

DANCING THROUGH THE STORMS OF LIFE

An Empaths Journey of
Faith, Love, and Resilience

GEORGE BENSON

#TheHomeWorkDad



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This is a work of nonfiction. It is a true account of the author's life to the best of their recollection. Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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DEDICATION

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**“For my wife Jodell and our Amazing Children Antonia & Julia”**

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*Life isn't about waiting
for the storms to pass;
It's about learning to dance in the rain!*

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**“In Loving Memory of David Alderpen”**

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*You taught me that storms don't define us!
They offer us the chance to
Learn to dance!*

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## A NOTE FROM GEORGE

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to explore this book. What you're about to read isn't just a collection of memories or insights—it's a reflection of my life with my wife, Jodell, and the journey we've been on for over 30 years. It's a journey filled with love, faith, family, and the kind of resilience that can only come from navigating life's ups and downs together. God's grace has been at the center of it all, guiding us through both the joyful and difficult moments. I've also included the latest version of my blog series "Beliefs That Matter" in the appendix, where I offer a deeper look into the values and principles that guide my life.

**MISSION:** Jodell and I founded Alderpen Media, INC. in May 2021 with the mission to equip purpose-driven parents with the resources they need to thrive at working or running a business from home while minimizing the chaos, enjoying the fun times, and keeping up with the responsibilities of parenthood.

**SENSITIVE CONTENT:** I want to be upfront about the fact that parts of this book touch on sensitive topics, like struggles with depression, injuries, and emotional challenges. These experiences are part of what has shaped me, and I believe in being honest about the hard parts of life. I've also written this book from my perspective as an intuitive empath, which influences how I understand and process the world around me. I realize this may feel unfamiliar—or even uncomfortable—for some, but it's an important aspect of who I am.

**PROUD PARENT:** Jodell and I are incredibly blessed to have been chosen by God to be the parents of two amazing daughters, Antonia and Julia. Antonia, who is transgender, and Julia have each been uniquely created by God, and we deeply respect their journeys and the individuals they have become. In honoring their privacy and ensuring their voices are represented, we have made it a priority to involve them in the process of creating this book. In Antonia's case, this means respecting the fact that she is, and always has been, our daughter—even if it took us more time to fully realize that than it typically does for parents. Every story in this book that involves Antonia or Julia has been reviewed and approved by them prior to publishing. We have always believed in the importance of protecting our family while sharing our story, and this is no exception.

For those who have questions about my personal beliefs concerning LGBTQ issues, I encourage you to read the article I've included in the appendix titled "GOD DOESN'T MAKE MISTAKES: UNIQUENESS IN GOD'S CREATION." This article begins with a discussion about intersex people, as I believe that the ways God creates both intersex and LGBTQ individuals are closely connected, and it reflects my understanding of God's design and my stance on these important matters.

**GOAL:** My goal with this book is to give you a chance to know me before you decide if I'm someone you want to follow, whether through my videos, my writing, or as part of The Home Work Community. I believe that transparency matters. I'd rather connect with a

smaller group of people who truly understand who I am and what I stand for than have anyone feel misled down the line. If my experiences, insights, and faith resonate with you, and you want to stay informed as we work toward building this community than I would suggest you:

- ✓ Join our mailing list: <https://www.thehomeworkdad.com/subscribe>
- ✓ Subscribe to our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@thehomeworkdad>
- ✓ Subscribe to our YouTube podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/@homeworkparenting>

As you read this book, and learn more about me, I invite you to consider if The Home Work Community is for you. Our dream is to create a place where purpose-driven parents can come together to share their stories, learn from each other, and thrive as they balance working or running a business from home—without sacrificing what matters most: the relationships you have with your spouse and children. As The Home Work Dad, I'll be sharing lessons from over 30 years of working and running businesses from home while raising a family. It hasn't always been easy, but it's been worth it.

Through this book and the content we create, my hope is to build an inclusive community of people who are willing to share what has worked for them, and who are open to learning from others who—though they may not be professionals—have valuable experiences to offer.

As you read, I hope you find something meaningful—whether it's encouragement, a sense of connection, or even a bit of laughter. Most of all, I hope it reminds you that no matter what storms life may bring, you're never alone.

With gratitude,  
George Benson  
The Home Work Dad  
President - Alderpen Media, INC.

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## GET THE LATEST VERSION

This book is a work in progress, and I will be updating it as new memories or insights come to light. You can always find the latest version at:

<https://getitto.day/thd-lifestory>.





## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever asked God to teach you patience? And did you really know what you were asking for at the time? What follows is a collection of memories that have been compiled into a story of George and Jodell Benson and how George's childhood prayer for patience would manifest itself in unexpected ways throughout their lives. Of course, George conveniently forgot to mention that prayer to Jodell until after they were married—a fact that, had Jodell known ahead of time just exactly what she was signing up for, might have been a deal breaker! But, as it turns out, through all the highs and lows, their love for each other and their faith in God would become the cornerstone of their shared journey together.

At the time of this writing, George & Jodell have been married for almost 30 years and their life together has been filled with countless challenges and moments of unexpected humor. From being hit in the head by falling fireworks debris and surviving what felt like the universe's vendetta against their parked cars, to navigating traumatic car accidents and even being shot at, their journey together has been anything but ordinary. Yet, amidst the chaos and laughter, there have been profound struggles. They faced the devastating loss of a child in the womb, the loss of various family members and close friends, George's ongoing battles with depression and thoughts of suicide, and his journey to embrace his gift as an intuitive empath, which at one point left him standing on a set of train tracks wanting to die and daring God to prove His existence—only to have God answer in a moment of divine intervention.

Through it all, George and Jodell have relied on their deep love for each other and their unwavering trust in God's plan and their story, woven with resilience, faith, humor, and a fair bit of divine patience, now serves as the foundation for George's role as The Home Work Dad, where he shares his life and experiences with others who work or run a business from home, to inspire them and help them as they navigate life's unpredictable path.

As you read what follows, remember, this story isn't just about the challenges they've faced, but about the incredible blessings they've stumbled upon—sometimes quite literally—along the way. George and Jodell believe they've been richly blessed, not just with material things, but with experiences, trials, and tribulations that have, perhaps somewhat stubbornly, shaped their faith as they learned that some of God's greatest gifts have been His divine strength, comfort, wisdom, and grace, often showing up right when they were on the verge of throwing in the towel and calling it quits! George & Jodell wholeheartedly believe that God is constantly walking with them, guiding them through life's wild twists and turns and in response to these blessings, they feel a deep sense of responsibility to share with others the lessons they have learned—"To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). Read on and discover some of the most valuable gifts they've been given including God's ability to help them laugh as they lean on each other, and—above all—as they learn to dance in the rain!

# **PART 01**

## **THE EARLY YEARS**

# 1

## Birth & Family

### GEORGE'S BIRTH & FAMILY

The year was **1970**, and in a small town in **Mid-Coast Maine**, a mother was preparing for what she thought would be a Christmas baby. However, to everyone's surprise, **George Benson** made his arrival on **Halloween!** George was a full-term baby despite being born almost two months earlier than expected. It seemed the doctors had miscalculated the due date. As if that wasn't enough of a surprise, George had been predicted to be a girl throughout his mother's pregnancy. When he was born a boy, it caught everyone off guard. In fact, one of George's sisters, upon seeing him for the first time, famously exclaimed that their mother needed to "take him back" because he was supposed to be a girl!

George was born in **Camden, Maine**, the youngest of nine children. He had five brothers and three sisters. His parents were hardworking, devout people who modeled resilience, faith, and entrepreneurship. His father initially worked as a line cook at **Wilson's Diner** in **Waltham, Massachusetts**, where he met George's mother Marion, who was a waitress. After starting their family, George's parents settled in Maine, where his father briefly worked as a constable police officer. At one point, after his short stint in law enforcement, George's father became an auctioneer and a short order cook. Over the years, George's parents ran several restaurants, sold homemade coleslaw and baked goods to local grocery stores, and successfully built and operated an oil burner repair service that thrived for decades.

George's upbringing was deeply influenced by these family-run ventures and the strong family values instilled in him. His parents, who were married for over 60 years before their passing, left a legacy of love in their large family, teaching their children the value of hard work and the importance of a deep, personal faith.

### JODELL'S BIRTH & FAMILY

In **November 1970**, Jodell was born in the same small-town hospital as George. As the middle child of three, Jodell had two brothers. Her father served in the military before settling into civilian life, and her mother worked in local stores before becoming a park ranger. Jodell's family raised her and her brothers in a loving family as they modeled their personal faith, instilling in her a deep connection to God and strong family ties. At the time of this writing, Jodell's parents have been married for almost 55 years, demonstrating their love and commitment to each other and their family.

## 2

# George's Early Years

## TRUST ISSUES

### Home Environment

In **1973**, when George was still a young child, his family faced a series of challenges that would forever impact their sense of safety. George's father, George Benson Sr., was working as a constable at the time and was the target of two harrowing attacks that shook the family.

The first attack occurred on **July 17, 1973**, while George's father was off-duty. His father noticed suspicious activity near Ingraham's General Store in Rockport, Maine, and attempted to stop a robbery in progress. As he confronted two men outside the store, a third man ambushed him from behind, tying a rope around his neck. After a search, George's father was found unconscious in a nearby gully and was rushed to the hospital for treatment.

Just a few weeks later, on **August 5, 1973**, George's father was attacked again, this time at their home. After hearing noises outside, he went to investigate, but was abducted by unknown assailants. They forced him at gunpoint to drive to a remote wooded area near the Megunticook-By-The-Sea Campground, where he was again beaten, tied to a tree and left for dead. By God's grace, remarkably, he was discovered by a camper, who helped him reach safety.

Although George was too young to remember these events firsthand, they became a significant part of his family's story. These traumatic incidents not only impacted his parent's life but also likely planted early seeds of mistrust and vulnerability in George and the rest of his family.

### Differences

By **1974** or **1975**, George began to realize that he was different from other children. Born with a natural predisposition toward heightened emotional awareness, he often felt emotions that weren't his own, sensing what he would later describe as the presence of energy around him, along with the ability to experience the pain and joy of others. The fear and uncertainty present in his home environment further intensified these sensitivities. Though it would take years for him to fully understand his abilities as an empath, these early experiences left a profound mark on him.

## Childhood Pain

Sometime during the **Summer or Fall of 1976 or 1977**, George's struggle with understanding his empathic nature resulted in multiple painful encounters. He was deeply hurt by others in his neighborhood on three separate occasions—events that continue to haunt him to this day. Although he now knows he did nothing wrong, the shame from those incidents weighed heavily on him for years, reinforcing his difficulty in trusting others. However, because the worst of those involved have since passed away, George believes that discussing these events offers no positive benefit to him or others. In order to protect his emotional well-being, he has made the decision to keep these memories in the past and asks that others respect that decision.

George shares this to help others understand how his experiences as an empath unknowingly led him into difficult situations as a child. By doing so, he hopes to raise awareness among parents about the unique challenges empaths face, particularly children, who require special attention and care as they learn to navigate their heightened sensitivity. George encourages all parents to take the time to walk in their child's shoes—striving to see the world through their child's eyes and understand their emotional experiences. By doing so, parents can gain valuable insights that may help them determine if their child is an empath. If they come to suspect their child is an empath, it's vital that parents educate themselves, and take proactive steps to protect their child from similar experiences that can lead to childhood trauma.

**NOTE: The details presented are all of the details that will be shared about this subject!**

## Trust Fall

By **1978**, George's trust in others had already been shaken by past experiences—first from the fear within his family after his father was assaulted, and later from the painful neighborhood incidents. This foundation of mistrust was further reinforced by an event during a Sunday School class at the local church. George had a teacher who would later become a close friend and even serve as a groomsman at his wedding. In his wisdom, the teacher thought a trust exercise would be a great idea. The concept was simple: each classmate would take turns leaning back, trusting the group to catch them, and then the next person would go, and so on. It seemed to go well—one classmate after another leaned back, and their peers caught them, just as planned.

George, being the last to go, watched everyone else get caught safely. When it was finally his turn, he leaned back—trusting, as he had seen his classmates do—and promptly fell flat on the floor as his peers failed to catch him. Lesson learned? Well, maybe not exactly the one the teacher had intended. George can laugh about it today, and holds no grudge toward the teacher or his classmates, but that moment was one of several that shaped his non-traditional faith. It taught him valuable lessons about trust, vulnerability, and perhaps a bit of caution when it comes to exercises involving falling. After all, “Maybe some lessons are best learned upright!”

Despite the difficulties George faced, his ability to sense and feel others' emotions (his empathic abilities) remained a significant part of his life. As he grew older, he began to

recognize that being an empath came with both positives and negatives. While it allowed him to deeply connect with others' emotions, it also made him vulnerable to emotional pain and betrayal. These early negative experiences, especially those involving broken trust, shaped his ongoing challenges in trusting others, particularly in relationships where deep emotional bonds were involved.

## **GROWTH**

### **Mom & Dads 25th Anniversary**

In **April of 1979**, his family celebrated his parents' **25th Wedding Anniversary**, an event that planted the seed of commitment and love inside George, as his parents modeled the importance of enduring love.

In the years that followed, there were more struggles with empathic events, both at school and at home, but for the most part, George spent his time playing and being by himself with very few friends. The home environment was still influenced by the trauma of his father's earlier attacks, which led to strict household rules. Sleepovers were not allowed, George had to be home before dark, and he was required to stay close to home. His parents, especially his mother, often watched him to make sure he was safe, even when he didn't realize it. George recalls asking to play in the woods, and his mother would agree but remind him to stay close to home. What he didn't learn until years later was that she would almost always go outside and stay within eyesight, though out of view, so George could feel independent while still being protected. This practice happened less frequently once George reached about 13 years old.

### **Principal's Office**

At school, while other kids were mastering dodgeball or trading baseball cards, George was mastering computer systems and discovering the joys of sending himself to the principal's office—but not for detention. It all started when George asked the principal if he could "rent time" on the computer in exchange for helping the janitors after school.

