Home

The journey that led me to that moment of desperation in a Southern California hospital room had begun 23 years earlier in the small, Midwestern town of Lafayette, Indiana.

I was born there on January 12, 1978, into an amazing Christian family. For as long as I can remember, my dad, Tom, was always involved in ministry, and my mom, Teri, seemed to have a direct line to God through her hours of prayer and time spent soaking in the Scriptures. The most important aspect of life in our home was Jesus. Today, my dad is the pastor of Harvest Chapel in Lafayette, a local fellowship that he started in 1993.

What's really mind-blowing is how *completely* messed up my parents' lives were up until a year before I was born. I hope sharing some of their story here—the dark, destructive path they were walking and the hope they discovered that changed everything—will illustrate the incredible miracle that God worked in their lives, in our family, and ultimately in my own life.

Collision Course

Each of my parents had grown up without knowing the Lord. As a teenager, my dad was heavily into alcohol and drugs, and he dropped out of school. He was a burly, long-haired, likeable guy whose friends called him “Bear”. The only time he wasn’t so likeable was when he had been drinking hard liquor, which he did now and then.

My mom led a much different early life, on the “opposite side of the tracks” from my dad. She was a more straight-laced girl who came from a stable home and had goals for the future. A good student in school, she had been accepted to Purdue University before beginning to date my dad when she was a senior in high school. She was drawn to him because he was so easy to talk to. When they became a couple, lots of people around them wondered why such a “good girl” as Teri would go out with such a “rebel” as Bear Camp.

They had reason to worry. My dad wasn’t a great influence on my mom. He not only drank and smoked pot; he also did other drugs and gradually got into dealing them. The couple moved in together, and their place became Party Central. My mom worked low-paying jobs (long-distance operator, hospital assistant) while my dad picked up sporadic construction work—nothing steady, though, since he was high much of the time.

In 1975, after my sister April was born, the partying at home slowed down a little bit, but my dad was still headed for trouble. By the fall of 1976, he was drinking more heavily than ever, doing cocaine, selling it, and becoming violent. On two occasions, he tore up a hotel room.

One day he came home and sunk down into a chair. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” he said to my mom. “I

feel so empty inside. It's not you. It's not April. These drugs are doing it. I'm not a good father to my daughter. I'm not married. I've made a mess of everything."

When Christmas Day 1976 arrived, he was so depressed that my mom thought he might try to harm himself. But he surprised her by saying, "I have to go to a church. I need to talk to a minister."

Those words shocked her. Church hadn't really occurred to her, but she was open to anything that might help.

After visiting two churches that weren't really the right fit for two hippies, my mom mentioned to my dad, "Some people at my job have been telling me about Jesus and their church, and they said we could come as we are, no matter what we look like or dress like. Could we try it out?" He agreed.

Rescued

It was January 2, the first Sunday of 1977. That morning, my dad had gone to help a buddy move. He stayed out all afternoon. When it was about time to go to church that evening, he called my mom at home.

"Hey, I'm at a Mexican restaurant," he said, slurring his words.

"Have you been drinking?" she asked.

"Oh, just a little," he said. "Don't worry, I'll pick you up and we'll all go." Now he sounded *really* intoxicated.

My mom was angry, and she started crying. "There's no way I'm going to church with you guys!" she said, and hung up. She left to go to church alone.

About 300 people were gathered for worship and teaching that night. My mom sat toward the back, in the middle of a row. A few minutes into the service, she heard a commo-

tion and glanced over her shoulder. It was my dad and his buddy, as drunk as could be, stumbling in. She slid down, but they saw her and started climbing over the pews to get to her. When they arrived and plopped down, my dad's inebriated friend started talking loudly. An usher walked up the aisle and asked him to come sit next to him, which he did. My mom was reeling. It felt like a circus.

About that time, the pastor began to preach. His message was about being delivered from the bondage of drugs and alcohol. Seriously! A few sentences in, my mom looked beside her and noticed that my dad had begun to sob. Throughout the message, he cried and cried and cried, burying his head in his hands.

