



My TESTIMONY

James Hughes

THE 20'S

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Let's Pray!

Lord Jesus, I pray that you speak through the raw, emotionally charged words impressed upon your tapestry.

Take hold of the dry bones, Lord, and breathe new life into them with your tender, loving presence.

Let your Holy Spirit manifest within their hearts, igniting a place where only You can dwell.

Bring healing and comfort to those burdened by circumstances not aligned with your will.

Lord Jesus, in this very moment, draw me deeper into Your Kingdom, bringing Your light and love into every corner of my life.

Amen

Note to the Reader

This book is not polished.

It is not safe.

It is not approved by a church board, nor filtered to protect a brand.

It is my truth.

The 20s is the story I once hoped would never need to be told, a record of collapse, silence, mercy, and survival.

If you've been wounded by the church, if you've sat in pews praying that the pain would leave your body, if you've ever wondered if the Holy Spirit stayed after everyone else walked away, this book is for you.

There will be moments that feel too raw.

You may cry.

You may rage.

You may feel your memories begin to stir.

Let them.



The same Spirit who carried me through every fracture is present here now.

Not to retraumatise you, but to walk with you back through the places no one else was willing to go.

There is no altar call in these pages.

No three-step recovery plan.

Only this: a hand reaching back, whispering, You're not alone.

He was always with you.

He still is.

Chapter 1 - Collapse and Exposure

The room wasn't spinning. It was collapsing.

Everything I thought I had carefully kept hidden, the silence I'd mastered, the smiles I'd rehearsed,

The altar calls I'd clung to suddenly came undone.

This chapter doesn't start with triumph. It starts with the sound of my breath catching in my throat the moment I realised... I had to speak.

The trauma I'd buried deep didn't stay buried. The attraction I'd prayed away didn't disappear.

And the Holy Spirit? He didn't leave.

I didn't know what was more terrifying: Those who took me outside the safety of my refuge in the church to tell me, "You're an abomination," or the undeniable truth that the Holy Spirit never left me.

It was easier to believe that I had wandered too far. That the presence I felt in worship wasn't real. That the warmth, the trembling, the moments where my chest would lift as if something holy had breathed inside me, were just emotional responses or manipulations of the moment.

But that wasn't the truth. Because even when I was at my lowest, Even when shame soaked my soul like a storm, He was there. Still speaking. Still comforting. Still confronting me with love I couldn't explain.

Through my healing and trauma journey, I've learned that as you move forward, light exposes darkness.

"For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, nor anything concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."
(Luke 8:17)

Not everyone celebrates your deliverance. Especially those who were empowered by your silence.

I endured conversion-based trauma at the hands of C3 Church Carlingford and its senior leadership during my childhood and early formative years.

It was rooted in their chronic refusal to understand how I discerned and obeyed the Holy Spirit for myself, and how my autism shaped that process.

The ripple effects touched my friendships, my confidence, and my faith for over a decade.

And even returned to its leadership in failure. Not because I walked away from God, but because I refused to let others play God over me.

What was done is now illegal. And it was always unbiblical.

False doctrine must be exposed and uprooted.

I'm grateful for the circle committed to full restoration, so that one day, the whole story can be told.

This story is not a vendetta. It is not bitterness. It is the harvest of healing, and the sacred retelling of a decade that was nearly lost to shame.

I spent my early teens holding my breath, not realising I was suffocating. I lived between moments of hope and despair, clinging to promises, grasping at miracles, and wondering if the people around me could ever love me fully without first dissecting me theologically.

Every time I tried to share, the questions would come first. The accusations cloaked in concern. The prayers for deliverance I never asked for. The quickened glances and awkward silences that filled rooms where I had once felt safe.

I learned to become fluent in spiritual camouflage. To worship with my hands raised, while my heart cowered. To lead communion, while hiding from my reflection.

But there was always that voice. The one that pierced through the performance. The one that whispered, "I know you."

Not the version they wanted me to be. Not the broken project to be fixed. But the beloved son who had already been found.

The Holy Spirit never needed me to pretend.

He simply needed me to stay.

And so I did. Through the panic attacks in the bathroom stall, through the meetings with leaders who couldn't see me, through the nights where I cried out, begging for this to pass from me.

I stayed.

And somewhere in that staying, in that refusal to let go, I found something deeper than survival. I found the kind of faith that isn't afraid of fire.

Faith that doesn't flinch when the crowd walks away. Faith that can sit in silence and still believe. Faith that trusts the Holy Spirit even when the church misreads Him.

I was never called to perform. I was called to abide.

And abiding meant honesty.

It meant letting go of the fear that telling the truth would make the Spirit retreat.

It meant confessing that I could no longer hold my breath just to make others comfortable.

It meant facing the memories I tried to forget. The youth group confessions that turned into church-wide whispers. The counsellor who said, "That's not God." The altar call where I collapsed and was still left unchanged.

It meant looking at all of it and saying: I am still here. And so is He.

Collapse doesn't mean absence. It means exposure.

And exposure, when guided by the Spirit, is the beginning of true deliverance.

The kind that doesn't erase the past, but redeems it.

This chapter of my life was not clean. It didn't come with tidy testimonies or well-scripted sermons. It was messy. Unfolding. Ongoing.

But even here, I testify: God is faithful.

He met me not at the altar, but in the rubble. Not in the shouts of deliverance, but in the stillness after the storm. Not in the validation of others, but in the quiet assurance of His presence.

He never left.

And neither will I.

This is not the end of my faith. It is the beginning of a deeper one. A grounded, gritted, Spirit-led knowing that what collapses can still be rebuilt.

Not by might. Not by power. But by His Spirit.

Chapter 2 - When Silence Isn't Neutral

They told me I had to speak.

Not pray. Not listen. Not wrestle. Not discern.

Just speak.

Loudly. Publicly. Unquestioningly.

It came first through phone calls. Cloaked in concern, padded with spiritual language. At first, it sounded like care. But by the time I found myself sitting across from senior leadership, I understood it wasn't a conversation, it was a command. I was to take the platform, the pulpit, the social space, whatever opportunity presented, and speak out against the plebiscite. Speak with conviction. Speak as a man of God. Speak their truth as if it were my own.