The principal agreed, and George gladly worked with the janitors in exchange for access to the school's technology. Whenever he could, he'd head straight to the principal's office just to use the computer, finding it far more appealing than playground politics. This early access to the school's technology, from the library to the principal's office, sparked a passion that would later blossom into something far more impressive than winning the school science fair—though that was probably on the table too.

### **Antique Shows**

In the **Summers from 1983 to 1985**, George worked alongside a janitor from his school, helping to load and unload items at antique shows that were held at the school. Picture it: while some kids were at summer camp making lanyards, George was hefting furniture and delicate vases at antique fairs—learning the art of manual labor and bargaining for

lemonade and hot dogs on the side. This side job not only allowed him to earn extra money but also fostered his work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit. George enjoyed the hands-on work and the sense of accomplishment that came from earning his own income—plus, he didn't mind avoiding the mosquito bites his peers were collecting at summer camp.

As George progressed through school, his natural curiosity and fascination with technology continued to grow. While his friends were fascinated by new game consoles, George was fascinated by how to take them apart and put them back together. (Whether they still worked afterward was another story.) He spent hours tinkering with computers, figuring out how they worked and how to solve technical issues, often exclaiming, "Why isn't this working?"—a mantra familiar to any tech enthusiast.

This knowledge would eventually become the foundation for the computer repair business he would later start, transforming his childhood passion into a lifelong profession. His early experiences with floppy disks and hard drives might not have seemed glamorous at the time, but they set the stage for what would become a very successful career—and a lot of "Did you try turning it off and on again?" conversations.



# 3

## High School As An Empath

### HIGH SCHOOL

**Between 1985 and 1989**, George thrived in high school, though not without causing a few headaches for his teachers. His natural gift for mathematics often put him ahead of them, solving problems in his head before they could even finish writing the equation on the board. More than once, his teachers found themselves sighing and saying, “Yes George, you got the right answer, but now can you show us how you did it?” George later tried to explain that math seemed to just “make sense” to him, like some mystical force. This focus on doing things differently—trusting his instincts—would become a hallmark of George’s approach to both education and life. It wasn’t that he couldn’t show his work; he just didn’t see why he had to if he already knew the answer. Clearly, future standardized tests didn’t share his philosophy.

While excelling in academics, George also balanced extracurricular activities, diving into high school life—quite literally, as a member of the YMCA swim team where he competed in various events but primarily focused on competitive diving. He also joined the library club, deepening his love for learning, though let’s be honest, it was probably as much about finding a quiet refuge from the constant emotional noise of high school as it was about books. Still, George’s work ethic remained strong, a continuation of the discipline he had developed during summers working at antique shows—because nothing teaches life lessons quite like loading someone’s great-grandmother’s armoire into a truck without scratching it.

### WOMAN IN DISTRESS

In **June of 1988 or 1989**, George had an experience that would forever change the way he viewed, what he would later learn was, his empathic gift. One afternoon, while at home with his mother, a woman they knew arrived at their house, deeply distraught. She had stopped in looking for comfort from George’s mom but she was also crying uncontrollably and her voice was lost to the overwhelming grief she was feeling. George’s mom, unsure what was going on and whether George should be there at that moment turned and looked at George and when he saw his mother’s eyes, without hesitation and feeling the weight of the moment, George quietly told his mother, “She had a miscarriage.” His mother, momentarily taken aback, looked at George in disbelief. How could her teenage son know what this woman was going through without a word being spoken?

At that moment, perhaps for the first time, George's mom knew that George had an ability to sense and understand far more than she ever imagined. This moment wasn't just about the revelation; it was a quiet, profound shift in his mother's understanding of George's abilities. She had always known him to be sensitive, but this was different—this was an intuitive depth that transcended words or explanation. For George, it was one of the first clear signs that he had an innate ability to sense not only the emotions of others, but a much deeper understanding of where those emotions came from, a gift he would come to both struggle with and embrace in the years to come.

## **BUILDING A FRAMEWORK**

Although this incident reinforced George's growing awareness that he had a unique sensitivity to the emotions of others. At the time, however, he and his parents didn't have the language to fully understand or explain what was happening to him. Being an "intuitive empath" wasn't exactly something that popped up in the high school career guidance office, so George had no clear framework to help him navigate these intense experiences.

As George's empathy grew, so did his awareness of how it affected him socially. He often found himself sensing the emotions of others—whether it was their pain, joy, or frustration—without realizing that these emotions didn't originate from within him. Navigating friendships and relationships became increasingly complex. He often found himself questioning whether the emotions he felt were his own or absorbed from those around him. Social interactions, which should have been a source of connection, frequently became overwhelming as he unknowingly took on the emotional burdens of those he cared about. The intensity of these feelings often led him to retreat, unsure of how to engage without being consumed by the emotions around him.

The confusion was especially pronounced when it came to dating. George frequently found himself second-guessing whether the emotions he was feeling in a romantic situation were genuine or if he was just echoing the energy of his date or the surrounding drama of teen angst. It was like being in an echo chamber of feelings, and it left him with more questions than answers. The intensity of absorbing others' emotions often overwhelmed him, leading him to retreat rather than engage—because it's hard to navigate dating when you're not even sure whose feelings you're processing at any given moment.

Looking back, George would later recognize these moments as early signs of his empathic abilities, but at the time, the absence of understanding left him feeling isolated and unsure of himself. Social interactions, which should have been a source of connection and growth, became a minefield of confusion and self-doubt. This early emotional overload became a significant part of George's journey toward eventually understanding and managing his intuitive empathic abilities. As George prepared to graduate and go off to college, he began to build a vocabulary for what it meant to be an empath, starting to put into words a small part of what made him the way he is. But at the time, George could only wish that high school came with an instruction manual—or at the very least, a mute button for other people's emotions.

## SAVING FOR COLLEGE & GRADUATION

Like most teenagers, George held down various jobs starting with mowing lawns when he was 14, working in the family restaurant during the summers, and at a local grocery store as well as McDonald's. George worked part-time hours until **January of 1989**, when, after earning the necessary credits to graduate, he went full-time to help save money for college. But despite having earned enough credits to graduate early, George wasn't about to miss out on walking across that stage. So, in **June of 1989**, with his family cheering, what felt like the final victory lap came to an end as he gripped his diploma with a wave of excitement (and maybe a bit of relief) rushing over him. This chapter of his life was finally closed, and for George, it wasn't just about the piece of paper—it was about surviving high school's emotional rollercoaster and coming out on the other side. He couldn't help but smile, thinking that the real adventure, college, was just around the corner.

# **PART 02**

## **COLLEGE, FAITH, FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

# 4

## Asbury College

### GOING OFF TO COLLEGE

For George, going off to college wasn't just about earning a degree—it was about exploring the world of people. Subjects like psychology, sociology, and religion fascinated him, but more than anything, George was intrigued by understanding others and how they navigated life. He also deeply desired to find someone to share his journey with. After all, he had been told for years that college is where most people find love that lasts a lifetime, and he was hopeful his own story would unfold in the same way.

George also knew he was different from most people he had encountered. In fact, during his high school years, he had only ever met one other person he suspected might also be an empath like him. But if there was one in mid-coast Maine, George believed there must be others out there.

### ASBURY COLLEGE

In **January of 1989**, George came across a small, two-inch square advertisement in a magazine featuring a peaceful scene of horses grazing in a pasture. The ad was for Asbury College (now Asbury University) in Wilmore, Kentucky, a small Christian institution with a close-knit community. As soon as he saw the image, something clicked. It wasn't just the picture itself, but the overwhelming sense of peace, purpose, and something even deeper—almost as if God was drawing him to that place. George felt what he describes as a divine connection to the photo, as though God's presence was within the image, calling him to Asbury. It was a familiar sense of knowing he had experienced before, coupled with a deep understanding that this divine calling would be life-changing. And so, Asbury became the one and only college that George applied to—and he got in.

His parents, however, weren't exactly thrilled about him going so far from home. But George's mind was made up. When fall arrived, he boarded a plane from Maine to Chicago, and then from Chicago to Kentucky. On the second leg of the journey, George found himself seated next to a girl named Debbie. They chatted casually during the flight, but it wasn't until they landed in Lexington, Kentucky, and both headed for the same van that George realized Debbie was also heading to Asbury. Her brother, Tim, was already attending the school, and during the 30-minute drive from the airport, Debbie mentioned that she would introduce George to him.

When they arrived at Asbury, Tim and George met and after a brief conversation George quickly discovered that Tim and he were living on the same floor just a couple of doors apart in the “Trustees Main” dorm. The guys that lived on that floor would later start a group called TM3. This was significant because TM3 would become the heart of George’s social life at Asbury. The TM3 group was always expanding as new members joined and all ate lunch together, watched movies, traveled, and forged friendships that would last a lifetime.

It was at one of the first meals together, soon after being introduced to Tim, when Tim asked George where he was from. George replied that he was from Maine and Tim smiled and said, “You’ve got to meet Craig.” It turned out Craig was also from Maine and lived just ten minutes away from George back home, although they had never met before arriving in Kentucky.

Over the next two months, George and Craig crossed paths frequently, and by the time November rolled around, they had become close friends. It wasn’t long before they decided to become roommates. The connection between George and Craig felt like more than coincidence—it was as if God had orchestrated their meeting, knowing that their friendship would become a cornerstone of George’s journey.

## **STRUGGLES AT ASBURY**

But George’s time at Asbury wasn’t without its struggles. The weight of his empathic abilities often left him drained and overwhelmed. While his faith grew during his time at Asbury, it was hard to focus on academics when he was carrying not just his own emotions, but those of his classmates, teachers, and even strangers. George found solace in his friendship with Craig and the community of TM3, but the emotional toll of being an empath often made concentrating on his studies feel like trying to juggle ten balls at once—that were on fire—while blindfolded.

Financial struggles also played a significant role in George’s time at Asbury. Despite his love for the school and the friendships he was forming, the cost of tuition became too much. So, after just over a year, George made the difficult decision to leave. It wasn’t an easy choice, but George trusted that God had a plan for him—even if that plan didn’t involve staying at Asbury.

“I guess God’s plan was more like one of those ‘choose your own adventure’ books,” George would later joke. “You think you know where it’s going, but God’s always got a surprise waiting on the next page.”

Though George’s time at Asbury was brief, the friendships he formed—with Craig and many others—would last a lifetime, and the experiences would stay with him as he continued his journey of faith and personal growth.

## **CRISIS OF FAITH & SUICIDE**

In the fall of **1989**, while attending Asbury College, George found himself wrestling with his

faith in a way he had never experienced before. The emotional weight of being an empath, combined with unresolved childhood trauma, had become overwhelming. His unique gift of feeling and absorbing the emotions of others, paired with the pain from his past, had become too much to bear. Every day felt like an uphill battle, and he was sinking under the weight of emotions that didn't even belong to him. He felt lost, overwhelmed, and deeply alone, battling depression and questioning how much longer he could keep going with this emotional burden on his shoulders.

One night, as his internal struggles reached their breaking point, George found himself standing at the edge of desperation. He had no plan, no idea of what he would do next, but he felt the need to get out, to escape. His feet carried him to the nearby train tracks—a place he often went to watch the trains speed by in the stillness of the night. But on this night, he wasn't there for solace. He stood on the tracks, heart heavy, and cried out in frustration and pain, "How can I possibly believe you're real, God? A real God wouldn't put me through this hell—feeling the things I'm feeling, knowing the things I'm knowing, and being unable to do anything about it!"

In that moment of raw vulnerability, George threw out what felt like an ultimatum to the heavens: "Either prove you're real, or I'm standing here until that train kills me."

Then, something unexpected happened.

As George stood there, waiting for what he thought might be his final moment, he heard the sound of a train. But it wasn't coming from behind him, where the tracks were—it was coming from in front of him and off to the left. Confused, he turned toward the sound, and what he saw next felt like something straight out of a divine encounter. A wall of water hit him with such intensity that it nearly knocked him off his feet. Thunder cracked across the sky as if the heavens were answering his challenge directly as a microburst, (which is a sudden and intense downdraft of wind) unleashed a powerful storm with rain and wind that came rushing at him in full force, like a freight train from the sky.

George stood there, drenched and shaken but laughing hysterically, as the storm surrounded him. It was as if God had sent the storm as a response to his plea, a divine interruption to remind George that he was not alone. The chaos of the storm matched the chaos inside him, but somehow, within it, there was an unmistakable sense of joy and peace and purpose.

As George made his way back toward town, laughing at the absurdity of it all—laughing at the sheer power of what he had just experienced—he realized something profound: God had heard him. That storm wasn't just a coincidence. It felt like a direct answer to his challenge, a tangible moment of divine intervention. The flood of emotions that had once felt like they would drown him were now matched by the literal flood he had just experienced. But this time, instead of being overwhelmed, George felt lighter, as if some of the emotional burden had been washed away in the storm.

As George started walking back toward town he struggled to remain standing, still laughing hysterically, he passed by the police station just as an officer came out, holding his hat against the wind. When their eyes met, the officer saw George's grin, and in that moment, the laughter became contagious. The officer began to laugh too, clutching his hat and trying

to get to his car, both of them momentarily swept up in the shared humor of the storm's chaos.

Thunder continued to rumble in the distance as George walked home, and from that night forward, the sound of thunder became something deeply personal for him—a constant reminder of God's power, love, and grace. What once might have been a symbol of fear or unrest now carried a deep sense of comfort. In the years that followed, the sound of thunder would forever remind George of that stormy night, of the moment God showed him that he was not alone.

While this would not be the last time George struggled with suicidal thoughts, that night on the train tracks marked a turning point. He had been given undeniable proof of God's presence, a personal experience that would carry him through future struggles. It became a moment of laughter, wonder, and reverence all wrapped into one.

Looking back, George would come to see this experience as one of the many times that God intervened in his life, often in ways that were unexpected and dramatic. Though his empathic abilities continued to challenge him, George began to understand that his gift—while a heavy burden at times—was part of God's plan for him. Through every storm, literal or emotional, George learned to lean on his faith, knowing that God was always present, even in the darkest moments. And in time, George would come to see that the same storm that nearly knocked him down was also the very storm that taught him how to stand strong and to dance in the rain.



