

# *From Despair to Delight*

*By Rhyann Taylor*

Personal testimonies are a window into the mighty power of God. Young people that are devoted and transformed by God are an inspiration. Here is the interesting story of God working in Rhyann's life (Jonathan's wife).

I was born into a Catholic family and raised on the tiny island of Guam in the Pacific. I am Chamorro (the native people of Guam) and Filipino. I have a strong-at-heart mother and father currently living on the island. I have two sisters living in the States who are 6 and 7 years older; both are married and have beautiful children.

Guam is approximately 30 miles long, one mile to 8½ miles wide, and about 225 square miles in area. It is 1,500 miles east of Manila, in the Philippines; about 3,000 miles west of Honolulu, Hawaii; and 5,000 miles west of San Francisco.

When I was younger, we had daily prayer; but I didn't grow up really knowing Jesus or understanding God's character. The only prayers that I clearly remember from childhood were the blessing for our food and the rosary. These prayers were just memorized, and I didn't understand them. My parents often argued, and it affected me more as I grew older. My childhood was filled with lies and secrets in the family, and promises were not always kept.

One day, when I was around the age of 6, I saw something on TV that caused my little heart to break: My sister and I were building houses with playing cards, and a movie portraying Jesus and His crucifixion caught my attention. As I beheld the scene, I started to cry. My tears hurt my mom's heart; she saw that I was crying because of what I was seeing. So she turned off the TV. If I correctly recall this, she comforted me before I returned to where my sister was. I then made a cross shape with some cards. I was still sad because of the pain I saw. Maybe I understood that the man being nailed to the cross was called Jesus. Perhaps I was told before that

He was the Son of God. Whatever the case may be, I am certain I didn't understand why He was being nailed to the cross.

Life had its bumps in the road and there were times where we had it difficult. We moved from place to place. My parents were not wise about our money, which often caused problems. My elementary school years were great. I loved my school, and I was a very independent child. When I entered middle school, I became like everyone else. I was introduced to many things the world offered. I became deceitful toward my mom and often kept secrets. In the 7th and 8th grades, I was frequently sad because of my relationships and problems at home. I was more discerning of the deceitfulness around me, and I became distrustful. My relationships with both my parents suffered during this time of my life. Instead of turning to them, I distanced myself from them and replaced them with secular things. I focused a lot on my appearance, my relationships, and the negative things that went on around me. I didn't know how to properly handle my emotions; instead of overcoming them, they overcame me, and I would resort to self-harm. In my heart, I was trapped in a ditch of sadness. I wanted all the pain to end, but I didn't want to die.

In the 8th grade, I had quite a few good friends. Some of them weren't the best influences, but I was a bad influence on them too. I was introduced to vaping, and I was foolish enough to think it was cool. [For those who do not know, a vape (verb form: also vape, vaped, vaping), also called an electronic cigarette or e-cigarette, is an electronic or battery device, usually in a shape similar to a pen or cigarette, that produces flavored steam containing nicotine that you can inhale and exhale into and from your lungs through your mouth.] I didn't realize I was slowly killing myself and forming an addiction; had I known, I probably wouldn't have cared. By my freshman year, I was vaping nearly every day. My mom found out, near the middle of the year, about what I was doing;

**2** it broke her heart. After talking to her about it, I decided to stop vaping. Relationships and family continued to confirm my distrust. I began life as a happy child, but I had become suicidal, hopeless, empty, lost, and miserable. I did whatever I wanted to, and I pursued worldly pleasures. I even tried to find happiness in relationships, but none of these things satisfied me. I always wanted more than I had, but materialistic things only gave me temporary happiness.

As a child, my hopes were dashed so often in my teen years that I doubted we would ever get some of the simple “luxuries” in life. I loved going places and never really liked staying at home, but my family hadn’t consistently owned a vehicle since I was in elementary school. (When we had a vehicle, it quickly broke down; and one even got stolen by the person who sold it to us.) I had lost faith in the idea of owning a car again. We occasionally rented a vehicle, but it was always a blessing that didn’t last. We were financially unstable, and I doubted my parents whenever they said we would get a car. That all changed in the first week of May 2020, when I was 15. I remember my dad coming home with his work truck and taking my mom and me to a car dealership to finance a car. I didn’t know much about financing a car; my focus was on the reality that we would soon own one after so many years. My mom and I were very happy. I remember I sat down in my house and actually prayed, acknowledging God and thanking Him. I didn’t know who God was on a personal level, but I knew He existed, and I believed that having a car again was His doing. God knew how much owning a car meant to me; He knew blessing us with a vehicle would be enough to arouse my curiosity about Him.