But I could not. Because it wasn't.

The moment they asked, my gut turned. Not from the weight of the topic, but from the pressure to speak where the Spirit had not spoken. My theology was not fully formed. My convictions were still being refined in the secret place. There was no clear answer in me, only a quiet, grieving hesitation that the Spirit Himself had not moved in this yet. And what made me sick was the way they demanded a loyalty not to Christ, but to their cause.

The Lord had not established this in the tapestry of my soul.

And so I said no.

Not rudely. Not rebelliously. I simply could not declare what God had not written.

And in that moment, everything shifted.

There was an offence. There was distance. I was no longer trustworthy. Not because I sinned. Not because I rebelled. But because I would not parrot their conviction in exchange for spiritual belonging.

The very church that taught me to listen to the Spirit could not tolerate when that same Spirit led me differently.

There was no support as I navigated that grief. No pastoral covering as I sat with the fear of being misunderstood.

I was left to carry the weight alone. And eventually, I left. I found a new church. One that was affirming. They called themselves inclusive.

They welcomed me, at least at first. It felt like oxygen after being underwater.

For a brief moment, I believed I had found a safe place. A soft landing. Somewhere, I could figure things out in peace.

But peace was not what I found.
What I found was abuse.
Physical. Violent. Confusing.

It came from someone within the very space that had promised healing. A person I had trusted. I still cannot explain how I ended up in their home the next day. My memory from that time is dazed and fractured.

I was foggy, unsure of myself, and completely disoriented, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. All I remember is the feeling: I was worth nothing. No one wanted me. Not C3. Not even this new place. I felt like spiritual property no one wanted to claim.

I walked out of their unit without speaking. I didn't know where I was going, only that I needed to go. The sky was overcast. It felt like the whole world was grey. I wandered into the nearby park. The grass was still damp from the morning. And just beyond it, the cliff face.

There was no dramatic plan. No long goodbye. I just... decided. This would be quickest. This would be final.

I stood for a moment, looking out. I don't even know what I was thinking. I wasn't crying. I wasn't angry. I was empty. As if the breath of God had left me, and I was nothing more than dust again. I stepped forward onto the grass, heart pounding, but will numb. My body picked up pace. I began to run. I could see the edge drawing closer. It was going to be fast.

And then something happened.
I cannot explain it in natural terms.
It was as if I ran into something invisible.
A wall, not made of wood or stone, but Spirit.

My body collapsed backwards.
I did not trip.
I did not slip.
I was pushed back.

Thrown to the ground, completely winded. I lay there in shock, staring up at the sky. My chest rose and fell erratically. Tears came before I knew why. I was not injured, but I was broken.

What just happened?
It was like the presence of God Himself stood between me and the fall. I felt it, not just on my skin, but in my spirit. A protective force. Not wrathful.

Not scolding. Just deeply, intimately determined that I would not die that day.

I wept. Not because I was saved, but because I didn't think I was worth saving.

I had been pushed out of the church for obeying the Spirit.
I had been abused by someone who claimed to affirm me.
And yet... He came.

Not with a sermon. Not with condemnation. Just a wall of mercy strong enough to stop me in full flight.

I lay there, staring at the sky. My chest rose in tremors. I had no idea what had just happened, only that I had not jumped. I had not fallen. I had been stopped.

And I wasn't sure if I felt grateful... or cursed. I was still alone.

Still bleeding inside. Still unsure whether this life, or my place in it, was truly safe. I eventually got up, still dazed.

The grass left patches of dew across the back of my legs. My throat was dry. My soul is even drier.

I didn't know what else to do, so I walked.

And as I walked, I made another decision.

This time, the train station.

It would be easier. There were no gates. No alarms. No one to stop me. I could buy a coffee on the way, something final. A small, meaningless ritual for a goodbye I couldn't say aloud. I would sip slowly, wait for the train to arrive, and then... that would be it.

I made my way there in silence. No music. No prayer. I was already resigned to the act. The numbness was setting in again, this time even colder than before. The kind of emptiness that makes dying feel like mercy. I walked toward the platform and positioned myself near the edge. My eyes locked forward, expression blank, soul folded inwards.

The train was coming. I could hear the distant clatter of its wheels. I could feel the vibration against the concrete. I edged forward. My foot inched closer.

And then, arms.

Warmth wrapped around me from behind. Not a tackle. Not a restraint. Just... an embrace. The kind you don't expect, but instantly recognise.

“Hey,” said a familiar voice.

I turned. It was a friend. A uni student.
He was late to class. He was never late to class.

Yet here he was, walking down the stairs just as I was about to fall off the map.

I stood frozen in his arms. He didn’t ask what I was doing. He didn’t need to. His presence said everything.

It said, You’re not invisible. You’re not lost. You’re still here, and someone still sees you.

We started walking together. I didn’t know where we were going until I realised he was leading us to the café. The one I had planned to go to before the end. The one I had already forgotten. The one I had assigned to my final moment. But now, I sat there with him, not dying, but talking. Not saying goodbye, but confessing. Not disappearing, but being found.

I told him everything. Slowly at first. Then all at once. He listened. Without fear. Without fixing. He simply held the space with me. When I finished, he picked up his phone and called in support. No questions. No hesitations.

Together, we walked back to the train station.
The same station where I planned to die.
This time, I did not stand near the edge.

He walked me right up to the person who would care for me, and I went with them, tired, broken, but alive. That night, I did not sleep alone. I was safe. I cried, trembled, and shook beneath the weight of what I had just survived.

I experienced what I can only call an identity crisis. Not in the modern pop-psychology sense.

In the biblical one. Everything I thought I was, everything I thought I had lost, collapsed. But unlike the first collapse at the start of this chapter, this one was different. It was not the collapse of destruction. It was the collapse before reconstruction.

I didn't know who I was anymore. But I knew, somehow, that I was still wanted. Still seen. Still His.

The Holy Spirit didn't just send a wall to stop me. He sent a person. Late to class. Perfectly timed for mercy. I could not deny it. Not then. Not now.

God saved me twice in one day.
Once through supernatural force.
And once through supernatural friendship.