# 5

## Catherine Boothe Bible College

### CRISIS AT BIBLE COLLEGE

After George left college and moved back to Maine, he worked for a few months until Craig graduated from Asbury and also returned to Maine. Then, in the **fall of 1991**, George and Craig decided to further their education by applying to the **Catherine Boothe Bible College** in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Before they went, both George and Craig, along with Craig's parents, had several conversations with the college administration, making it clear that they would need jobs to help pay their way. The administration assured them this wouldn't be a problem, so when they were accepted, they made the decision to go.

Unfortunately, within days of arriving and getting settled in and ready to work, George & Craig were informed that there had been a mistake: the officials had promised jobs but because George & Craig were American citizens, they were not eligible for the jobs they had been promised. The school agreed to let them stay for the remainder of the semester, but only on the condition that their college tuition bill was paid in full before finals. Without the jobs, the financial burden was too great. This meant not only that they couldn't return for the next semester, but they also couldn't even sit for their finals, stripping away any academic credit or transferable benefit for that term. While the knowledge and experience gained were still valuable, without the ability to apply them toward a degree, the practical academic benefit was lost.

It was an extremely frustrating and disheartening setback that once again reinforced George's distrust; however, despite everything, George still had an unshakable sense that God had a reason for bringing them to Canada. Even if it wasn't clear yet, he believed there was a purpose beyond their immediate understanding. He also felt strongly that if they stayed until the end of the semester, rather than leaving early, God would reveal that purpose in time.

As the semester came to an end in **December of 1991**, George's sense of purpose in being there became clearer in a way that was impossible to predict. One night, George, Craig, and some friends were walking through the city. At one moment, George had a strong sense that they needed to walk in a certain direction, so without asking the others he instinctively turned down a side road and started walking with a sense of urgency. Without question, the rest of the group followed. As they walked around a corner, George noticed

two men in the distance. One was holding up the other, and as they got closer, it became clear that the second man had been stabbed and was bleeding profusely. The scene was chaotic, and the man who had been stabbed was clearly overwhelmed. He told them, with resignation in his voice, to just let him die. He was ready to give up and didn't want to live anymore.

Without hesitation, George knelt down so that he was looking up at the man, who was barely standing as his friend held him up. In a calm but earnest voice, George spoke to him and said, "I've been where you are, and I know what it's like to want to die, to feel like there's nothing worth living for." He paused for a moment, making sure the man was hearing him and then looking directly at his eyes he said, "But I'm here to tell you, you're worth saving. God has a plan for you, just like He has a plan for me and each of us. Things will get better!"

The man, who had been so set on giving up, seemed to pause, letting the words sink in. Slowly, the despair in his eyes began to soften as George's words reached him. George turned to Craig and the rest of the group and said, "Go call an ambulance." George, Craig, and the others stayed with the man until the ambulance arrived. In that moment, they had quite literally saved this man's life.

For George, this experience was a powerful reminder of how God uses people to reach others in their darkest hours, but it also held an even deeper significance. George realized that God had taken his own struggles with wanting to die—a battle he had faced and overcome—and used that experience as a catalyst to prepare him for this very moment. It was as if everything George had endured was leading him to pay it forward, to show God's love to someone else who was in desperate need of it. The weight of the encounter stayed with him, reaffirming his belief that he was meant to use his empathic abilities to help others, even in the most dire circumstances.

As their time in Canada was coming to an end, Craig moved back to Maine and George moved to Alaska to live with his sister. It was there that his empathic abilities would become even more refined as he learned what it means to step into the unknown.

# 6

## Alaska

### AN ALASKAN ADVENTURE

To say that Alaska is huge is an understatement. And yet there was a time that George found himself navigating it as though he had an internal compass guiding him. There was a woman that George knew living in Alaska and she came to him in distress. Her and her daughter had a disagreement that morning and her daughter had run away from home, and the woman had no idea where she could be. George, sensing the woman's desperation, offered to help look for the girl, despite not knowing where to even begin.

He got into his car and began driving, praying for wisdom and direction along the way. As he drove through the vast Alaskan landscape, George kept having a strong, inexplicable urging to turn down one road, then another. He had no map or clear plan, only a deep sense that he was being led somewhere. After about 30 minutes of driving through unfamiliar territory, George found himself pulling into the parking lot of a grocery store that he had never been to before!

While sitting in the car, George felt a subtle inner prompting—like a quiet whisper of intuition—telling him to get out of the car and go inside the store. After a moment of hesitation, he got out and, as he walked toward the entrance, another whisper came: 'Go to the meat counter on the right.' As George entered the store and headed in that direction, yet another whisper followed: 'Ask for a man named David.'

At first, George hesitated, wondering if he should really act on such an odd feeling. How likely was it that he'd find the right person in a random grocery store? But the inner voice persisted: 'Ask for him!' Reluctantly, George approached the meat counter. The employee behind the counter asked, 'What can I get for you?' and George replied, 'Is David here?'

To George's surprise, the employee said, 'Hold on, I'll get him.' Moments later, a man came out and introduced himself as David. Still processing the chain of improbable events, George explained why he was there and asked about the runaway girl. In an unexpected twist, David confirmed that the girl had been at his house and had gotten on the bus with his daughter that very morning. George quickly took down some contact information and relayed it to the girl's mother. Thanks to this remarkable series of events, the girl was safely reunited with her family.

This extraordinary experience not only strengthened George's belief in his empathic abilities but also deepened his understanding of their purpose and potential. It was no longer just about feeling the emotions of others—his abilities were part of a greater plan to

guide him in helping those in need. He realized that what felt like an overwhelming burden was, in fact, a profound gift. George came to understand that his empathic nature, combined with claircognizant tendencies (his ability to "just know" things), was God's way of using him as a vessel to intervene in the lives of others.

From that moment forward, George's belief that he was meant to use his gifts to help others was solidified. Though it wasn't always easy, he knew that God had a plan for him, and that his empathic abilities were a critical part of it.

# **PART 03**

## **BUILDING A LIFE**

# 7

## Moving Home

### MOVING BACK TO MAINE

George's sister and her husband made the difficult decision to sell their house and move from Alaska to Seattle, Washington. George knew that he didn't want to live in a city. He believed that moving back home was the right decision in part because a brand-new Wal-Mart was being built in Rockland, and with his management experience, George knew he had a good chance at getting a job and moving up within the company. He saw this as an opportunity to start building a life, maybe buy a home, settle down, and perhaps even find a life partner. So in **July of 1992**, he decided to move back to Maine. The trip driving across the country to Maine took about 10 days, and along the way, George stopped to visit friends from the Bible College in Winnipeg.

After arriving back in Maine, George reconnected with Craig, other friends, and family, and started looking for a job. Wal-Mart wasn't hiring yet, as construction was still underway, so George took on two part-time jobs—one at a local grocery store and another at McDonald's. Then, in **October of 1992**, George was hired by Wal-Mart and began working full-time.

# 8

## Budding Romance

### MEETING JODELL

As he settled into life in Maine, George and Craig began attending a local singles group, where they met Bill and Sue, who would go on to become lifelong friends and a core part of George's social circle. Then, in **January of 1993**, Wal-Mart hired several manager trainees. One of them was a shy woman named Jodell and another was a more outgoing woman named Jennifer. Jodell and Jennifer quickly became friends and it wasn't long before George met them both. Although Jennifer and George found it easy to talk, George sensed there was something different about Jodell that drew him in. Her quiet presence stood out and he couldn't shake the feeling that Jodell was someone special.

As the weeks passed, George found himself thinking more and more about Jodell. He knew he was interested in her, but there was one small hurdle—company policy. Dating between associates and management wasn't allowed without approval, and that meant George had to have the talk with the store manager. If asking someone out wasn't nerve-racking enough, imagine having to ask your boss for permission! But George, undeterred, went ahead with the awkward conversation, fumbling through his words. The store manager agreed to allow him to ask her out because he knew that Jodell was only a trainee in the store and would only be working there for a short time.

### FIRST DATES

Fast forward about a week to **June of 1993**: George finally mustered the courage to ask Jodell on their first date. The moment felt monumental, like stepping off a cliff and hoping to land in something soft—and thankfully, he did! That first date went well despite the fact that both of them were nervous. During that date George discovered that the store manager had already talked with Jodell and she knew he was planning to ask her out before George even had the chance to build up the courage! George & Jodell laughed and talked and the connection between them seemed sincere, deepened by their shared faith and values. Their conversations flowed easily, and before long, they would find themselves on a steady path of dating.

After that date plans were made to get together again. The next day George returned to work thinking about the date the night before. As he walked through the front door and started to head toward the back to clock in, Jennifer spotted him and seemed to take particular joy in needling George about his budding romance with Jodell. Jennifer started

walking beside George and said “So, did you kiss her?” as she smiled with a grin eagerly wanting him to spill the beans. George, red-faced and flustered, responded with a quick, embarrassed “No!” before hurrying off to escape further questioning. And so began a running joke.

After every date, Jennifer would ask the same question, “Did you kiss her?” And after the second and third dates, George’s answer remained a sheepish “No!”—each time more mortified than the last. But by the time the fourth date rolled around, things had changed. When Jennifer asked her now-famous question, George simply smiled, said nothing, and kept on walking toward the back to clock in. That smile said it all, and Jennifer didn’t need to ask again.

## **ACCIDENT: BRAIN INJURY**

However, not everything in their story was light-hearted and humorous. In **November of 1993**, George faced an unexpected and serious challenge when he suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident. While driving his **Blue Mercury Lynx Station Wagon**, George was stopped, waiting for oncoming traffic to break so he could make a left-hand turn, when his car was struck from behind by a speeding driver. The impact sent his head slamming into the bar between the front and back doors on the driver’s side. The result was a severe injury that left George facing months of therapy and counseling to recover.

It was a difficult time for both him and Jodell, but rather than pulling them apart, this trial only brought them closer. Their shared faith became their anchor, and they leaned on each other in ways they hadn’t expected so early in their relationship.

In the weeks following the accident, as George faced the long road to recovery, something became undeniably clear. George was in love with Jodell! Her love and support was like a constant anchor in the storm. With every passing day George fell deeper in love with her and he knew, without a doubt, that Jodell was the person he wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

## **WILL YOU MARRY ME?**

So, in **December of 1993**, George made a plan. Despite still healing, both physically and emotionally, he knew he wanted to propose—and he wanted to make the moment special. His plan unfolded as a Christmas gift for Jodell. He carefully wrapped a large box, and inside it was another, smaller box. Taped to that box was a note that simply said, “Will.” As Jodell unwrapped the second box, she found yet another, even smaller one, with a note that said, “you.” Finally, after unwrapping one more box, she found a note that asked, “Marry me?” and inside the last box was the ring.

With a smile and without hesitation, Jodell said yes. At the time, they were sitting on a couch at George’s parents’ house, who, knowing what was about to happen, had graciously left for the evening to give them privacy. After Jodell said yes, George slipped



the ring onto her finger. For a brief moment, they laughed as they tried to figure out which hand the ring was supposed to go on—unsure if it should be the right or the left.

As they were talking, George's parents returned home. Excited but a little nervous, Jodell went to meet them at the door and immediately asked George's mom about which hand the ring should be on. George, starting to get up from the couch to follow her, met Jodell as she walked back into the living room. As she approached, she happily called out, "Hey Jeff—we had the ring on the wrong finger!"

George, hearing this as they met, blinked in confusion. "Jeff?" he asked, as he saw his parents grinning in surprise. Realizing her mix-up, Jodell's face turned red, and she quickly corrected herself, saying, "I mean George," feeling embarrassed. Everyone burst into laughter. It wasn't just an endearing moment for that night—it became one of those funny memories that would live on in the years to come, a story they would laugh about again and again.

Over the years, George would come to learn that little mix-ups like this were part of Jodell's charm—and amusingly enough, Jeff was one of two names Jodell had never liked. The other? George. And somehow, that just made him love her even more!

## THE WEDDING

It was a beautiful fall day in early **October 1994** when George and Jodell stood before family and friends in a church in **Morrill, Maine**, pledging their lives to each other with faith as the foundation of their union. Around 300 of their closest family members and friends gathered to witness the occasion. George's brother Patrick stood by his side as the best man, and Jodell's friend Bethany stood with her as the maid of honor.

The service was filled with music, a candle lighting ceremony, and plenty of laughter. The pastor, with a knowing smile, reminded George and Jodell of the simple comforts they were leaving behind. From others doing their laundry to the small joys of family life, he painted a picture of both nostalgia and humor, drawing chuckles from the guests and the couple alike. Their love for one another, coupled with a shared belief in God's guidance, was palpable as they embarked on this new chapter together.

Little did they know just how many curve-balls life was about to throw their way—along with a few brick walls, both figurative and literal—but together, they were ready to take on whatever came next.

# WEDDING DAY

OCTOBER 8, 1994



**GEORGE & JODELL BENSON**

CAMP FAIR HAVEN - BROOKS, MAINE

# 9

## Honeymoon Years

### **BUILDING A HOME & BUSINESS**

After getting married, George and Jodell bought a mobile home and moved it to a mobile home park. In **March of 1995**, they adopted their first cat, a black cat named Shadow. Then in November that year they were made aware of a multi-colored Siamese cat named Cola that had been left alone in a building after the family had moved out so George & Jodell adopted her and nursed her back to health.

Then, in **December of 1995**, George began working for an electronics repair company that fixed TV's, Computers, and Appliances for local rental stores. While the work was enjoyable and his coworkers were great, the new higher-ups that were brought on shortly after George was hired made life difficult for all of the employees—especially George's supervisor. George knew that standing up for his supervisor wasn't going over well with the higher ups but he also knew that he had to do the right thing! So after doing so, George began to talk with his supervisor and with his encouragement, George began to seriously consider striking out on his own.

So, after a really rough day with the higher ups, in **June of 1996**, George made the decision to quit the repair company to start his own business—a decision he probably should have discussed with Jodell first. Thankfully, she was supportive and forgiving, as always and from that day forward, George was his own boss... well, other than his customers, of course.