When the "altar call" arrived at the end of the message, a youth pastor came up to them and asked, "Do you want to go forward?" My dad didn't need any coaxing. He jumped up and literally *ran* down the aisle to the front. His buddy wasn't far behind. My mom walked after them. The whole church came down and began to pray for them as my dad and his friend received the gift of new life in Jesus.

After the service, church leaders encouraged them with words of kindness and wisdom. They gave them a copy of *The Living Bible* and told them to start with the Gospel of John.

In this Assemblies of God church, the pastor had been praying for revival. That night, it descended on the church. The pastor couldn't stand alcohol, and he wasn't crazy about long-haired hippies. So, whom did the Lord use to bring revival? Who else: *Drunk hippies*. From that season, the church would launch a "Whosoever Ministry"—based on the idea that whosoever God brings into your path, *that's* who you reach out to with the love of Jesus.

Absorbing the news of my dad's conversion that night, my mom reacted with a kind of detached approval. Her attitude was, "Those guys *sure* needed that." But over the next week, as she read the Gospel of John—once she started, she couldn't put it down—her eyes were open to the fact that *she* was a sinner in need of a perfect Savior, too. When she realized what Christ had done for her, it hit her hard.

One night, she sat in her living-room chair and cried out, "Lord, I am so sorry!" That was the clincher for her. At that moment she surrendered completely and prayed, "I will go anywhere, do anything. Whatever You ask, I'm Yours."

Those few weeks marked a drastic change in my parents' lives. Three weeks later, on January 22, 1977, they exchanged vows and were married in that church. A year and ten days after they got saved, I was born. By then, they were well on their way to laying the foundation for our family with Christ at the center.

I am so glad I came along *after* God got hold of my parents. I only know about their pre-salvation struggles through stories and photos. What I remember most is being raised in a home where my mom and dad were on fire with the love of Jesus and a desire to share it with others. My dad always seemed to have a shepherd's heart, even though he wasn't a pastor yet when I was a child. My parents weren't perfect, of course, but I knew where their hearts and minds were focused. They put the Lord first. What I saw when we went to church together was exactly what I saw at home. They were genuine, sold-out followers of Jesus.

Fed By Faith

I am the second of four children. In addition to my older sister, April, I have two younger brothers, Jared and Joshua.

Josh has Down syndrome, and he is an incredible blessing to me and to our whole family. We all share tons of happy memories from childhood, even though it wasn't an easy or comfortable life. My family was *super poor*. My dad was barely literate, and he didn't have a formal education or any particular technical skills—he miraculously passed his general equivalency diploma (GED) test well into adulthood—so he bounced from odd job to odd job, doing whatever work he could land. His income was sparse and infrequent.

This isn't one of those sob stories that I want you to hear and go, "Awwwwwww." While we didn't have a lot of material comforts, the truth is that being poor gave us the opportunity to see God move in many ways that we might not have experienced otherwise. We truly lived by faith, because we had no other choice.

There were times when we wouldn't have money for food from Tuesday until payday on Friday. The cupboards would be bare, and that's no exaggeration. Without saying anything to anyone outside of our family, my parents would initiate a time of prayer. We would get on our knees and pray that God would provide food for us. Sometimes—fairly often, it seemed like—we would wake up the next morning and find that people had set groceries on our front porch.

People gave us other stuff, too...including many interesting vehicles. We had about fifteen different cars when I was a kid—cars like rusty Ford Pintos and barely running Chevys. They would last about a year before dying, but we were thankful for each one of them.

Our auto adventures gave us lots of opportunities to create lasting memories. For example, one day my mom drove our hand-me-down Pinto to pick up my sister and two of her

friends from Girls Scouts. After the girls climbed into the car, my mom noticed that one of April's second-grade friends was looking around the back seat with big eyes.

"Um, where did you get this car?" the little girl asked.

"Oh, a friend gave it to us," my mom replied.

The girl looked around the car again and, in a cute little voice just loud enough to be heard, said, "Hmmm, some friend." My mom smiled and chuckled up in the front seat.

Another day, my mom picked me up from church in a different clunker. The floorboards were so rusted out that I could see the ground under my feet. No joke. As I got in and closed the passenger-side door, I noticed a belt hanging from the door.