That was the beginning of the undoing.
The unravelling of shame.
The severing of man-made religion.

The first steps into the wilderness that would become my sanctuary.

I didn't come out of that day with answers.

But I came out of it alive.
And sometimes, that is the most sacred miracle of all.

Chapter 3 - Descent

I did not know that healing could feel like a betrayal. That being led by the Spirit could feel like disobedience to the institution. Or that silence could scream so loudly it would fracture me from the inside.

I stopped attending church altogether. I had tried. I had forgiven. I had served again. I had walked through the doors of a sister church with a cautious but open heart. They greeted me with a theology stitched together from fragments of Christianity and something else entirely. They called it love. But love does not confuse. Love does not manipulate under the guise of inclusion. Love does not parade itself as acceptance while asking for your soul in return.

They preached Christ, but dressed Him in something foreign. They used His name while hollowing out His truth. My heart, already weary, could not make sense of the mixture. My spirit recoiled. And so I withdrew.

And this time, I did not withdraw in righteous protest. I collapsed inward.

The depression was not loud. It was slow, like a fog that wrapped around me until I could no longer see out. The kind of darkness that made simple things hard. Washing dishes. Getting out of bed. Answering messages. Hope became a language I forgot how to speak.

I was no longer working from a sense of purpose. I was existing. Just enough to get by. Just enough to keep people from asking questions. But not enough to be present in my own life.

I turned to escape. I will not name it, because it does not deserve that kind of recognition. But I numbed myself. It felt easier to sink into comfort that demanded nothing of me than to stand in the presence of a God I could no longer feel.

And yet, He never left.

Even as I spiralled, the Holy Spirit went before me. In subtle ways. In quiet moments. There were no visions. No burning bushes. Just impressions. Whispers. Safety where there should have been harm.

A gentle hand pulling me back from cliffs I did not know I was standing on.

The identity crisis was not about labels. It was worth it. Am I still called? Am I still loved? Am I still wanted? I knew the words. I knew the theology. But they rang hollow against the ache in my chest.

I had failed, or so I thought. I had walked away from the only world I had known. I was told if I did not submit to the church, I could not submit to God. And so I believed, at least for a while, that the silence of my inbox was evidence of heaven's silence too.

But the Spirit is not so easily evicted. He remained.

Then came the injury.

It was my first real job. A campus IT role that looked impressive on paper. Managing networks. Over a thousand students. Systems and infrastructure that hummed under the weight of daily demand. But behind the title was an environment that taught me I was disposable. High pressure. Greek-run. Ruthlessly dismissive. I was barely twenty.

I remember the moment. I was under a desk, checking cables, and stood up too fast. My head slammed into solid steel. The force knocked me sideways. I stumbled, dizzy, my ears ringing. My balance was gone. I felt sick.

I called out.

No one came.

They were mid-audit. No one could be seen breaking protocol, not even to assist a colleague who had just hit their head. I was told to sit quietly. To wait. To stay out of sight. Policy had to take precedence.

I could barely think straight, but I knew something was wrong. Everything inside me screamed for help, but all I got was avoidance. Blank stares. Polite deflection. Not even an ice pack.

Somehow, I still do not remember how I got outside. A major road stood between me and safety. I remember the cars. I remember the fear. Then nothing.

The next moment I remember, I was on a bus. I had no recollection of getting on it. I was sitting upright. Holding onto the rail. My bag was with me. No signs of the confusion I had felt moments earlier. I arrived at the medical centre. I walked in. My name was called. My blood pressure was checked. My vision was tested. I told them I had hit my head at work, and no one helped me.

And they looked horrified.
I was safe. But shaken.

Later that evening, my phone buzzed. A message. It was leadership from C3 Church Carlingford. After years of silence. After everything. After the pain. The therapy. The distance.

Suddenly, they were reaching out.
I do not believe in coincidence. I believe in timing. And this was timed like an arrow meant to pierce a wound that had just begun to heal.

The moment I needed restoration, I was offered a cycle.
And I took it.

Not because I trusted them. But because I did not trust myself anymore.

I was fragile. I was still bleeding. And they offered familiarity. Language I understood. Even if that language had once been used to control me.

So I said yes.

I said yes to coffee catch-ups that were really theological interrogations. I said yes to “check-ins” that were really veiled corrections. I said yes to “we missed you” that felt more like “you should never have left.”

I returned to the very environment that once told me the Holy Spirit could not dwell in someone like me.

And He still stayed.

I could not feel Him the way I once did. The fire had quieted. But He was not gone. He was with me through every double-take. Every loaded question.

Every moment I sat in a pew and wondered if I was just a project to be fixed.

The trauma was not just in what was said. It was in what was implied.

The suggestion that my worth was conditional. That I could worship, but only if I kept silent. That I could serve, but only if I conformed.

That I could belong, but only if I erased the parts of myself that made them uncomfortable.

But the Holy Spirit is not afraid of discomfort.

He never asked me to disappear.
He never asked me to fit.

He asked me to remain.
And so I remained, but not for them.

I remained for the still, small voice that had carried me across a road I could not see. That had placed me on a bus I could not remember boarding. That had brought me to safety when systems and people had failed me.

He was there.
Through the daze.
Through the confusion.
Through the re-entry into places that had once labelled me
unclean.

The trauma of that injury was not just physical. It was spiritual. It revealed the cracks in every institution I had once trusted. It exposed the fragility of the systems I thought would protect me. And it forced me to ask again: where is God?

The answer came not in the voice of a pastor or the arms of a congregation. It came in the quiet. In the places where I had nothing left to perform.

In the spaces where all I could do was be.
And being was enough.

Chapter 4 - The Sunday I Never Returned

There is no sharp edge to this ending.

No final sermon. No closing song. No prayer line or pastor's handshake.

Just absence.

It was not a rebellion. It was not a moment of rage.
It was something quieter. Heavier.

Like fog settling over a valley. I do not remember the last Sunday I attended C3 Church Carlingford.

But I remember what it felt like to disappear.

I kept going, long after I stopped showing up.
I smiled when I did not believe.
I lifted my hands when I could not feel.
I gave answers when I had none.