By **July of 1996**, George found himself zipping across Maine, servicing clients left and right, and working at all hours to keep up with the demand. Jodell, ever the supportive partner, stood by his side through the long days and late nights. The business flourished, but as the old saying goes, "Mo' money, mo' problems." The more the business grew, the more challenges seemed to pop up—like weeds in a garden that just wouldn't quit.

### **LEGAL BATTLES**

As the business grew, George realized he was always on the road and longed for a home base where clients could bring their computers to him instead of him constantly traveling. So, in **1997**, George and Jodell made a bold move and purchased a three-story property, setting their sights on a major renovation project. The plan was simple (or so they thought): convert the top floor into their new home and transform the lower floors into professional

offices using one of them to run their computer repair business. Everything seemed on track after they secured the necessary permits from the town.

The **Summer of 1997** saw them rolling up their sleeves, excited to turn their dream into a reality. But just when it seemed like everything was moving forward, life pressed the pause button. Their plans came to a screeching halt when a neighbor, out of the blue, hired an attorney to block the project.

Now, some people might get discouraged at the sight of legal papers, but George and Jodell weren't about to back down without a fight. They lawyered up and quickly realized that the town official who had issued their permits had made a series of errors. The good news? They had a strong case. The bad news? There was no guarantee they'd win, and the potential financial cost of dragging the town and their neighbor to court was daunting. After weighing their options—and probably more than one “Why is this happening to us?” moment—they made a decision: peace over conflict. Instead of waging a costly legal battle, they chose to scale back the project, prioritizing their well-being and community harmony over bricks and blueprints.

But here's where George's stubborn optimism came in handy. Rather than letting the experience sour him, he flipped the script. In a “turn lemons into lemonade” moment, George decided to volunteer for the town's zoning board of appeals. So for over 11 years, he worked tirelessly to help others as they navigated similar zoning challenges, always trying to make sure that no one else had to go through the headache he and Jodell had endured. It wasn't exactly the glamorous end they'd envisioned for their dream property, but George's service on the board was a testament to his character—always looking for a way to give back and make a difference, even if it meant dealing with more paperwork.

Despite everything life threw at them—the setbacks, the zoning issues, the accidents—George and Jodell kept their eyes on what mattered most: each other and their faith. Scaling back the renovation project wasn't easy, but they both knew that peace was more valuable than winning any fight. They prioritized their well-being and their community over the temporary satisfaction of a legal victory. And as they built their life together, with all its ups and downs, their commitment to each other only grew stronger.

## **ACCIDENT, CHARLENE, RENOVATIONS**

Of course, life wasn't done throwing challenges their way. In **September of 1997**, George and Jodell were involved in a car accident in Jay, Maine. George was driving a maroon **1988 Ford Escort Station Wagon**, when another driver pulled out in front of them. Because what's a little more chaos in an already eventful year, right? Fortunately, they both recovered, but the car - not so much! It was totaled! The experience was yet another test of their faith and resilience, but hey, with each new hurdle, George and Jodell leaned harder on each other—and on their belief that everything happens for a reason, even if that reason is sometimes a mystery wrapped in bad timing.

By **October 1997**, George had transitioned his business from the open road to more of a “brick-and-mortar” location. This move allowed him to expand his offerings and provide

even better service to his growing list of clients. He named the business The PC Café & Service Center, blending his love for computers with the entrepreneurial flair that came so naturally to him. As time went on George & Jodell offered more services, creating the corporate assumed names “Bookkeeping Etc.” and “Abricom Systems, INC.”

In **January of 1998**, George and Jodell met Charlene, a friend of Bill’s, who was moving to the area and needed a place to stay while she searched for a home of her own. Generous as ever, they offered her a place to stay, and soon, Charlene and Jodell became fast friends—bonding over shared laughter, late-night talks, and, of course, plenty of coffee.

As the year unfolded, George and Jodell started planning for some major changes. With big ideas on the horizon—a significant construction project to build a dormer on their home, upgrades to the parking lot for the business, and an exciting vacation to Italy—they were feeling both ambitious and a bit nervous. By July, Charlene had found a place of her own and moved out, leaving behind fond memories but with the knowledge she was only a 10 minute drive away!

**September** saw the beginning of the dormer construction, and by **October**, the parking lot was finally upgraded—ahh the smell of fresh pavement—and progress! With all the dust settled, literally and figuratively, George and Jodell set off on their much-anticipated vacation to Italy, excited to trade construction projects for pizza and pasta.

## TOWN OF THOMASTON

In **April of 1999**, Jodell began working for the Town of Thomaston, a decision that seemed simple enough at the time but would soon prove invaluable for both her and George. This job came with something that would become a true lifesaver: medical insurance. Little did they know just how much use that poor insurance card would get in the years ahead!

Despite George’s disappointment that Jodell would not be working with him - Jodell’s decision to take the job—rooted in her faith and belief it was the right thing to do—turned out to be invaluable, especially with the medical challenges they would face down the road. Today, Jodell continues to work for the town, now as the Finance Director, though that role has been a little lighter on surprises compared to their personal life.

## ACCIDENT IN ORONO

With Jodell working for Thomaston, George had to adjust his hours so he could still take care of customers who needed him to travel for help. On one such trip in **May of 1999**, while George was working at a customer’s home, a neighbor came knocking. This wasn’t the usual “Can I borrow a cup of sugar?” type of visit. Instead, the neighbor sheepishly admitted to having accidentally hit George’s parked maroon **1993 Subaru Impreza**—causing significant damage. Unfortunately, however, this was only the beginning of the universe’s vendetta against George’s parked cars!

For George, this accident wasn’t his first, nor would it be his last. The car would get fixed,

and life would move on as he and Jodell learned to roll with punches, learning to deal with the many unexpected challenges they would face. Luckily, they had their faith, each other—and a good mechanic—to keep them moving forward. And while the road was filled with triumphs and setbacks, they faced it all hand in hand, knowing that together, they could weather any storm!

# **PART 04**

## **GROWING TOGETHER**

# 10

## Starting A Family

### BOBBY-JO

During the months following that accident life was going good. The business got a new sign, tried some new forms of advertising with multiple radio advertisements to advertise the year's Christmas specials. Then, in the weeks before Christmas, George felt the pressure of life building up—work, marriage, and the looming uncertainty of starting a family all weighed on his mind. He had always wanted to be a good husband to Jodell, but the thought of adding fatherhood into the mix felt overwhelming. The idea of balancing both roles—being a devoted husband and a good father—left him feeling paralyzed. Could he really be “enough” for both Jodell and a child?

As these doubts grew, George began to wrestle with the thoughts of becoming a father. He loved Jodell deeply but he also found himself praying—sometimes desperately—asking God to hold off on letting it happen. It wasn't that George didn't want children; it was that he doubted his ability to juggle both roles without failing at one—or both. The pressure of perfectionism was suffocating. Jodell, ever supportive, was patient with George's struggle, and together, they decided to be careful. Jodell was a master at charting her cycles, and armed with the added information they tried to avoid conceiving until they both felt ready.

But life, as it often does, had other plans.

Shortly after **Christmas**, George started experiencing unusual symptoms—waking up feeling nauseous for no apparent reason. At first, he and Jodell wondered if it was related to something George was eating or the stress of the responsibilities he was carrying. Yet, despite their best efforts to investigate, the symptoms persisted. What George didn't realize at the time was that this wasn't just stress; it was something more.

As the new year started it seemed like George's empathic abilities had been trying to tell him something but the stress of life and the stomach problems he was having made it difficult to pinpoint what it was. Later that month, on **January 29th, 2000**, while out shopping with his brother Patrick and sister-in-law Andrea, Patrick made a joke: “You'd think between the five of us, one of us would've had the energy to get out of the car.” George, confused by the remark, asked if there was something they weren't telling him—maybe Andrea was pregnant? Little did George know, it was Jodell who was carrying their child. The next day, **January 30th**, Jodell shared the news with George, and the mystery was solved.

The news came as a complete surprise, especially to George. Despite their efforts to be



careful, Jodell had ovulated earlier than expected. When Jodell shared the news, George was hit with a wave of complex emotions—shock, joy, fear, and doubt all swirling together—but, although he did not know it at the time, this did explain George’s sickness. It turns out that what George had been experiencing wasn’t strictly speaking stress-related—it was called **Couvade Syndrome**, a condition where expectant fathers physically manifest pregnancy symptoms. George had been feeling the weight of the pregnancy without even knowing it.

A few weeks later, in **February 2000**, George was in Augusta, Maine picking up parts for a customer. Augusta is a city in Maine and it has a series of traffic circles. One entrance to the traffic circle is at the top of a hill. George was driving his dad’s **1991 Jeep Cherokee** up that hill to enter the traffic circle when another vehicle behind him hit the Jeep causing a small amount of damage.

Around that same time, George’s morning sickness symptoms returned with full force. Initially, he attributed the sickness to the mounting stress—dealing with car repairs, rescheduling customer appointments, adding chiropractor visits, and managing the emotional toll of it all. He convinced himself that it was simply the weight of everything happening at once. But the stress soon transformed into profound grief when he and Jodell went to a doctor’s appointment, only to receive the devastating news that their baby, Bobby-Jo, had died in the womb at just six weeks and two days. In that moment, the world seemed to stop, and the burden George had been carrying suddenly became heavier than he could have ever imagined.

The grief was overwhelming, and it left George and Jodell in a spiral of emotional turmoil. The loss of Bobby-Jo wasn’t just heartbreaking—it stirred up every fear and doubt they had, and before long, it began to drive a wedge between them. Worse still, they couldn’t seem to talk about what had happened. Jodell leaned on family members for support, while George struggled, unsure of what to do. He desperately wanted to be there for Jodell, but he couldn’t shake the heavy guilt that perhaps his prayers and inner battles had somehow contributed to Bobby-Jo’s death. For months, George silently carried this weight, quietly wrestling with the painful belief that his own fears might have played a part in their tragedy.

Then, one night, as George and Jodell sat together on the couch, the emotional dam finally broke. The weight of everything crashed down on George, and he burst into tears. Through his sobs, he cried out, “I want our baby back!” In that raw and vulnerable moment, George allowed himself to grieve—not just for the loss of Bobby-Jo, but for all the impossible standards he had been carrying. It was as if, for the first time, he fully understood the depth of his pain and the toll it had taken on him and Jodell.

In that moment, George realized something he hadn’t allowed himself to before: God wasn’t asking him to be perfect. The crushing expectations he had placed on himself were not part of God’s plan. Instead, he began to see that God was asking him to do his best and to trust that where he fell short, God’s grace would fill in the gaps.

This shift in perspective lifted the unbearable burden that had been suffocating George. He found peace in knowing that God had never abandoned them, even in the darkest of times. From that moment on, George began to let go of the perfectionism that had held him back for so long, allowing himself to trust in God’s plan and embrace the future—whatever it

might hold—with a renewed sense of hope and faith.

## A COSMIC VENDETTA

As the **Spring of 2000** approached, one of George's brothers, Donald, who had recently retired from the Air Force, was planning to renovate a house he had bought and build a garage. Being handy with a hammer and experienced with carpentry, George offered to help his brother. He was young when Don went into the military and saw this as an opportunity to finally get to know his older brother. The garage project spanned the summer, and just as fall rolled around, the universe, once again, decided to wreak a little havoc.

The havoc began in late **October** at Wal-Mart while George was picking up groceries. As he was leaving the store, a woman approached him and explained that she had just witnessed a truck with a trailer hitch backing into the parking space in front of George's maroon **1993 Subaru Impreza**. The hitch had struck George's car, causing radiator damage. Grateful for the information, George reported the incident and had the car repaired.

Then, just a month later in late **November**, while planning a big family Thanksgiving gathering, George headed out again to get groceries for the event. Along the way, he stopped at a local convenience store for a drink. As he grabbed a Diet Mountain Dew and approached the register, another customer walked in and, to George's astonishment, confessed they had just hit the same maroon **1993 Subaru Impreza**—damaging the exact spot that had been repaired a few weeks earlier.

Because, of course, the universe seems to have a way of testing patience, especially for those who dare to ask for it! But by now, George and Jodell were well-practiced at rolling with life's punches, laughing at what could only be described as a cosmic vendetta against their parked cars.

## BIRTH & DEATH - JOY & SORROW

Fast forward several months to **September 2001**, and life brought some unexpected yet happy news. George was experiencing familiar signs of stress—stomach issues, fatigue, and an overwhelming sense of unease. At the time no one thought much of it, but by early **September**, it all became clear: George's **Couvade Syndrome** was back, and this time it was because Jodell was pregnant with their second child, Antonia. Oh the joy Jodell felt, when she realized her loving husband was once again so willing to take on the morning sickness burden for her...wait—did George actually sign up for that?

A few days later, on **September 11, 2001**, the world was struck by tragedy. That morning, George awoke with an overwhelming sense of dread. He jumped out of bed and turned on the TV just as the breaking news was coming in on the TV talking about the first plane strike at the World Trade Center. As the news unfolded, George became increasingly uneasy until suddenly his brain was flooded with a download of information as his claircognizant abilities kicked in and he struggled with knowing that another plane was

about to hit the second tower—moments later it did. George’s anger at God was evident as he sat by himself asking “Why God? Why? What the hell good is it to know this in advance and have no way to do anything about it?” The anger in that moment brought him back to the day when he was standing on the tracks yelling at God. The weight of that day’s events, combined with the intensity of being an empath, was almost too much for George to bear. He felt raw and exposed, as though the world’s pain had seeped into his very core. When Jodell returned home from work later that day, they sat together to talk about what had happened. But as much as George wanted to share everything he was feeling, the words seemed to elude him. He could see the concern in Jodell’s eyes, but he struggled with what to say.

Though they had been together for years, Jodell knew little about what it meant for George to be an empath. He hadn’t yet found the words to fully explain it, and in that moment, it felt impossible to describe the emotional storm he was enduring. Instead, they talked about the sadness of the day’s events—the surface-level grief they both could see and understand—while the deeper turmoil within George remained locked away.