Sincerely thanking God for the car was the first time that I understandingly acknowledged Him in prayer. That week, I began reading a Bible that my mom had placed in my room. I started at Genesis because it was the first book. Who would’ve thought a loss of hope in something so simple would be something God could use to draw me to Him? I admittedly wasn’t consistent in reading and praying, but it was definitely the start of a new chapter in my life.

In the beginning of my walk with Jesus, I was still very worldly. I said bad words and still cared

way too much about my appearance, but God didn’t give up on me. I dated an online friend, and we tried to make our relationship Christ-centered. It wasn’t perfect, but with the knowledge and light God gave us, we tried to honor Him. A few months into our relationship, my special friend introduced me to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. We were both born and raised Catholics, and he explained to me how Seventh-day Adventists teach from the Bible alone. After more research, he suggested we convert from being Catholics to be Seventh-day Adventists. That day, we both decided that we were no longer Catholics and were now Seventh-day Adventists. He had also discovered there was a church in one village of Guam called “Agana Heights SDA Church.” We immediately started joining the Agana Heights SDA church services online.

There was a time, in our relationship, when I was strongly convinced by God that we needed to break up. In some ways, our relationship was still worldly, and we didn’t build each other up. As much as we tried to make the relationship Christ-centered, our focus was on other things. This resulted in a poor relationship with God, which naturally affected our relationship with one another. Because of the infatuation I had toward him, the idea of breaking up made me cry for days, but I knew what God was asking of me. I finally told him what I felt God was impressing on my heart; but, after talking and praying, we ended up continuing our relationship. (Yes, I know that not listening to God was foolish.)

A month or two later, there was a special speaker who was going to share a message for two Sabbaths. I really wanted to go; and, after telling my parents about it, we attended in person. We soon frequented the services in person and eventually became members of the church. My relationship was mostly online, and we were looking forward to our senior year because we were both going to attend the same school in person. About a month after attending the church in person, the Adventist school, called “Guam Adventist Academy,” planned to play their instruments at my church. After I saw and heard a little about the school, I was in love with it. I sat down in one pew and eagerly waited for the service to start. During the announcements, a kind lady came up to the podium and invited anyone interested in having their kids attend GAA (Guam Adventist

Academy) to speak with her after the service. The moment I heard the invitation, I immediately felt God was speaking to me. I also felt stuck, since the person I was dating and I were looking forward to seeing each other the next school year. I texted him. I felt impressed, by God, that he was watching the online service and knew that I was being impressed to transfer to GAA. During the sermon, the speaker read a verse that God impressed upon my heart: Hebrews 3:15, "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." This verse was repeated twice; each time it hit my heart, and I knew that God was impressing me to go to this school.

The relationship I had with the person I was dating eventually ended. He didn't want to continue an online relationship any further. Though the breakup left me miserable for some time, God gave me the strength to overcome the sadness and also gave me something exciting to look forward to. When I told my mom about GAA, she mentioned how expensive private schools are. But she concluded that, if God really was calling me to attend this school, He would make a way for it to happen. She found out that the school's monthly payments were based on work income, and there was even a discount for a period of time. It was a huge blessing! I had faith that I would attend because I knew that God was calling me. Since this was the case, I didn't need to worry about the tuition, uniforms, or transportation. We discovered a bus service for private-school students operated on the island, and it even had a bus stop near our house! There was also a church member, whom I called Aunty, who only lived five minutes away from me. She offered to give me rides too, since her kids also attended GAA. The payments were not a problem and the transportation was covered. When my mom and I went to the school so I could get sized for uniforms, the blessings didn't end! The principal was so generous; she gave me free uniform bottoms, and they even fit me! Students who no longer needed them had donated them. We had enough money for all my uniforms.

I attended GAA for my senior year, and all my prayers that aligned with God's will were answered. There weren't as many students attending the school as I thought; it was small, but it was so cool to see how teachers had a close relationship with their students. I loved having a

Bible class; and, on Friday mornings, the school would gather in the chapel and have worship time, with singing and listening to a message by a special speaker. The principal even generously allowed me to use her classroom during my breaks to do my devotionals.

GAA does something amazing called "Senior Sabbaths." This involves the seniors leading the worship service in the Seventh-day Adventist churches on the island. I chose to share my testimony and my current struggle with fanaticism in diet with my church for the Senior Sabbath in November 2022.