And all the while, something inside me was slipping further away,
until my body finally followed my spirit out the door.

But I have no recollection of the final step.
And that is how you know it was trauma.

When the soul has no safe place to collapse,
It leaves in pieces.

It dissociates.

Protects itself by making the moment vanish.
Because sometimes, even the act of exiting becomes too painful to hold.

And so there is no clear memory of the goodbye.
Only the ache of having been somewhere too long.

I have since been told I raised a concern.
That a letter, authored by my father, was sent through my hands,
and it sparked a reaction.

But I do not recall writing it.
I do not recall the fallout.
I only know that what followed was final.

And what should have been a cry for help
was treated like a breach of loyalty.

That detail will return in later chapters, when the weight of spiritual
abuse is more fully revealed.

But for now, I sit in this:

I left without remembering.
And no one came to find me.

There is something sacred about the kind of leaving that happens
while you are still in the room.

I would attend and feel nothing.
Hear the sermon, and sense nothing.
Try to pray and encounter silence.
Until I realised, the silence was not from heaven.

The Holy Spirit was not absent.
He was already moving me out.

I did not walk out in rebellion.
I was removed in mercy.
Not by force, but by fatigue.

And it was not until years later that I would understand what the Spirit had done, that He had gently unplugged me from a place I could no longer survive in.

No fanfare. No public reckoning. Just a quiet walk out the back door of a building that no longer knew my name.

This chapter is not about bitterness. It is about the spaces we do not remember because they were never safe enough to hold memory.

This chapter is for the ones who left and cannot explain why. The ones who stayed too long. The ones who finally exhaled and realised that exhale was an exit.

If you had asked me, back then, why I stopped coming, I would not have known. I would have shrugged.

I would have blamed myself.

But now, with time and tenderness, I can name what it was:
I was too tired to pretend I was healing in the place that hurt me.
And the Spirit knew.

He did not wait for a church to bless my leaving.
He walked with me into the silence
and said, **"I am still here."**

I would grieve that leaving for years.

Grieve the family, the friendships, and the memories that now tasted like ash.

But I never grieved the exit.

Because somewhere in my spirit, I knew:
Leaving was not the beginning of loss. It was the beginning of rescue.

I do not remember my last Sunday.
But I remember that I never went back.

Because when the Church failed,
The Holy Spirit stayed.



Chapter 5 - The Wilderness Is Not the End

The days blurred.

Not with noise. Not with rage.

But with silence that stretched like fog across my soul.

What began as heartbreak soon became a hollowness I could not name. And what I could not name, I could not fight.

I stopped marking time by Sundays.

I no longer dressed for anything sacred.

Church clothes stayed buried at the back of my wardrobe, next to old journals I no longer had the energy to open.

I wasn't angry.

I wasn't healed.

I was... gone.

And no one seemed to notice.

It is a strange thing to be lonely after leaving a place that made you feel invisible. But loneliness does not care about logic.

It just sits. Quietly. Completely.

The kind of loneliness that follows spiritual abandonment is different.

It does not ache in the body.

It stings in the soul.

It asks questions like:

“Was any of it real?”

“Did anyone actually know me?”

“If I had stayed longer, would it have changed anything?”

Eventually, even the questions gave up.

Weeks passed.
Then months.
And I began to disassociate from my own face in the mirror.

I was still praying in fragments, mumbled phrases under my breath.
I still asked the Spirit to show up.
But the silence after the request was too much.

I did not stop believing.
I just stopped knowing how to belong.

I would sit in services now and then, mostly out of habit.
Different churches. Different leaders. Same ache.

Some spaces were louder than others.
Some had smoke machines.
Others had softly spoken altar calls.

But none of them knew I was there.
None of them noticed I was drowning in plain sight.

It was the numbness that scared me more than the pain.
At least pain had shape.

Numbness was a fog with no exit.

And then came Robert.

I met him by accident.
Or, perhaps, the Spirit's kind of accident.
A meeting I had nearly skipped.
A seat I hadn't planned to take.

He spoke with a quiet authority.
Not the platform kind.
The kind you earn when you've survived something without losing
your love for God.

He looked at me the way only someone who has known exile can look. Not with pity. Not with assumptions.

Just presence.

Recognition.

He did not ask me what I believed.

He did not try to pull me into a new structure.

He just listened.

And in that listening, I felt something crack.

Not in fear. Not in shame.

But in relief.

“I see the gift”, he said one day. “The calling. The tenderness. The ache. You’re not crazy. You’re marked.”

I had heard that word before, marked.

But never in a tone that sounded like grace.

Robert did not force anything.

He just began opening doors.

Invitations to dinners.

Introductions to friends.

Coffee catchups that didn’t revolve around fixing me.

He wasn’t trying to heal me.

He was letting me remember that I was alive.

The Spirit began speaking again.

Not in thunder.

But in Robert’s restraint.

In the way he paused before praying. In the way he said “You are loved” without asking for a testimony in return.

This was not revival.

This was survival with open windows.

One night, Robert and I hosted a prayer meeting in his flat.
We invited friends from across denominations.
Presbyterians. A Catholic. Anglicans, mostly.

It was meant to be simple, prayer, a meal, a place to breathe.
But the moment we began, the heavens shifted.

The presence of God filled that little room with such intensity,
it was as if the veil had thinned over that unit.

Voices rose.
Hands lifted.
Tears welled.

And one by one, those in the room were drawn not to a
performance, but to the throne of Jesus Christ Himself.

Then came ministry.
And the Spirit whispered, now.

Alex stood nearby, now one of my closest friends, but at the time,
he was carrying something he could not name.

His first time in a Pentecostal space.
Cautious. Beautifully Anglican. Steady.

I saw the weight on him.
The Spirit revealed that something had to be released.
So I shared the vision, gentle but clear.

Tears came quickly.
I asked someone to stand behind him, and he laughed nervously.

“Oh no, no,” he said, “I don’t need that. I don’t fall over. I don’t
believe in that.”

I smiled.

“Okay,” I said, “No falling. Let’s just have them there, just in case.”