Yet, even in that silence, there was comfort. George found solace in simply sitting with Jodell, in having someone beside him who cared. It was as though her presence alone, even without fully understanding the depths of what he was experiencing, was enough to bring a measure of peace to his storm. He didn’t need to explain everything right then—just being with her, in that moment, was enough.

The pain and confusion within George wouldn’t be fully addressed for years. It would take time, and life would have to unfold in ways neither of them could predict before they would finally have the conversations that revealed what it truly meant for George to be an empath. But for now, they leaned on one another. George turned to God for strength, and Jodell for comfort. Together, they prayed for peace as the world around them seemed to unravel, their faith a fragile but steady anchor amidst the chaos.

In the aftermath of **September 11th**, while the nation was in mourning, George and Jodell found themselves dealing with their own personal challenges. The joy of Jodell’s pregnancy, once a source of hope and excitement, began to feel overshadowed by both national grief and growing concerns about complications with the pregnancy. It was a time filled with mixed emotions.

As **December** rolled around, during what should have been a routine doctor’s visit, Jodell was asked if she would consider participating in an experimental AFP blood test. The decision wasn’t easy, but after much thought and discussion, George and Jodell agreed to proceed with the test, cautiously optimistic. In the days that followed, when the results came back, they were nothing short of devastated and perplexed: the test revealed that their baby, Antonia, had both Spina Bifida and Down Syndrome—two conditions rarely seen together and seemingly at opposite ends of a spectrum.

The news hit like a tidal wave, leaving George and Jodell shaken to their core. The joy they had once felt about the pregnancy was suddenly clouded by fear and uncertainty. The world they had imagined for their unborn child felt as though it had collapsed in an instant, and the weight of the possibilities ahead bore down on them. Yet, even in the midst of this emotional whirlwind, they held onto one glimmer of hope. Together with Jodell’s doctor, they

reasoned that because the AFP test was experimental, there was a strong chance it was a false reading.

That belief gave them something to cling to, but it didn't erase the fear. The uncertainty cast a shadow over everything, turning each day into an emotional tightrope walk between cautious optimism and an ever-present worry about the unknown. George and Jodell tried to move forward, but the lingering "what if" followed them everywhere. Even though they prayed for peace and trusted in their faith, the emotional weight was inescapable, making what should have been a time of joyful preparation into one filled with apprehension, as they grappled with the fragile balance between hope and fear.

Still, in the midst of it all, George and Jodell held fast to their belief that God was in control. Their faith became their anchor, providing a sense of peace even as they faced the unknown. It was this unwavering trust in God's plan that carried them through, reminding them that no matter what lay ahead, they were not facing it alone.

## **ANTONIA'S BIRTH**

As **April 2002** approached, George and Jodell Benson were eagerly anticipating the birth of their second child, but little did they know that her arrival would be filled with unexpected twists, anxiety, and unforgettable moments. Despite being born prematurely at just four pounds, Antonia came into the world on **April 25, 2002**, at **Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine**. Just six days before her birth, during a routine **sonogram**, the doctors discovered that Jodell had dangerously low amniotic fluid. The discovery was alarming, and without hesitation, they sent Jodell directly to the hospital to be admitted for monitoring.

After being admitted, the doctors spent the next six days closely monitoring Jodell's amniotic fluid levels, as well as Antonia's heart rate looking for any signs of distress. Then, on **April 24, 2002**, they made a plan to deliver Antonia by a scheduled C-section at **10:30 A.M.** the next morning. With that plan in place, and because he couldn't stay the night at the hospital, George kissed Jodell goodbye and headed home in the early evening.

But later that night, just as George had settled into bed, his phone rang around **3 A.M.** A nurse was on the line, telling him that Jodell was being prepped for an emergency C-section. The amniotic fluid levels had dropped dangerously low again, and they couldn't wait until morning. A full team was already in place to perform the surgery. The nurse tried to reassure George, explaining that there was no need to rush to the hospital, as Antonia would already be born by the time he arrived due to the nearly two-hour drive.

Heart pounding, George quickly called his mother, who agreed to ride with him. As they made their way to Maine Medical Center in Portland, the minutes seemed to stretch endlessly. His mind raced with thoughts of Jodell and their baby, praying that everything would be okay. When they finally arrived at the hospital around **5:30 A.M.**, George was taken to Jodell's room, where she was resting under the nurse's watch as the anesthesia from the spinal tap wore off.

Jodell was groggy but alert enough to recount her experience of the C-section. With a faint

smile, she told George and his mother about the funny moment when her leg slipped off the bed after receiving the spinal tap. She laughed as she remembered telling the doctor, "Ahh Doc, you're going to have to help me lift my leg!" Part of what makes this funny is that to this day Jodell has absolutely no memory of telling this story—yet George, his mother, and the nurse who was there all vividly remembered her sharing it, despite having no memory of doing so.

As the moments passed, Jodell became increasingly anxious. Antonia was in the NICU, but Jodell couldn't go see her just yet because she still had to wait for the spinal tap to fully wear off before she could walk. After some time, Jodell finally urged George to go ahead and meet their daughter. He hesitated, wanting to share that first moment together, but Jodell again strongly urged him to go.

Taking a deep breath, George agreed and asked the nurse for directions to the NICU. She told him the directions and said when he got to the NICU to don a gown and mask, wash up at the sink outside the NICU, and that another nurse would meet him at the NICU doors. Following the instructions, George went to the NICU, put on a gown, washed his hands thoroughly, and then slowly pushed the NICU doors open. As he stood waiting by the doors for a nurse to greet him, George called out quietly so as to not wake the babies. But no one came.

At first, it seemed quiet, almost surreal, with the soft hum of machines and monitors filling the room. Then, faintly, he heard it—a small cry coming from the far end of the NICU. It was quiet, but unmistakable. Immediately, George knew that sound—it was Antonia. Her cry, though soft, echoed through the room, piercing through the stillness and reaching him in a way that was more than just sound—it was a call, a connection that transcended explanation.

Without hesitation, as if some unseen force was guiding him, George began walking toward the far end of the NICU. There were rows of incubators, each housing tiny, fragile lives, but in that moment, all George could hear was his daughter. The world around him seemed to blur as he moved closer to her crib, the sound of her soft cry drawing him in like a beacon.

As he reached her incubator, there she was—his beautiful, fragile little girl, surrounded by wires and tubes, her tiny body fighting to grow and heal. The sight of her took his breath away. In that instant, George felt something he could never fully put into words—a profound, unbreakable bond that went deeper than anything he had ever experienced. He didn't need a nurse to show him the way or tell him which baby was his—he had simply known. It was as if his heart had been guiding him all along, straight to her side.



Tears welled up in his eyes as he stood there, gazing down at Antonia. Despite the tubes and the machines, she was perfect. Her tiny chest rose and fell with the soft beeping of the monitor, her delicate hands curled into fists, and her face was peaceful, even as she let out that faint, heart-tugging cry. George's heart swelled with love and gratitude. After all the worry, the uncertainty, and the fear of the unknown, here she was—his daughter. Safe. Stronger than she looked.

Though the journey to her birth had been filled with challenges, George knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that God had guided them through every moment. Antonia's cry wasn't just the sound of a newborn—it was a reminder of the miracles that happen even in life's darkest moments. It was the sound of hope, resilience, and love.

Antonia spent the next six days in the NICU and then an additional 13 days in continuing care. During her time in the continuing care unit, there was an unsettling moment when George and Jodell discovered that the medical records binder for Antonia had mistakenly been filled with the details of another child. When Jodell brought this to the nurse's attention, she was met with a curt, frustrated response, which left them both feeling uneasy. Concerned for Antonia's care, George contacted their personal doctor, Dr. Dan Friedland, and arranged for Antonia to be transferred to a different hospital, closer to home—Miles Memorial Hospital. Antonia spent another seven days at Miles before finally being discharged, and George and Jodell were able to bring their precious daughter home.

Despite being born prematurely at **3:28 A.M.** and weighing just four pounds, Antonia was largely healthy, and the AFP test results, which had caused so much worry, were proven wrong. Over time, George and Jodell came to see the entire experience—especially the experimental AFP test that initially led to such fear—as part of a larger miracle. Without that test, they might not have known about the dangerously low amniotic fluid in time. It was through that challenge that they were able to bring Antonia into the world safely. This experience reminded them that even life's most difficult moments can be used by God to bring about miracles, and that faith, love, and perseverance are the keys to navigating the unknown.

## THE HOMEWORK DAD

After an extended hospital stay, the moment George and Jodell had been waiting for finally arrived—it was time to bring Antonia home. As they stepped out of the hospital, it suddenly hit them: no one had handed them an instruction manual. They exchanged nervous glances—really, who thought it was a good idea to send two exhausted new parents into the world with a newborn bundle of joy and no guidebook?

In the months leading up to Antonia's birth, George and Jodell had made a big decision: after Jodell's maternity leave, George would become Antonia's primary caregiver while Jodell returned to work. It was a decision they both felt confident about, but the reality of it was much harder than they could have anticipated. Every day, Jodell would use a breast pump to collect milk for Antonia, and George would manage the feedings and care throughout the day. Occasionally, George would take Antonia down to visit Jodell at work in Thomaston, where the office staff loved seeing the baby. It was one of the few moments of light in a routine that had quickly become exhausting.

## THE PANIC ATTACK

Fast forward through many sleepless nights, countless diaper changes, and the general chaos that comes with adjusting to parenthood, and by **November of 2002**, George found himself brought to the brink of a major panic attack. It wasn't one big dramatic event that triggered it—no, it was an extension cord. George had been working at a local library, installing new computers and networking them together. As he finished up the project and packed up his tools to head home, he reached for an extension cord to wrap up. It was a long cord, so he gave it a hard pull to bring it closer, but the far end snapped back like a whip, striking him square in the eye.

At the time, it stung, but George didn't think much of it. It wasn't until he was driving home, with the dark setting in and oncoming headlights glaring in his eyes, that he started to realize something was wrong. The glare of the oncoming lights made his vision blurry, and the fear that something might be seriously wrong began to creep in. Combined with the exhaustion from sleepless nights and the constant pressure of balancing parenthood with running a business, it all became too much.

By the time George got home, the anxiety had snowballed. He sat down on the couch, and his heart started pounding. His chest tightened, and he felt like he couldn't catch his breath. The fear that he might be having a heart attack gripped him and he told Jodell to call 911. When the ambulance arrived, George was greeted by a familiar face—an old high school teacher who was now part of the ambulance crew. The man's calm and wise demeanor helped settle George down. He explained that what George was experiencing was a panic attack, not a heart attack. He gave George a choice: they could take him to the hospital, or, if George felt he could, he suggested that it might be best to try to sleep it off in a dark, quiet room.

Taking his former teacher's advice, George chose to rest. Lying down in a dark room, he eventually drifted off to sleep, and when he awoke, the worst of it had passed.

## A NEW WAY OF LIFE

By **December of 2002**, George had regained his footing and decided it was time to formalize the expanding brands. The business had been growing steadily, providing some bookkeeping services and selling computer systems. So, he officially registered the names “Bookkeeping Etc.” and “Abricom Systems, INC.” to create brands that reflected the products and services offered.

For the first few months of **2003**, life seemed to be falling into place. George and Jodell had finally found a routine that balanced the chaos of parenting with the demands of their personal lives and growing business. The sleepless nights had begun to ease, and they were starting to enjoy the rhythm of raising their daughter, Antonia, while still managing their professional responsibilities. For the first time in what felt like forever, they were catching their breath.

## BIRTH & DEATH - JOY & SORRY: PART 2

But as **June** rolled in, life had other plans. It wasn't long before George began feeling the familiar signs of **Couvade Syndrome**—the sympathetic pregnancy symptoms that had plagued him before. There was an undeniable sense of déjà vu, as if his body was signaling something big. He had felt this way twice before, and he started to sense that Jodell might be pregnant again. Around the same time, as it turned out, Jodell had also suspected she was pregnant. So when the pregnancy test came back positive, their suspicions were confirmed: Jodell was pregnant with their second daughter, Julia.

At first, the news brought a swell of excitement and anticipation. Another baby on the way, another chapter in their journey as parents. But as the initial joy settled, the weight of what lay ahead began to creep in. The memories of their first pregnancy—the challenges, the complications, the emotional roller coaster—flooded back. With every ounce of joy came an undercurrent of uncertainty. How would they manage another child while maintaining their already delicate balance? Could they handle more sleepless nights, more doctor's appointments, and the emotional ups and downs that come with pregnancy?

Life, as it often does, had dealt them a bittersweet hand. They felt the excitement of welcoming another child, but it was tempered by the knowledge of the challenges that awaited. And while their love and faith were strong, the road ahead felt long, unpredictable, and daunting.

### Antonia's Glasses

As **2004** rolled in and Julia's birth was approaching, life brought a whirlwind of emotions for George and Jodell. Amidst the preparations for their second child, they found themselves focused on Antonia, who had been to the eye doctor previously and was now set to receive her first pair of glasses. In early **January**, they took her to the follow-up appointment. Sitting in the doctor's chair, Antonia seemed a little curious but calm as George and Jodell



explained that the doctor had special glasses—just like Mommy’s and Daddy’s—for her to try on. She nodded with the trust only a child can offer, seemingly okay with what was about to happen.

Then, the doctor carefully took the small pair of glasses, gently slipping them over Antonia’s face and adjusting them behind her ears. And in that moment, something magical happened. Antonia’s face lit up with a radiant smile, her eyes wide in wonder, as if she was seeing everything clearly for the very first time. Slowly, she began turning her head left and right, taking in every detail with awe, soaking in the new clarity of her surroundings.

It was as though a veil had been lifted, and now the world was sharp and vibrant. George and Jodell, watching their daughter’s amazement, felt a wave of emotion wash over them. Tears welled up in their eyes as they realized what this moment truly meant—Antonia’s world had opened up in a way they hadn’t even realized she had been missing. Watching her take in the clarity of her surroundings was a powerful reminder of the simple miracles we often take for granted.