A couple of months before, as I was nearing the end of my junior year, I noticed that I focused on food significantly more than I should have. I thought about food constantly and often overate. Because I didn't want to make my appetite an idol or become its slave, I learned self-control by not giving my body what it wanted. (I took it to an extreme, though.) I struggled so much in this area of my life that I became really skinny. My heart would condemn me to thinking that I had sinned. This resulted in me not giving my body what it needed. I struggled with this for more than 6 months until it dragged me into a deep pit of inner pain and depression. I prayed every day in that pit; I prayed for God to help me overcome. I was constantly reminded how God was pursuing me, and He was going to help me overcome. Though I was having self-control to an extreme, God knew my heart and saw I didn't want to serve my flesh, but wanted to serve Him instead. I shared this testimony for Senior Sabbath; and I told my church that, during my experience, God hadn't stopped reminding me He was still pursuing me. That same day, I was also baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church with my parents.

Though I felt great after my baptism, Satan wasn't giving up and tried to make sure I always felt a deep sadness. God always reassured me that everything was going to be OK and that He hadn't left me. In my journey with food, He helped me to understand that we should eat for strength and not for pleasure, and that we are not only to eat the right things at the right time, but that we are to eat the right amount of food our body needs for strength and nourishment. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do,

4 do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31. “Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength and not for drunkenness!” Ecclesiastes 10:17. Though this struggle lasted for months, God has given me the victory over appetite and fanaticism. Truly He has heard and continues to hear my prayers, answering them in His perfect way and time.

Accepting Jesus into my life was a journey. There were still lots of trials and battles, but I had something different that I didn’t have before. I had confidence and assurance that there was someone who truly loved me and wouldn’t leave me, fail me, lie to me, or hurt me. I understood through experience that there was someone who I could trust and put my faith in, someone who wouldn’t let me down. He could help, deliver, strengthen, and comfort me when I was in pain. These assurances are all I need to endure hard times. I also gained the hope of a better life and future when Jesus returns.

I got married 10 months after my graduation to an amazing man who I was friends with in church, named Jonathan Taylor. God told me to break up with the person I was dating in high school, and I didn’t listen to Him. When the relationship ended, I didn’t understand, at the moment, why things were happening the way they were. God later revealed to me that He had someone else for me—a better relationship. When God told me to give up something, I should have trusted that He had something better in store for my life. However, that person I dated in high school introduced me to the Adventist faith, and he helped me become an Adventist. Because of this, I am thankful for the relationship that I once had.

Before I accepted Jesus into my life, I was weary and lost, but God pursued me and did not deliver me into the hand of the enemy. (See Psalm 34:14-22.) He drew me to Himself through something as simple as having a car. I came to Him, and He did not cast me out (See John 6:37). As I drew near to Him, He drew near to me. (See James 4:8.) I wasn’t satisfied with anything this world offered, but when I came to Jesus and

entered a relationship with Him, He satisfied my hunger and thirst for fulfillment. I praise and thank God for the trials and pain I’ve experienced growing up. I can now say with confidence that a life with God in it is a different and better life. When, as a child, I cried at the sight of Jesus being nailed to a cross, I didn’t understand the significance. Now I know He took the punishment we deserved, the wages of sin. I know He nailed our sins to His cross and forgave us for them. He made it possible for us to live with Him for eternity if we truly demonstrate the obedience of faith.

God has rescued me from the dominion of darkness and transferred me into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (See Colossians 1:13-14.) Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found; I was blind, but now I see.

I will leave you with this beautiful passage from *Steps to Christ*:

“As you see the enormity of sin, as you see yourself as you really are, do not give up to despair. It was sinners that Christ came to save. We have not to reconcile God to us, but—O wondrous love!—God in Christ is “reconciling the world unto Himself.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. He is wooing, by His tender love, the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of his children, as is God with those He seeks to save. No one could plead more tenderly with the transgressor. No human lips ever poured out more tender entreaties to the wanderer than does He. All His promises, His warnings, are but the breathing of unutterable love.”—*Steps to Christ*, 35.

Now I get to work at Harvestime Books answering phones to take orders. It is exciting to hear how God is working through the small, truth-packed books leaving our ministry. I also am illustrating pictures for toddler books about the Ten Commandments. This is a missing part in children’s literature. I look forward to introducing them when they are finished.

Let us endure for His promises are sure, Your sister in Christ, —*Rhyann Taylor*