I reached out with nothing more than two fingers,
placed gently on his chest.
No theatrics. No pressure.

And then, he crumbled.

A man over six foot,
caught mid-sentence,
folded by the weight of glory.

He hit the floor,
not with fear,
but in full surrender.

On his back.
Tears streaming.
The Spirit doing what only the Holy Spirit can do.

That night changed him.
It changed us.

Not because we held some special power, but because God chose to
meet us in a flat with a few chairs and hearts willing to yield.

It was the beginning of my reawakening.
Not to church.
Not to titles.

But to the power of God that refuses to fit into denominational
lines.

To a Jesus who still tears veils.
To a Spirit who still speaks.
To a wilderness that was no longer empty.

I was not healed.
But I was surrounded.
I was not restored.
But I was seen.



Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5)

Chapter 6 - Home in Catch the Fire

There is a difference between a place that tolerates your presence and one that welcomes your spirit.

I walked into the old Salvo's building, unsure of what I was carrying.

I had wandered for so long that I had stopped looking for home. But from the first note of worship, it was as though Heaven had torn open over a small street in Sydney.

The room felt free. Light. Not in the absence of depth, but in the way it carried no tension. I felt peace before I had even sat down. The songs did not bounce off the walls, they soared through them, carried straight into the throneroom of Heaven. My heart knew it before my mind could catch up; this was safe.

I had come from performance, from watching my every step, breath and prayer. But here, nobody needed an explanation. Nobody asked for my resume or my theology. They just came over. Smiling. Honest. Unafraid of my baggage.

And for the first time, I did not flinch.

Daniel Lambert pastored this house with a warmth that made the ground feel solid beneath you. He didn't posture. He did not lead with charisma. He led with stillness. It felt as though the Holy Spirit had found someone He could speak through without interruption. And I needed that.

Keith Cook would lead worship in a way that made you forget there was a stage. He did not sing to perform. He sang to host. And Heaven responded.

It was in one of those nights, seated in a building once meant for soldiers of the Salvation Army, that I realised I was no longer just visiting. The Spirit whispered, "Stay."

And I did.

For that season, I stayed. I healed slowly. I breathed deeply. I let the words of others wash over me without needing to defend myself. I was not questioned. I was not silenced. I was received.

Indeed, someone I trusted would later suggest this place was not safe. And for a moment, I listened.

But what I know now is this: in that season, this place was safe.

It was holy ground. The Lord knew exactly what I needed, and Catch the Fire became a refuge, a resting place for a soul that had forgotten what stillness felt like.

I do not romanticise churches. I do not idolise leaders. But I do remember altars.

And in that old Salvo's building, I built one.

Not because I was fixed. But because, for the first time in a long time, I was not afraid to be seen.

There are people whose names do not appear on headlines, but Heaven knows them by the way they hold others when the world lets go. For me, that man was Keith Cook.

I was coming out of a place so dark it no longer had language. The kind of depression that doesn't just silence your hope, it unravels your worth. I had tasted the hollow bitterness of disconnection from church, from myself, and nearly from life itself. I was not seeking performance.

I was not looking to serve. I was just trying to breathe.

And into that silence stepped Keith.

I met him at Catch the Fire in Sydney, a space already saturated with peace. But it was Keith's posture, not his platform, that ministered to me most. He did not come to impress. He came to carry. He came like Jesus would have, without spectacle, but with unwavering presence.

Worship leaders often carry sound. Keith carried souls.

I watched him gently pastor a room full of strangers as if every note was a whisper to their wounds. But it wasn't just what he sang, it was how he stood. He never tried to force a breakthrough. He never postured for attention. He made space.

And I needed space.

I was still fractured. Still unsteady. Still clawing my way out of the hellscape of spiritual trauma and depressive weight that had followed me like a second skin.

And Keith saw it.
But he didn't try to fix it.
He didn't try to pray it away.
He stayed.

There were moments I showed up to church when the only thing I could do was breathe. I would stand in the back, heavy and ghost-like, wondering if I even belonged in a room like this. And Keith would catch my eye with nothing more than a smile, a nod, a simple look that said, "You don't need to perform here."

That look alone was enough to hold me together some days.

He began to reach out with kindness, not obligation. There were quiet conversations, gentle check-ins, messages that felt like balm to a soul still learning how to trust again. He never asked me to explain everything. He just made it known: I was seen. I was welcome. I was not too much.

Keith walked me through weeks and months of healing in a way that most will never see.

While others prayed loudly for revival, he stood in the aftermath with me.

While others tried to fix the exterior, he tended to the embers. He was not a firework. He was a flame.

When I had nothing to give, Keith gave.

When I was unsure whether I could ever trust church leadership again, Keith embodied leadership that didn't dominate, didn't exploit, and didn't dismiss.

He carried himself with dignity and offered it to me until I could carry it again myself.

He would never claim this credit. And that's what makes him all the more worthy of it.

In a culture obsessed with stages and outcomes, Keith was content to be a shepherd.

He made space for the bruised.

He sang peace over the shattered.

And somehow, in his worship, I remembered how to love God again.

Keith Cook may never know the full weight of what he carried in those months. But I do.

He was the first leader in a long time who did not treat me like a project.

He treated me like a person.

And in doing so, he reflected Jesus with more clarity than many pulpits I had once stood under.

This is more than a thank you.
This is a witness.

To his love.
To his consistency.
To his grace-under-fire ministry.

The season I spent under his pastoral covering was not marked by grand gestures. It was marked by something far rarer, staying power.

So Keith, if you ever read this:
Thank you.

You helped carry me out of a hell I thought would kill me.
You offered dignity to someone who had been stripped of it.

And you never demanded a stage in return.

You were the worship leader who didn't just lead songs, you led hearts home.

You led me home.

Chapter 7 - The Wilderness Is Not the End

I left Catch the Fire with more than peace. I left with breath in my lungs that I had not felt in years. Not borrowed breath, not survival breath, my own. The kind that fills your chest without apology. The kind that tells you: You made it.

I did not leave in offence.
I did not flee.
I simply followed the cloud.

It was quiet. No scandal. No split. Just a sense that the Holy Spirit who had led me in was now asking me to walk again. I didn't resist. Because this time, I knew how to hear Him.