The joy of the moment was undeniable, and George couldn’t help but chuckle through his tears, turning to Jodell and whispering, "It’s like she’s seeing everything for the first time... including just how weird we look." They both laughed softly, but underneath the humor was a deep sense of gratitude and love. It was a small moment, yet it carried so much weight—a reminder that sometimes, the greatest gifts come in the form of seeing the world through new eyes.

### **Cliffs Death**

A week later, on a quiet Sunday afternoon, sudden heartache struck. Jodell received a phone call from her sister-in-law, her voice filled with worry. Jodell’s brother, Cliff, had gone upstairs after church to lie down with a headache. Hours passed, and when he wouldn’t wake up, he was rushed to the hospital. As soon as they heard, George and Jodell immediately made the trip to be with the family, joining them in prayer and waiting anxiously as doctors ran tests. The hours dragged on, filled with uncertainty and hope, but despite every effort, a few days later on January 20, 2004, at just 35 years old, Cliff passed away unexpectedly.

The shock of his death was overwhelming. An autopsy was performed, but the cause of death remained a mystery, leaving the family struggling to make sense of it all. To make matters even more heartbreaking, Cliff’s death came just five days before the birth of his second child. The timing was unbearably cruel—an unspeakable loss just as a new life was about to enter the world. The family found themselves caught between the deep sorrow of Cliff’s passing and the anticipation of his child’s arrival, struggling to find peace in the midst of so much pain.

As time passed, George and Jodell came to believe that Cliff’s death bore the signs of the Powassan virus—a rare, tick-borne illness that aligned with his symptoms and his outdoor work in construction. But even understanding the likely cause didn’t ease the pain of losing him so suddenly.

## JULIA'S BIRTH

Just a couple of weeks after Cliff's passing, in **February 2004**, George and Jodell found themselves facing a complex mix of emotions. The immense sorrow from losing Jodell's brother was still raw, yet they were preparing to welcome another life into the world—Julia, their second daughter. It was as though life had orchestrated an emotional balancing act: one moment filled with heartbreak, the next with the hopeful anticipation of new life.

At a doctor's appointment on **February 11, 2004**, it was decided that Julia would be born by a scheduled C-section the following day. As much as they were looking forward to her arrival, the weight of Cliff's death made it difficult to fully embrace the excitement. The surgery was scheduled for **10:15 a.m.**, and by **6 a.m.**, George and Jodell were at Miles Memorial Hospital, ready to begin preparations. They were both exhausted—emotionally drained from juggling grief and joy—but they held tightly to the belief that, somehow, Julia's birth would help them heal.



At **10:54 a.m.** on **February 12, 2004**, Julia was born. George stood by Jodell's side in the operating room, his hand clasping hers as the surgeon moved quickly but with precision. Their personal doctor, Dr. Dan Friedland, was also in the room, camera in hand with permission to document the delivery. He was there not only as their family doctor but also as Julia's attending physician, ready to care for their newborn the moment she arrived.

When the surgeon lifted Julia from Jodell's womb, George's heart raced with anticipation. The doctor quickly clipped the umbilical cord, and Julia was wiped clean and placed under a light. It was a flurry of activity, yet it felt as though time had slowed for George. As Julia's tiny form was gently handled by the medical team, Jodell had already been put to sleep by the anesthesiologist and missed the initial moments of her daughter's birth.

Dr. Friedland examined Julia, checking her vitals as George stood nearby, overwhelmed by the sight of his new daughter. Then, in a moment of quiet tenderness, Dr. Friedland nodded to George, signaling that it was okay to approach. George, eyes brimming with awe, slowly extended a finger towards his newborn daughter. As his fingertip brushed against her tiny hand, Julia's delicate fingers curled around his. It was an overwhelming, surreal moment—one filled with both smiles and tears. In that brief but powerful connection, George felt an

indescribable bond forming, as though Julia had been sent to remind him that amidst the sorrow, there was still beauty in life.

Over the next eight days, Jodell and Julia remained in the hospital, both recovering well. Around day three, Dr. Friedland stopped by Jodell's room for a visit. It wasn't a typical check-in; instead, he sat down, and as Jodell spoke about the birth, life, and the heartache of losing her brother Cliff, Dan just listened. It was a tender, healing moment for Jodell, knowing that she was cared for not just by a doctor but by someone who genuinely understood her pain and joy.

On the night before Jodell and Julia were to be discharged, the hospital provided George & Jodell with a romantic meal—a quiet date night, a simple but meaningful gesture that allowed George and Jodell to share a moment of peace amid the whirlwind of emotions. It was a small but lasting memory, a moment of calm in the storm of loss and new beginnings.

As George and Jodell finally prepared to take Julia home, the bittersweet emotions lingered. The joy of her birth was forever intertwined with the pain of Cliff's passing, and they couldn't help but reflect on the fragility of life itself. Yet, holding Julia in their arms, they felt hope—hope for healing, for joy, and for the future.

# 11

## Growing a Family

### FIRST MINIVAN

As the summer of 2004 approached, George and Jodell found themselves leaning heavily on friends and family, trying to adjust to life with two young daughters. With a growing family, the need for a larger vehicle became evident. In June, they found a **1997 Plymouth Grand Voyager** minivan—the first of what would become a long line of minivans they'd own over the years. You might think it was because they drove them until they died... but alas, life wasn't done teaching them patience just yet!

### CHARLENE'S DEATH

With the arrival of summer came a tradition in mid-coast Maine, the Lobster Festival. An event that brings crowds from all over the world with rides, contests, vendors and more. So when **August 2004** rolled around, the joy of the fair was overshadowed by heartbreak. Jodell's best friend, Charlene, who had been battling cancer, passed away at just 47 years old. The loss was devastating, especially on the heels of all the grief George and Jodell had already endured. With so much loss piling up, it would have been easy to feel crushed under the weight of grief, but George and Jodell, as always, found strength in each other and in their unwavering belief that God had a plan—even when the plan was hard to see.

Through it all, George found some comfort in staying busy with his business. It became like a cave, a retreat where he could distance himself from people and immerse himself in the work of repairing machines, finding solace in the steady hum of productivity. Focusing on his business allowed him a brief respite from the emotional weight he carried.

### PERSONAL & BUSINESS

In **January 2005**, George founded Amerilake Incorporated, a maintenance service business that worked with a local non-profit. Then, in **January 2006**, he transitioned his business "The PC Cafe & Service Center" into a new corporation called "The Service Center, INC.," which offered everything from computer repair to website hosting and design services under the assumed name Frugal Hosting & Design, INC. George's vision for the future only grew, as did his faith, which guided him through every business decision.

The rest of **2006** brought exciting changes for George and Jodell. They expanded their living space by adding an upstairs renovation above the existing garage, creating a new kitchen, living room, and bedroom. The improvements provided much-needed space for their growing family, giving everyone a little more room to breathe—and maybe a bit more elbow room at the dinner table. Additionally, they purchased a new car, marking another step forward in what felt like a year of progress and change on the home front.

The months that followed were a whirlwind of events—both joyful and sorrowful. In **January 2007**, the family faced the heartbreaking loss of George’s parents cat, Fuzzball, who had come to live with them. Her absence left a noticeable void in the Benson household. As with so many of life’s moments, the loss reminded George and Jodell that even the smallest members of the family leave a lasting impact, their memories lingering in the quiet corners of the house.

That spring brought a new sign—literally—along with an upgrade to a new vehicle. And in **June 2007**, the family shared a proud moment as Antonia graduated from preschool. The joy in watching their little girl walk across the stage, ready for the next chapter, was undeniable. They could hardly believe how quickly time had flown—one minute she was learning to walk, and the next, she was donning a tiny cap and gown. It was a moment of pride, and nervous expectation about the life to come.

## **ROLAND & SHADOW**

But as **October 2007** arrived, so did another wave of heartache. George’s brother, Roland, passed away unexpectedly at the age of **47**, just days before he was supposed to meet his first grandchild. The news hit hard, like a blow out of nowhere. The loss of Roland was a painful reminder of life’s unpredictability, and George and Jodell once again found themselves leaning on each other and their faith to navigate the deep sorrow. It felt surreal to grapple with such a loss, knowing that Roland had been so close to holding his grandchild in his arms for the first time.

Then, heartbreak struck again just three weeks later, on **November 13, 2007**, when their cat, Shadow, passed away. Shadow had been with them since the early days of their marriage, a constant presence through all the highs and lows. His passing was another reminder of how quickly life can change. Shadow wasn’t just any cat—he had a mischievous streak that kept the family entertained for years. Whether he was scaling the curtains to perch at the top like a tiny, determined mountain climber or darting around the house to chase bare legs with playful ambushes, his energy was infectious. The sound of his claws scratching the furniture (despite many attempts to train him otherwise) was a familiar soundtrack in their home.

At the same time, the loss of Roland lingered heavily. They couldn’t help but think back to summer afternoons spent playing frisbee with him in the yard, or the times the kids would kick a soccer ball around with Roland, his laughter and encouragement filling the air as he cheered them on. These memories, full of light and love, were bittersweet now, providing comfort even as they sharpened the pain of loss.

Both Roland and Shadow had left their marks on the lives of others in ways that would never be forgotten—Roland with his larger-than-life personality and Shadow with his stealthy, unpredictable antics. The weight of losing them both in such a short span of time left George and Jodell at a loss for words. But amidst the grief, those memories offered solace. They found themselves chuckling through tears as they remembered Shadow’s failed attempts at “hunting” a sock or Roland’s yummy pizza. In those moments, they were reminded that the love and joy they shared with both were what truly mattered, even as they faced the pain of their absence.

Grieving was difficult, but those shared stories—told late into the night or in quiet moments over coffee—became a way for George and Jodell and the rest of the family to process their loss. Even though the house felt emptier without Shadow’s pounces or Roland’s laughter, the memories became a lifeline, offering small moments of healing amid the heartache.

## **RECOGNITION, VACATION, VENDETTA**

### **Antonia Drawing Contest**

The months following these losses were a mix of bittersweet moments and small joys—like patches of sunlight breaking through the clouds. In **April 2008**, Antonia’s creativity was recognized when her drawing was selected in a local contest. The pride in her eyes as we shared the news was contagious, bringing a smile to George and Jodell’s faces after the heaviness of the past year.

### **New York Vacation**

Days later, the Benson's took a well-deserved vacation to visit friends in **New York**. It was a trip filled with laughter, relaxation, and a welcome break from the weight of the year’s losses. Antonia and Julia were over the moon when they each got brand-new bikes—perfect for zipping around the neighborhood and making memories.

That vacation, with its small moments of joy and the simple thrill of new bikes, was exactly what the family needed. It reminded them that even amidst loss, there was still space for laughter, for love, and for hope.

### **Antonia Kindergarten Graduation**

Then came another milestone—Antonia’s kindergarten graduation in **June 2008**. Watching her walk across the stage in her little cap and gown filled George and Jodell with joy and pride. Antonia’s beaming smile was a reminder of the bright moments that life still had to offer, even in the midst of challenges.

### **Accident At Wasse’s**

But, as life often goes, the universe wasn’t quite done testing their resilience. In **December 2008**, George and Julia were heading out for a father-daughter lunch at Wasse’s Hot Dog

Stand when the unexpected happened. As they turned into the parking lot and pulled forward, they stopped to wait for a truck in front of them. The man in the truck was also stopped, waiting for another car to pull out—but then, without warning, he decided to back up. Without checking his rearview mirror, the man accidentally reversed right into George's **2003 Dodge Grand Caravan**. His trailer hitch went straight into George's radiator, causing significant damage. Because, of course, why not add another car accident to the mix?

As if life hadn't already thrown enough challenges their way, this incident marked yet another hurdle in the ongoing saga of cosmic vendettas against their vehicles. It was almost as if the universe had developed a personal grudge, just waiting for the right moment to test George's patience yet again.

## **ROGUE NAIL**

As **2009** began, family gatherings brought the usual joy of Christmas and New Years celebrations, but by **April**, life took another sharp turn. Literally! While working on a project, a rogue nail from a nail gun shot off a piece of wood and as it was flying through the air it decided to turn and aim straight for George's thumb, sending him on an eventful trip to the hospital. The visit was made even more memorable by a nurse who stormed into the room shouting, "I was supposed to be off 30 minutes ago!" before dramatically tossing her clipboard across the room. Even in these painful moments, life found a way to sprinkle in some humor.

## **GREEN THUMB ACCIDENT**

But the real test of patience came on **May 1, 2009**, when George found himself in a serious car accident. He was driving his **2003 Dodge Grand Caravan**, heading east on Route 17, when the day took a dangerous turn. A driver ahead who was leaving the parking lot of a local garden supply store, decided to pull out into oncoming traffic as if they thought they had all the time in the world. Unfortunately, they misjudged the situation by a long shot, forcing George into a split-second, life-or-death decision.

He had two options: swerve right and hope he didn't plow into the people standing on the side of the road, or swerve left and pray he avoided the oncoming vehicles. With no time to think, George veered left. His van was hit twice—first on the passenger side by an oncoming truck, and then again on the driver's side when his vehicle slammed into a telephone pole. The exploding airbags, the sound of crunching metal and the jarring impact left George stunned, as the weight of the situation hit him—quite literally.

This wasn't just another fender-bender; the accident would leave George with multiple injuries that would require four surgeries over the next few years to repair his knees and shoulders. The road to recovery would be brutal, and, as if the universe hadn't thrown enough his way, two of those surgeries would trigger major dystonic reactions—because why not add some extra complications for good measure?

There would be days when the physical pain felt overwhelming, but the mental toll would often feel even worse. George had always been resilient, but this would be a new level of challenge. Each surgery would bring its own struggles: countless doctor appointments, physical therapy sessions, and sleepless nights spent wondering if things would ever return to normal. The frustration would be real, but through it all, Jodell would become more than just his emotional rock. She would transform into his caregiver, offering unwavering comfort and patience in the face of what would often seem like an endless barrage of hurdles.