"What's this?" I asked.

She said, "You gotta hold on to it. Buckle up and hang on to the belt, because if you don't, the door will fly open when we go around curves." I held on to that piece of fake leather like my life depended on it. It probably did.

Okay, here's the last car story, but it has *got* to be the harshest one for a teenage boy to deal with: One day when I was in seventh grade, I was hanging out after school talking with my girlfriend at the time. She was a cheerleader, and I was this ultra-cool, stud football player. (We had the kind of relationship where you are "going out" but not really going anywhere.) All of a sudden here comes my dad to pick me up, driving a Pinto that sounded about as loud as a drag racer. The muffler had fallen off some time before. All of the kids hanging around turned to look at the rusty, beat-up car as I walked over and tried to open the passenger-side door as quickly as I could. It wouldn't open (surprise), so I had to climb into the car through the window. This was not exactly a popularity boost for a 13-year-old boy.

Sometimes I felt embarrassed about being poor, but looking back now I can laugh and give thanks that we had *any* cars to get us around and *any* food to eat. Tough situations like those can build our character and prepare us for harder days to come. Not only that, but the kind of faith my parents showed me in our home was *real*, and it stuck with me. Just like a lot of kids, I went through a “punk stage” when I was ungrateful and bummed about all the things my family couldn’t afford. But now, I am so incredibly thankful for those lean times. Little did I know that having nothing else except for God to lean on was providing much-needed preparation for what I would walk through later in life.

A Sure Foundation

My parents also instilled the word of God into my life early on. Having come out of such a messed-up background and then getting radically saved, they knew the impact of putting down deep roots in the Scriptures. They hosted a Friday-night Bible study just about every week (to replace the wild parties they had hosted on Fridays before coming to know Christ). People would hang out until three or four in the morning—talking about God, singing, praying.

I gave my heart to the Lord when I was four or five years old, knowing what I was doing. What it meant to say “yes” to Jesus had been explained to me, and I was as receptive and knowledgeable as any young child could be. I can’t even remember what it felt like *not* to have faith and trust in the Lord as my foundation.

When I entered adolescence, a few bombs came flying into the mix trying to blow up that solid foundation. In junior high school, I started to stray. I had always been a “church kid”, but

I went wayward for a period of about three years. To be honest, I just really wanted to explore what the world had to offer. I got involved in school sports, especially football. Football and all that goes with it—the coolness, the swagger, the popularity—became a big part of my identity. I wanted to be liked, to run with the “in” crowd. I also started partying pretty hard.

Don’t get me wrong: It’s not as if I forgot about God. I always had the knowledge that I was out on a shaky limb during this rebellious season. I experienced times of repentance when I would cry out, “God, I’m tired of this junk! I’m sorry. I don’t want to do this anymore.”

But then I would go right back to school and get sucked back into what I had been doing. My parents didn’t know everything. I tried to keep my wandering a secret, because I didn’t want to let them down. (Later on, they told me they’d been aware that I was veering into dangerous territory as my teen years progressed. The Lord revealed to their hearts that all was not right, and they asked Him for wisdom about how much space to give me.)

Up to that point, I had done everything pretty well. I was a “good kid.” I didn’t want to get caught, either. I knew my family was the real deal, on the right path, with solid answers about life. *I* was the one acting like an idiot, playing the role of prodigal in search of the next thrill.

Whenever God would press on me with conviction, I would confess my sin and return to Him...but then I would slip right back out of His arms. I wanted to do right, but I couldn’t. Paul’s words were true of me:

*“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.
For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see*

another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”¹

Wretched is exactly how I felt most of the time through ninth and tenth grades—never really happy for more than a few fleeting moments. The fun never seemed to last. I was aware of what I was doing. I knew it didn’t line up with who God wanted me to be, but I wasn’t angry at Him. I realized my own curiosity had led me to a search for meaning outside the safe bounds of His ways. James expresses it well in his New Testament book: “...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”²

I needed a lifeline, and—just in time—one was about to be tossed my way.



¹ *Romans 7:21-25*

² *James 1:14*