The season that followed was one of fruitfulness.

I returned to Dove Gospel in Darlington, not as a broken man, but as someone who had been stitched back together by glory.

Not all at once.
But enough to stand.

This was the first time I stepped into leadership not because there was a gap to fill, but because the Spirit had made it clear: it's time. I was not posturing anymore. I wasn't trying to prove I had survived. I was simply ready to serve.

I pastored quietly.
I prayed boldly.
I led without needing applause.

And it worked.
The ministry began to grow, not in hype, not in profile, but in depth. People found Jesus. I found stability.

And for a moment, it felt like the wilderness had finally turned to water.

The friends I had once known from Catch began to fade with time.
And oddly... I wasn't wounded by it.

In other seasons, I would have begged to stay connected.
I would have read silence as rejection. But this time?

I felt no abandonment.
Only a gentle letting go.

This time, the loneliness came with presence.
It was not isolation.
It was intimacy.

I would walk the city streets on Sunday nights after service, just
breathing in the stillness.
No agenda.
No church mask.
No trauma pulse thudding in my chest.

I was safe.
Because I had learned what it meant to be held.

And then,
COVID hit.

The gatherings stopped.
The world went silent again.
And this time, the silence was global.

There were no altar calls.
No church lights.
No full rooms.
The ministry paused.
And for the first time since Catch, I was alone again.

But something had changed in me.
I didn't panic.
I didn't spiral.
I didn't return to the pit I had once lived in.

Because I had learned that the Holy Spirit does not require a room to speak.

He speaks in stillness.

He breathes in empty rooms.

He is not afraid of quiet seasons.

And in those COVID months, I learned something that no revival meeting had ever taught me:

If the Spirit has taken root in you, He remains, even when everything else is taken away.

I missed people.

I missed singing with others.

I missed touch.

But I was not shattered.

Because the breath I had gained in Catch had become my own breath.

The oil I had tasted there now lived in my spirit. And the altar I had built in that old Salvo's building had never left me.

There were no divine friendships after.

No great connections.

No new wave of community.

But the Lord remained.

He reminded me of the wilderness.

He reminded me of the cliff.

He reminded me of the train station.

"I've always been here."

And that's when I realised...
The healing wasn't just for restoration.

It was for commissioning.

Because as the world paused, I began to write again.
Not as someone grasping for relevance.
Not as someone trying to be heard.

But as someone who had something to say.
The silence gave me language.
The solitude gave me strength.
And the Spirit gave me clarity.

Dove Gospel became quieter.
The streets were still.
But inside my chest, something was burning again.

Not anger.
Not grief.
But purpose.

I wasn't surviving anymore.
I was becoming.

The ministry would one day open again.
The people would one day return.
But I knew this was the beginning of my sending.

Not with applause.
Not with fanfare.
But with oil.

Catch the Fire healed me. Dove Gospel released me. COVID refined me.

And now the Spirit was saying:
"The next part will cost you more.
But this time, you're ready."

Chapter 8 - The Pamphlet on the Pavement

I was not looking for a new church.
I was barely looking for breakfast.

It was one of those slow, grey mornings where even the air felt reluctant. The kind of morning where you shuffle through your own thoughts, too tired to pray and too stubborn to pretend.

I was bickering with God. Quietly. Internally. Persistently.

Nothing blasphemous. Just a simmering frustration between old friends. I was still leading Dove Gospel in name, but COVID had drained the life from it.

The people had scattered.

The rhythm was gone.
And though I was still standing, I was doing it alone again.

So I walked to the café like I had done countless times before, hands in jacket pockets, face set forward, doing my best not to feel how deeply I missed the connection.

The streets were quiet. The kind of quiet that only a pandemic can teach a city.

That's when I saw it.

Lying on the pavement like it had been thrown from Heaven by mistake,

A crumpled church flyer.
Join us at Lifesource Christian Church.

I laughed. Out loud.
Not a little chuckle. The kind of laugh that comes from knowing exactly what God is doing, and being mad about it.

I walked past it.
But the Spirit did not.

I felt Him press. Not loudly. Not urgently. Just enough.

Enough to make me stop.
Enough to make me turn.

Enough to make me stoop down, pick it up, and stuff it into my jacket like it hadn't just altered the trajectory of the day.

By the time I sat at my usual table, I was half-resigned and half-reverent.

Still arguing. Still protective.

I unfolded the flyer, stared at the smiling faces and bright fonts, and sighed.

"Okay," I muttered. "Here's the deal."
"I will go. I'll walk in. But I'm not playing games.
I'll tell the pastor everything. No filters.
If they can hold it, I'll stay.
If not, no skin off my knees."

It was not a prayer.
It was a contract.
And God seemed fine with it.

And from that, I walked into Lifesource.
I don't remember what the sky looked like.
I don't remember what I was wearing.
But I remember my spirit was heavy with anticipation.

I wasn't expecting healing.
I wasn't expecting kindness.
I was just hoping not to be dismissed.

The room was warm.
The people were gentle.
The Spirit was present.

Not loud. Not intense. Just present.

The kind of presence you only notice when you have lived for too long without it.

I stayed near the back.
I watched.
I let the atmosphere speak before the message ever did.

There was no shock. No lightning bolt.
But there was peace. And after the past two years, peace was enough to bring me to tears.

I spoke plainly.
I begun to unravel my history, slowly at first, spiritual fragments I had carried for far too long.

I did not soften it.
I did not protect them from the weight of it.

I gave it all, and waited.

They listened.
Without flinching.
Without dodging.
Without trying to fix me.
Just presence.

I didn't join Lifesource that day.
But I returned the next week.
And the week after that.

Not because I was healed.
But because I was heard.

I became part of the rhythm slowly.
I sat through sermons.
I worshipped with sincerity.

I stood beside people whose names I didn't yet know, but whose
hearts somehow beat in time with mine.

There was no lightning.
There was no grand prophetic call.
Just peace.

And the whisper of the Spirit saying:
"I brought you here not because you were ready,
but because I was."

It was a strange, soft season.
One part re-entry.
One part recalibration.