Yet, despite everything, George and Jodell would cling to their faith, believing that God would see them through this storm as He had before. There would be moments when laughter would manage to pierce through the pain—someone would inevitably joke, "At this rate, you're gonna need a family membership to the hospital!" That small bit of humor, even in the darkest times, would remind them to stay positive and remember that despite being bruised and hurt at least he was still alive.

## **SCOTT'S ACCIDENT**

With his recovery underway and Thanksgiving approaching in **November 2009**, George had yet another powerful empathic experience. It was a quiet evening, and he was reading a book to the kids during their usual family time. As they laughed and settled into the cozy moment, the phone suddenly rang. The instant the sound broke the calm, George felt a wave of dread wash over him. The shift in energy was palpable, cutting through the warmth of the evening like a cold wind.

Without hesitation, George turned to Jodell, his voice low and serious. "Oh no—something has happened—it's Connie." Moments later, when he answered the phone, his sense of foreboding was confirmed. It was his sister, Connie, her voice trembling as she explained that her son, Scott—home for Thanksgiving break from Georgetown University—had been in a devastating car accident. His car had gone off the road and crashed into a tree, leaving him in critical condition. He was being life-flighted to Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor.

The details of Scott's miraculous survival are beyond the scope of this essay, but the months that followed were filled with overwhelming stress and uncertainty. Scott remained in a coma, and the strain of the situation weighed heavily on the family, including George and Jodell. The accident added trips to and from Bangor, long hours spent in the hospital waiting rooms, and a heightened emotional intensity that only deepened George's empathic connection to his sister's suffering.

George, who had always believed in the power of prayer, felt compelled to act. In an effort to gather support for Scott's recovery, he created a website, reaching out to people all over the world, asking for prayers and positive energy. This act of faith was not only a way to support his nephew but also a way for George to cope with the stress and heartache, knowing that his family wasn't alone in their prayers for a miracle.

And, in God's timing, that miracle came. Against all odds, Scott survived and after months of uncertainty, he emerged from the coma, defying the doctors' expectations, over and over



again, and eventually regaining enough strength to return to Georgetown University and finish his degree. The experience left a lasting impact on George and Jodell—not only as a testament to God's power but also as a profound example of George's intuitive empathic abilities.

While this miraculous story deserves to be told in full elsewhere, it is shared here as a testament to the power of prayer and the deep emotional and spiritual impact it had on George, Jodell, and their entire family. It was a time of overwhelming challenges, but also one of hope, connection, and witnessing God's power in the face of unimaginable adversity.

The months following Scott's accident were filled with nearly daily trips to Bangor as George and Jodell witnessed the slow but miraculous steps of Scott's recovery. It was a long and grueling process, filled with emotional highs and lows as they watched God's hand at work. Over time, this journey of healing created what would become the "new normal" for the family—a season marked by hospital visits, prayers, and adjustments to the rhythms of life.

## **SEPTIC FAILURE: PART 1**

Amidst this emotional whirlwind, life at home continued with its own set of challenges. As if navigating Scott's recovery wasn't enough, by **June of 2010**, George and Jodell found themselves dealing with a new, far less miraculous issue: a foul odor in the air. The septic system that came with their house ran to a tank near the driveway, and that summer, the smell began to grow increasingly unpleasant. It seemed to be coming from the side of a hill at the end of their driveway—a sure sign something was amiss.

Enter the town's code enforcement officer, who suggested they perform a simple test: put green dye in the toilet, flush, and see where it goes. Simple enough... but what followed about 20 minutes later was like a scene straight out of a sci-fi movie. A neon-green liquid—resembling something suspiciously close to Mountain Dew—began oozing out of the side of the hill, trickling down the road, and making its way into the storm drain. It was the kind of moment where George, half laughing, half cringing, thought, I drink something that looks just like that!

But, as it turns out, that fluorescent green stream would be a blessing in disguise. Because the dye had flowed into the storm drain, they discovered that they actually qualified for a state grant to help cover some of the costs of designing and installing a new septic system. George joked that if you're going to have septic system problems, at least make them colorful enough to get a grant. With a little divine intervention (and some Mountain Dew-esque dye), they were able to navigate the mess—and the finances—of rebuilding their septic system.

However, the process was anything but quick. It took considerable time to get the grant, secure approval from the state of Maine and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (**DEP**), and have the new system designed. After months of waiting and getting all the ducks in a row, construction on the system finally began in **December 2010**. One

particular challenge with the design was a small storm stream that ran through George's backyard and into the neighboring property. The **DEP** hired an engineer to address the issue, and they decided that a series of culverts and a catch basin would solve the problem.

Yet, there was one critical flaw in the engineer's design. It called for the culvert to daylight out the side of a hill, directly onto the roadside, rather than being fully buried. George immediately raised his concerns, telling the engineer that, come spring, the stream would flood the road—he had seen how the water moved in those seasons. George wasn't alone in this concern; the town's public works director agreed with him but explained that they were required to follow the engineer's plan as approved by the **DEP**. However, the public works director assured George that if the road did flood as expected, they would come back and bury the culvert properly. It was clear to George that the town was not at fault—it was simply a bad design from the engineer.

Fast forward to the **Spring of 2011**, and George's prediction proved all too accurate. As the snowmelt surged and spring showers kicked in, the culvert unleashed a torrent of water onto the road, flooding not just the street but also George and Jodell's basement—where George had been running his computer business. What was supposed to be a solution quickly turned into a new headache as they found themselves dealing with water damage to both their home and the business.

## **CLEANUP & REPAIRS**

In the days that followed, George and Jodell assessed the damage and worked tirelessly to clean up the mess. It was a frustrating setback, but they pressed on, knowing they had faced worse. Then, just a few weeks later, in **April 2011**, as if they hadn't had enough challenges already, someone attempted to break into the business by trying to kick in the door, causing damage to the doorjamb that needed to be fixed. While the attempt was unsuccessful, it left them rattled, wondering what else could go wrong.

When summer arrived, the town returned and buried the culvert as promised—just as George had warned was necessary from the start. Meanwhile, repairs to the flooded basement were in full swing, and George and Jodell faced the daunting task of replacing their aging furnace, which had not only suffered damage from the flood but was also well beyond its years.

Yet, by the time summer began to fade, with the new furnace in place, the basement repairs nearing completion, and the culvert issue finally fixed, there was a flicker of hope. It felt like the weight of the past months was finally lifting, as though they were slowly but surely beginning to regain control of their lives. They allowed themselves to breathe a little easier, believing that maybe, just maybe, the worst was behind them.

Or so they thought...

## ANSWERED PRAYERS

**Saturday, September 3, 2011**, was a picture-perfect early fall day. The air was crisp, the leaves had just begun to turn, and the warmth of family lingered as George and his family piled into their **2006 Chrysler Town & Country** minivan, ready to head home after an evening spent at his brother's bowling alley. The night had been filled with joy—bowling, friendly games of pool, and laughter that echoed throughout the room as loved ones reconnected after time apart. It was one of those rare nights where the world felt right, where the simple act of being together, visiting with family and friends, erased the stress of the past few months.

As they drove home under a clear night sky, George and Jodell continued their familiar tradition, asking Antonia and Julia what they wanted to pray for before bed. The children, tired but content after an evening of fun, settled into the comfort of the car's back seats. Antonia, always thoughtful and sincere, was the first to speak. With her eyes closed, she quietly prayed for our cats and other pets as well as traveling mercies, asking God to watch over their journey home. Her voice, soft but earnest, carried the weight of a child's faith, confident that her words were being heard.

Julia followed, adding her own thoughts. Her prayer was a little longer, weaving in not only a request for safety but also for the health of their family and the well-being of their friends. She prayed for protection and for the little things that had crossed her mind throughout the week—concerns that seemed big in a child's world but carried just as much importance in that moment. The sincerity in her words reflected the love and care she held for those around her, a heart already learning how to pray for others.

For George and Jodell, listening to their children's prayers was always a quiet blessing. It was a simple routine, but one that grounded them in their faith and reminded them of the strength found in their family bond. There was something deeply comforting in hearing their children's voices lifted in prayer, offering their hopes and concerns to God. As the last words of the prayers faded into the gentle hum of the car, a sense of peace filled the vehicle—an almost tangible feeling of protection as they made their way home.

In that moment, everything felt peaceful, a rare sense of calm settling in the car. The comforting rhythm of family prayer seemed to wrap around them like a warm blanket, providing reassurance after a day filled with joy. George glanced at Jodell, sharing a silent look of contentment, knowing that amidst the challenges of life, moments like this were a precious gift.

In the quiet moments that followed the prayers, the family continued their drive, descending a hill into a valley. George's eyes scanned the road ahead, and he noticed a car parked on the shoulder at the top of the opposite hill, its hazard lights blinking in the darkness. Something about the scene caught his attention, but he dismissed it for the moment, focusing on the road as they neared the bottom of the valley.

Just as the last words of the kids' prayers echoed in his mind and the van reached the valley's lowest point, a sudden, deafening sound shattered the stillness. The passenger-side window exploded without warning, sending shards of glass flying across Jodell, Antonia, and Julia. In an instant, the calm of the drive dissolved into chaos.

The sound of the shattering glass startled George, and his heart leapt in his chest. His hands instinctively tightened around the steering wheel as he swerved in reaction, narrowly avoiding an oncoming car in the other lane. His mind raced, but he forced himself to focus, his only thought: keeping his family safe. In those few terrifying seconds, the peaceful drive had turned into a nightmare.

Shaken but trying to stay calm, George carefully pulled the van in behind the parked car he had noticed earlier, his mind still reeling from what had just happened. He got out, heart pounding, and approached the vehicle. The occupants were just as rattled, asking if something had hit George's van as well. Confused and alarmed, George and Jodell initially thought someone might have been throwing rocks at the cars, the randomness of it all making it difficult to comprehend.

They quickly called the police, hoping for answers. When the sheriff arrived and began investigating the scene, the horrifying truth came to light—it wasn't rocks. Someone had been shooting at the vehicles. The realization hit like a second wave of fear, as the full danger of the situation settled over them. The shooter, a man named Nick Adkins, was soon arrested, bringing an end to what had felt like an unthinkable ordeal.

The entire experience shook the family deeply, leaving them rattled by how close they had come to disaster. It was a stark reminder of how fragile life could be, how quickly things could change in the blink of an eye. But even in the midst of the fear and confusion, George and Jodell couldn't help but reflect on the prayers that had been spoken just moments before in the van—their children asking for God's protection and for traveling mercies. In that dark moment, the power of faith felt more tangible than ever, a quiet reassurance that, despite everything, God had kept them safe!

## MITTENS

As life slowly returned to normal, the family found solace in small moments of joy, reminding them that even in the darkest times, there was always light. On Jodell's birthday in **November**, the family adopted a new cat named Mittens—a sweet black-and-white companion who immediately became a lap-dweller and an unexpected source of comfort. It was as if Mittens instinctively knew they needed a little extra love and warmth, curling up on their laps during quiet moments, offering a sense of peace that the family desperately needed.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & MORE

The **First Half of 2012**, however, was marked by the ongoing recovery from the trauma of the shooting. The kids were noticeably shaken, often avoiding nighttime outings altogether. Antonia and Julia, once carefree and excited for family adventures, were now cautious, clinging to the safety of home. The sense of security they once had was shattered, leaving behind a shadow of anxiety that would take months to heal.

Amidst this recovery, George and Jodell were approached by representatives of a program called Restorative Justice—a system of criminal justice focused on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. The suggestion to confront Nick Adkins, the man responsible for the shooting, felt daunting. How could they face the person who had nearly taken so much from them? After much prayer and heartfelt discussions with Antonia and Julia, they made the difficult decision to participate. They believed in the power of forgiveness, though it didn't come easily, and hoped that this process might bring some measure of closure.

The meeting took place on **April 18, 2012**, in a quiet local church. As they sat across from Nick Adkins, the air was thick with tension and unspoken emotions. It was a profoundly difficult experience for the children, especially as the rawness of their fear resurfaced. But the opportunity to face Mr. Adkins head-on gave them a sense of control over their story.

One moment that particularly stayed with the family was when Nick, in a tone that felt too casual for the gravity of the situation, said, "If I had known there were kids in the van, I never would have shot at that vehicle." The carelessness of his words hung in the air, what should have been part of an apology instead felt like a hollow excuse for his actions. For both Antonia and Julia, it was a stark realization—sometimes people make unimaginably poor choices, and sometimes those choices steal away your sense of safety. It also opened their eyes to the harsh consequences of alcohol and recklessness.

## **50 Appointments**

The **Second Half of 2012** brought a much-needed sense of calm. Julia began a project that would include 50 Appointments, working with a local teacher who was pursuing a new certification. The one-on-one tutoring sessions allowed Julia to grow, and the teacher received evaluations from other educators as part of her process. Julia found herself excited by the learning experience, and her confidence blossomed.

## **Robotics Club**

Meanwhile, Antonia had her own moment of pride. In **December**, she was featured in the local newspaper for her involvement in a robotics club. It wasn't the first time she'd been recognized, but seeing her name in print never got old. The family celebrated her achievement, grateful for moments of joy and accomplishment after so much hardship.

## **VALLEY SNOW STORM**

Then **February 2013** hit, quite literally, with a freak snowstorm. While most of the town received 18 to 24 inches, the valley they lived in was buried under more than four feet of snow. The sheer volume of it was overwhelming, and after days of snow blowing and shoveling, the snow piled so high at the intersection of their corner lot that it resembled a small mountain. George joked that they should set up a ski resort and watch people ski down the newly created slope. Despite the exhausting work, the family found themselves laughing at the situation, turning what could have been a daunting challenge into a lighthearted adventure. It was a reminder that, even when life threw curveballs, they could

still find joy and humor in it together.

## **NAHLA**

In May, Antonia's heart found room for a new member of the family. She adopted a cat named Nahla, whose playful energy brought even more life into their home. Nahla quickly became Antonia's constant companion, always by her side, bringing smiles to their days and providing the kind of unspoken comfort only a pet can offer. One of Nahla's quirks was her obsession with cleaning people's hair—she especially loved to lick Antonia's head, as if she were grooming her human. On more than one occasion, they caught Nahla gleefully unrolling the toilet paper and turning it into her personal playground, leaving a trail of shredded paper throughout the house. Her antics brought laughter and joy to the family, making her a beloved part of their everyday lives.