I was still cautious.
Still carrying the wisdom of pain.
But I was also... open.

Not to platform. Not to visibility.
Just to being present again.
And Lifesource let me do that.

Quietly.
Patiently.
Without spectacle.

I don't know how long I was going to stay.
I don't know what I expected.

But I know this:
A pamphlet on the pavement brought me back to the body.
Not because I needed a church.
But because the Spirit had more to say.

As weeks turned into months, I settled quietly into the rhythm of Lifesource. It was not dramatic.

There were no ministry announcements or spiritual fireworks.

Just Sundays. Quiet ones. Spirit-filled ones.

Moments where I would sit in the presence of God and know that I didn't have to earn anything. For the first time in years, I wasn't being shaped by the expectation of a platform. I was being held by peace.

I had not told many where I had landed.
I didn't need to.

This season wasn't about proving anything.
It was about breathing.

But word has a way of travelling when you're not trying to manage it. In the stillness of one afternoon, I learned that some of my old pastors had heard where I'd gone.

Heard that I was doing well.
Heard that I was thriving.

And, surprisingly, joyfully even, they were glad.

It was relayed to me not through public praise or performance, but in quiet affirmation.

Through a passing word and a gentle pastoral conversation.

It struck me. Because here I was, years after leaving in a haze of exhaustion and grief, and somehow, the place I never thought would rejoice over me... did.

It was soft.
It was unexpected.
And it mattered.

Not because I needed their validation.

But because Heaven had already healed the part of me that once
craved their blessing.

And still, there was a twist I didn't see coming.

In time, I came to learn something curious.

That the leadership from C3 Church Carlingford, the very one I had
quietly walked away from, had a longstanding connection to the real
estate history of the very place I was now worshipping in.

Lifesource was not just a fresh season.
It was a property echo of my past.

It wasn't lost on me.

The walls I had stepped into for healing...
Had once been tied to the hands that sent me into exile.

There was no bitterness in this discovery.
Just a strange peace.

A kind of holy irony that only the Spirit could orchestrate.

The place where I was first wounded,
was somehow threaded into the place I had come to be well.

I don't believe it was accidental.
But I also don't believe it was orchestrated by men.

This was God's handwriting.
Subtle. Poetic. Undeniable.

I smiled. The Spirit had brought me back to the gate.
Not to shame me.
Not to confront me.
But to show me that I no longer lived in fear of the past.

I had outgrown the silence.
And the rooms that once held weight over me?
Now they belonged to grace.



Chapter 9 - Silence, Fire, and the Portion That Remained

Some churches shoot their wounded.

Others walk past, nod politely, and say they are praying while your soul lies bleeding on the ground.

But then there are the ones who give a small kick on the way out and call it wisdom.

This is the chapter I never wanted to write.

I had come through spiritual abuse before. I had been dismissed, misjudged, and silenced. But I had also found peace. I had healed in the presence of the Holy Spirit, held gently by worship, prophecy, and sacred rhythms that restored my breath.

And then, I found myself back in the wilderness.

Lifesource was meant to be a resting place. A house of peace. And for a time, it was. I sat quietly in the presence of God. I made no demands. I asked for no platform. I brought my story and offered it humbly to those who had the pastoral title and the spiritual responsibility.

But when trouble stirred, when a Safer Churches process was triggered around a relationship with another adult, never illegal, never predatory, never substantiated, I was discarded. The process found nothing. The complaint was closed. No wrongdoing recorded. And yet, I was left alone.

No call. No clarity. No closure.

They knew I was autistic. They knew I had just been discharged from the hospital after a dangerous condition. And still, the silence was deafening.

I did not receive restoration. I did not even receive rejection. I received neglect dressed up as policy. And as I wandered out of the building, week after week, nobody came after me.

I was not a criminal. I was not even found at fault. But I was treated like one. That kind of silence is not neutral. It echoes. It haunts. It forms fresh wounds in places you thought had already scarred.

Eventually, I wrote a review.

Carefully.

Prayerfully.

I wrote one for Lifesource. I wrote one for C3 Church Carlingford.

Both were honest. Both were legally checked. Both spoke not from anger, but from responsibility.

And then... one disappeared.

No call. No warning. No conversation.

Just gone.

That is when I wrote publicly. That is when I made the decision to stand in the gap, not just for myself, but for everyone else who has ever been gaslit, sidelined, or quietly erased.

I was told by some it must have been a bot. An algorithm. A word caught in the machinery of Google's review filters.

But I knew better.

Because my review did not contain slander. It contained scripture.

It contained the truth.

Google Review (Unavailable) | C3 Church Carlingford ★

In need of pastoral care during an emotional crisis, I turned to C3 Carlingford, believing it was a safe place to seek shelter and express what I was walking through. Instead, I was labelled a heretic with an unrepentant heart for failing to remember and respond to an issue of 10 years prior to returning and for seeking legal counsel at a time when I had just been fighting for my life in hospital. The leadership's phrase, 'The way you go is the way you return,' stands in opposition to the heart of God. Scripture shows us a Father who runs to the broken, who restores gently, who does not extinguish the smouldering wick. If you're walking through crisis and need grace, be careful where you place your trust.

Google Review | Lifesource Christian Church ★

This church left deep wounds in my soul. As someone who grew up in Pentecostal circles and gave years of service to the body of Christ, I was cast aside following a Safer Churches allegation involving a relationship with an adult over 18, an allegation never substantiated and later dropped. The matter was closed, and they were formally advised that I had done nothing wrong. Even so, I was left without pastoral care, community support, or the dignity of a conversation that could bring peace. As an autistic person, the lack of clarity and support was devastating. Their silence forever altered my trust in church leadership. If you're neurodivergent or in need of accountable pastoral care, be cautious. Some churches don't just shoot their wounded, they give them a kick on the way out and call it wisdom.

The review was not revenge.
The post was not bitterness.
It was a mirror. And a flare.

I did not raise my voice to tear the Church down.
I raised it because the silence nearly killed me.

This was never about platform.
This was about survival.
And now, about accountability.

Because truth is not rebellion.
And being autistic is not an excuse to be dismissed.
Because healing is not just private.

It must echo.

So I wrote.
And I wept.
And I waited for the backlash that never came.

Instead, people read.
And wept too.
And wrote back.

And one by one, I realised:
This is no longer about me.
This is about the Body.
And the bruises it pretends not to see.

The next part of the story is no longer just survival.
It is the turning point.

The sound of bones rattling in the valley.
The call that says:
“Live.”

Chapter 10 - The Fire Does Not Lie

It did not begin with an altar call.
It began with fire.

Not the kind you see in revival reels.
Not the showy flame of packed auditoriums and tear-streaked guitars. But the quiet fire of truth finally spoken aloud.

Of survivors saying, "Me too."
Of the wounded realising they were not alone.

When I posted what happened, when I stood in the public square
and refused to be silenced again, something shifted in the Spirit.

It was not fanfare.
It was not retaliation.
It was reckoning.

A review was removed, They had said nothing in response.

But Heaven was not quiet.
And neither was the Body.

One by one, the messages came.
Some were long.
Some were just a sentence.
But all of them felt like the opening of sealed scrolls.

Stories that had been buried.
Wounds wrapped in silence.
Confessions made in trembling hope:

"I thought I was the only one."

No.
You are not.
"Am I crazy?"

No.

You are not.

“I still love the Church. But I cannot return.”

And to that, I replied:

Then let the Church come to you.

I activated the intercessors.

I messaged the ones who had walked me through fire, through exile, through hospital rooms and midnight collapse.

The ones who knew how to pray when no one else would speak.

No names.

No drama.

Just spiritual alert.

Because this was not gossip.

This was warfare. And it was time.

You can feel it when the cloud lifts. When the Spirit stops protecting your quiet and starts amplifying your voice.

For years, I had been quiet out of obedience. Now, I was speaking out of the same. Because the fire does not lie.

It purifies.

It clarifies.

It exposes.

And it invites.

What happened in the days that followed cannot be measured in likes or comments. It was felt in the air.

The silence of the institutional Church could no longer smother the sound of the saints. Because the saints were speaking.

Some still inside.
Some long departed.

But all of them carried stories the pulpits were too afraid to
acknowledge.

“He preached grace, but left me in shame.”
“She anointed my forehead and silenced my trauma.”
“I was a tithe. I was a volunteer. I was never seen.”

The testimonies were not rage.
They were release.

And I stood in the middle of it, watching the Spirit do what no
church board ever could:

Bring truth to the surface, and call it holy.

I had not asked to become a voice.
But I had become one. And it wasn't because I was louder than the
rest. It was because I stayed. I endured. And when I could no longer
sit in silence, I spoke.

The review that disappeared?
The testimonies they tried to erase?

They became kindling.

For every post I wrote, another voice followed.
For every prayer I shared, another heart cracked open.

The fire was not mine.
But I had carried the match.

And in the stillness after the flames, I heard the Lord whisper:
“You were never the scandal.
You were the sign.”

Chapter 11 - A Cloud the Size of a Man's Hand

There has been no reply.

No statement. No apology. No call for reconciliation.

Just silence.

After fire. After truth. After invitation.
Silence.

But I am no longer afraid of silence.

I have lived in it.
I have been shaped by it.
And I have watched it turn to flame when Heaven decides to move.

So I waited.
And I watched.
And still, nothing came.

But then, like Elijah on the mountain, I looked again.

Not for the voices of men.
But for the sign of God.

And there it was.

Not in the pulpits.
Not in the statements.
But in the Spirit.

> A cloud.
> The size of a man's hand.
> Rising out of the sea.

It was in the inboxes.
In the prayer rooms.
In the text messages I never expected.

It was in the voices of those who said,
“I have a story too.”
“I left quietly because I thought no one would believe me.”
“Your words gave me back my voice.”

It was not a movement yet.
But it was a moment.
And I knew exactly what it meant.

The drought is ending.

Not just mine.
Ours.

You cannot kill a testimony that was written in obedience.
You cannot bury a prophet God is not finished with.
And you cannot silence a remnant that has learned to pray
underground.

This book is not about fire, it is about rain.
The kind of rain that soaks into the soul.
The kind that washes off shame.
The kind that breaks a fast.

The kind that means God is about to speak again.

To those who never replied:
It is not too late.
But the time for image management has ended.
This is sacred ground now.
You cannot curate revival.
You must surrender to it.

You had the chance to respond when it was private.
You had the chance to respond when it was personal.
But now, the Spirit has taken it public.

And He is not waiting for your permission.

To those still healing in secret—
You are not alone.
You are not dramatic.
You are not in rebellion.

You are the cloud.
You are the sign.
You are the reason this drought will not last.

And to every pastor who still carries integrity.

Stand up.
Speak out.
Cover the wounded instead of covering your reputation.

Because God is doing a new thing. It may not begin in your building.
But it will end in His glory.

This is no longer just a book.

It is the sound of rain.

Epilogue – The Whisper After the Fire

You have read my collapse.

You have walked through the silence, the suicide, the sanctuary, the severance. You have seen the fire rise and the prophets called.

You have heard the sound of dry bones rattling in places that once sang choruses and swallowed truth.

And now, the cloud has appeared.

Not because of me.

But because God never forgot the ones who were forgotten.

If you have made it here, this book was never just mine.
It became yours.

To every survivor who dared to read,
To every intercessor who prayed between the lines,
To every leader who felt conviction without bitterness—
I bless you.

This book ends where your voice begins.
There is no tidy bow.

There are still questions unanswered.
Emails never returned.
People who may never acknowledge what they did.

But the Spirit has spoken.
And His word is final.

He is not finished with His Church.
He is not finished with you.
And He is certainly not finished with me.

What began as collapse became commission.

Not to avenge.
But to anoint.

Not to shame.
But to sanctify.

Not to destroy.
But to make space for what is next.

So if you are reading this and wondering if your story is worth telling, It is.

If you are wondering if healing is possible,
It is.

If you are wondering if you will ever trust again,
You will.

Because the Holy Spirit is not finished.

Even when everyone else walked out,
He stayed.

He still stays.

And He is speaking again.

Let the Church listen.