## **SCOTT'S GRADUATION**

But perhaps the most miraculous moment of that year came on **May 18, 2013**, when George's nephew Scott, who had survived the horrific car accident years earlier, walked across the stage at Georgetown University to receive his diploma. For the family, it was nothing short of a miracle. Watching Scott, who had once been in a coma and on the brink of death, take those steps across the stage brought tears to their eyes. It was a testament to God's grace, to Scott's incredible determination, and to the power of faith in even the darkest moments. The entire family rejoiced, knowing they had witnessed something extraordinary.

## **SEPTIC FAILURE: PART 2**

Around that same time, George and Jodell's septic system failed—again. It was like the unwelcome sequel to a movie they never wanted to see. In what could only be described as a bad case of *déjà vu*, the system that had been installed just a few years earlier decided it had enough. As late spring turned into summer, the familiar hum of construction equipment filled the air once more. Plans were set to dig up the entire system, raise it another four feet, and hopefully, this time, put an end to their septic woes. George joked that at this rate, with all the cars stopping to watch the progress, they'd need to install an observation deck so visitors could marvel at the "septic mountain" being built in their yard.

But, amidst the chaos of backhoes and dirt piles, there were still bright spots. Family members visited from out of town, bringing much-needed distractions from the never-ending septic saga. The house was filled with laughter, stories, and shared meals—as George & Jodell shared stories about dealing with septic issues... again.

Meanwhile, the kids found their own escape, spending hours learning to swim. The joy of splashing in the water became a welcome relief from the construction zone that had

become their backyard. Despite the frustrations and endless digging, summer still held moments of happiness and togetherness. And while the septic system tested their patience once again, George and Jodell managed to navigate it all with their usual mix of faith, humor, and determination—knowing that no matter how many times life made them dig deep, they'd always find a way to rise above it, even if it meant raising the septic four more feet!

## **WHEN ARE YOU DUE?**

As fall approached, in either **October or November of 2003**, George had another intuitive empath moment that left both him and his dental hygienist stunned. George had a routine dentist appointment, and, as usual, his regular hygienist—someone he had known since school—was the one to take care of him. Though they weren't close friends outside of their dental office interactions, they had always been friendly, sharing casual chit-chat over the years. It was the kind of relationship where they knew each other well enough for friendly remarks, but nothing too personal.

This time, however, something felt different. As the hygienist brought George back to the dental chair, they began with their usual small talk. Then, out of nowhere, George experienced what he described as an “instant knowing”—a sudden, unshakable feeling that his hygienist was pregnant.

Without thinking, George blurted out, “So, when are you due?”

The question was so unexpected that it stopped the hygienist in her tracks. She straightened in her chair, leaning back slightly, and let out a nervous laugh before replying in surprise, “How did you know? I just found out this morning, and I haven't even told my husband yet!”

They exchanged stunned looks, followed by more laughter, both trying to process the moment. George couldn't explain how he knew—he simply felt it, just as he had with other intuitive moments throughout his life. But what made this moment stand out was the timing. She had only learned the news that morning, making George's question even more remarkable and, in a way, magical.

Though they weren't particularly close, the shared experience became something they would talk about for years. That day, their lighthearted conversations took on a deeper, more memorable meaning—one neither of them would forget anytime soon.

## **2014-2015**

In **2014** and **2015**, life finally seemed to settle into a peaceful rhythm for George, Jodell, and their family. After years of navigating challenges and curveballs, they welcomed this quieter season. Antonia and Julia both passed their swimming tests, a proud moment for everyone, especially the kiddos, who wasted no time showing off their newfound skills. Julia expanded the family in her own way, adopting two spirited parakeets named Petty

and Chipper. The birds quickly became a source of entertainment, with their cheerful chirping filling the house.

### **60th Wedding Anniversary**

**April 11, 2014**, marked an extraordinary milestone—George’s parents celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary**, a rare and beautiful testament to a lifetime of love and dedication. Later that summer, the family embarked on a scenic day trip to explore several local waterfalls. Between the misty cascades and quiet moments of reflection, they relished the beauty of both nature and the enduring bonds of family.

### **Blueberry & Boston**

In **March of 2015**, George and Jodell decided to part ways with their reliable **1999 Ford Escort**, upgrading to a **2006 Chevy Aveo** a car that would affectionately become known as “Blueberry” because of its light blue color. And shortly after that, the family took a trip to the Boston Aquarium. While marveling at the sea creatures, the family had a serendipitous encounter when they ran into one of Julia’s classmates. Julia was both surprised and delighted, as they hadn’t expected to see anyone they knew, least of all at an aquarium hours away from home. It added an extra layer of excitement to an already fun-filled day.

### **Summer Camp**

The **Summer of 2015** brought even more “firsts” for the kids. Antonia and Julia experienced the thrill of going to summer camp for the first time, returning with stories of adventures, friendships, and the occasional bug bite. For the most part, life felt refreshingly ordinary—a rhythm of small joys and simple routines. But just when everything seemed smooth, a reminder of life’s unpredictability came knocking.

### **Shooting at Windows**

On **June 10, 2015**, the family faced a puzzling and frustrating incident when someone decided to take a BB gun and shoot at their basement windows. Though the damage was minor, the unexpected event shook them. It was a strange and unsettling interruption in what had otherwise been a calm period.

Through it all, the family embraced both the highs and lows, finding humor and grace in the everyday moments, and always leaning on each other to get through whatever came their way.

## **BILL & CRAIG’S DEATH**

Fast forward to **January 30, 2016**, George experienced two devastating losses within a 24-hour period. His two best friends, Bill and Craig, passed away—one from cancer in Maine and the other from a heart attack in North Carolina. This blow shook George to his core. He became numb. With both funerals happening almost simultaneously, George had to decide which one to attend. Ultimately, he chose to attend Craig’s funeral in North



Carolina, a decision driven by his desire to soften the sting of loss by creating positive memories with the ones he loved most—his family. They took time to travel together, making stops along the way and turning the trip into a family vacation, blending moments of sorrow with the joy of being together.

As they traveled, George shared heart-to-heart talks with his daughters about the value of life, how fleeting and precious each moment was, and the importance of making the most of every minute. He wanted them to understand how fragile life could be, but despite those conversations, in the months that followed, George found himself spiraling into a darkness he hadn't anticipated. His grief morphed into deep anger, and he began questioning God and wondering why life had to be so cruel!

The depression George had once thought he had conquered began creeping back in, and it wasn't long before its grip tightened. The familiar weight of hopelessness and frustration hung over him, casting a shadow on his daily life. Worse yet, George realized that his anger was seeping into his interactions with those he loved most—his wife and daughters. He was angry all the time, and that constant fury frightened him. He didn't want his kids to see him like this, he didn't want to become someone who brought anger into their home.

## TRIP TO KENTUCKY

Recognizing the need to process his anger and grief before they consumed him, George made the difficult but necessary decision to take some time away. He planned a solo trip to Kentucky, intending to reconnect with old college friends from TM3. It wasn't just a vacation—it was a journey of healing. George knew that if he didn't find a way to release the rage building inside him, it would continue to erode his relationships with his family. He hoped that the time away from the daily pressures would help him find clarity and peace, allowing him to gain control over the depression that had started to take hold.

In late **May of 2016**, George set off on his trip, visiting friends and reflecting on the weight of his emotions. The journey, though filled with moments of reconnecting, was also a mirror of just how lost he felt in his grief. He prayed that the time away would allow him to shed enough of the anger to return home with a clearer mind, ready to be the husband and father his family needed.

### Milestones: Antonia & Julia

George returned in early **June**, just in time for two important family milestones. Julia's class put on a show, *Dance Through the Decades*, followed by Antonia's eighth-grade graduation on **June 16, 2016**. Life was moving forward, even amidst the grief. In the weeks that followed, both Antonia and Julia began volunteering at a local farm, where they learned invaluable lessons about hard work, commitment, and independence—reminders that even in difficult times, growth and healing can happen in unexpected ways.

## LOOKING FOR CHANGE

Though the loss of his best friends left a hole in George's heart, it also sparked a period of deep reflection and growth. That trip to Kentucky helped George realize he needed to confront not only his grief but the way he had been holding onto years of buried pain. The losses they had faced—Bobby-Jo, Jodell's brother, Charlene, George's brother Roland, and now his two best friends—had taken a heavy toll on both him and Jodell. The weight of everything had strained them, yet they had always carried on without fully confronting the emotions. They needed a new way forward, one that involved more openness with each other. George began to understand that part of healing meant allowing himself to be vulnerable with the one person who had been by his side through it all—Jodell. He decided it was time to share with her a part of himself he had kept hidden for years: his empathic abilities.

For too long, George had carried the burden of being an empath in silence. Jodell knew he was different—she had seen it in the way he reacted to people and situations—but they had never talked about it openly. The strain of their losses and the unspoken truths between them had built walls, but George realized that if they were going to move forward and create a new normal, those walls had to come down. It was time for him to open up, to stop hiding, and to let Jodell fully into that part of his life.

# 12

## Life Goes On

### JODY COMES HOME

As **2016** came to a close, George and his family found themselves carrying a growing concern for George's mom, Marion, who was **85**, and his dad, George Sr., who was **81**. Both, who were well into their later years had long been dealing with various health issues that accompanied their advancing age. Yet, it was the news of George Senior's upcoming heart catheterization in **January 2017** that served as a catalyst, stirring up deeper worries within the family.

The heart procedure, while necessary, forced them all to confront the fragility of their parents' health in a way they hadn't before. It wasn't just the procedure itself—it was a reminder that time was moving faster than they wanted to admit.

**Jody**, one of George's sisters, felt the gravity of the situation, and it became clear to her that she wanted to move back home to help care for their parents. It was a difficult decision, but one made with love, as she knew her presence would offer both practical help and emotional support. The rest of the family rallied around the decision, feeling a sense of gratitude but also a quiet acceptance that life was shifting, and the era of their parents being independent was beginning to fade.

### HERITAGE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Despite the anxiety surrounding George's parents' health, the early months of **2017** weren't without moments of joy. In late **April**, George and Jodell had the opportunity to chaperone a school music trip to **New York City** with Antonia, who was part of the school chorus. It was a wonderful trip filled with the vibrant energy of the city, a peaceful boat ride at night and the excitement of the students, and for a brief time, George and Jodell could set aside their worries. The trip became one of their favorite memories from that year, filled with laughter, sightseeing, and music that lifted their spirits.

### MOM BENSON'S DEATH

But even that joyful trip couldn't shield them from the reality that life was changing. Just a few weeks later, on **June 7, 2017**, George's world was shaken once again. His mother,

Marion, passed away peacefully, surrounded by family as his sister Connie sang softly to her. Marion's gentle passing, though a comfort, left a deep void in George's heart. The loss was a painful reminder of the inevitable passage of time, and while the family was grateful for the love that surrounded Marion in her final moments, they were left to pick up the pieces of their grief.

As the **Fall of 2017** unfolded, George was still grappling with the grief of losing his mother just a few months earlier. The weight of that loss felt heavier with each passing day, and it had a profound effect on his emotional state. But in a way, that shared grief also opened something within George—a deeper vulnerability he hadn't fully embraced before. He believed that the loss of his mother, and the process of mourning with Jodell, had softened the walls he'd built around certain parts of himself. It was this shared sorrow that prepared George to finally open up about a truth he'd kept hidden for years: his empathic abilities.

## **TURNING POINT**

The moment that sparked this openness came unexpectedly while they were shopping at a local department store. As George and Jodell approached the register to check out, George suddenly stopped in his tracks, sensing something deeply unsettling. A man dressed in all black stood at the register, and without warning, George was hit by an overwhelming wave of anger as disturbing images flashed through his mind. The intensity of the feeling physically repulsed him, and he instinctively began backing up, trying to distance himself from the man's energy.

Jodell, confused by his sudden reaction, asked, 'What's wrong?'

Unable to explain fully at that moment, George quietly responded, 'I'll explain after we pay.' George kept his distance, remaining visibly tense as they completed their shopping. After the man in black left the store, George and Jodell paid for their items and quickly exited. As they walked to their car, George spotted the man off in the distance, getting into his vehicle. Pointing toward him, George said, 'You see the man in black getting into that car? He's a child molester.'

Jodell was taken aback by his certainty but could see the seriousness in his eyes. Though she didn't fully understand what had just happened, she knew there was more George needed to share. As they traveled home and later that evening, they talked, and for the first time, George fully opened up to Jodell about his empathic abilities. He explained that for years, he had experienced sudden, intense feelings—like the one that had just overcome him in the store—and how they often came with images or instincts he couldn't explain. He shared how he had spent years carrying this burden alone, unsure of how to talk about it.

Jodell listened, realizing that George had been holding onto so much more than she had ever known. It was in this conversation, rooted in the grief they'd shared from his mother's passing, that George finally felt safe enough to tell her the truth about the depth of his emotional experiences.

A few weeks later, while watching the local news, George's senses were confirmed. The

man he had pointed out—the man in black—had been arrested for molesting children. The news sent a shiver through Jodell. George had been right.

This moment, though shocking, marked a turning point in their relationship. The grief they had navigated together over George's mother's death had laid the foundation for this deeper connection, allowing George to be vulnerable in a way he hadn't before. For Jodell, it was a revelation—not only understanding George's empathic abilities but also realizing the emotional weight he had been carrying alone for years.

With this new openness, their relationship began to heal and grow. They were no longer just weathering the storms of life; they were facing them together, grounded in trust, faith, and a deeper understanding of one another. And for the first time, George felt truly supported in carrying the burden of his empathy, no longer needing to navigate it in silence.

## **FAMILY ROOM RENOVATION**

In the months that followed, George and Jodell embarked on a renovation project to convert an old woodworking shop into a family room. The project, spanning the end of **2017** and into **January of 2018**, was completed just as a Japanese exchange student named Kate, would come to stay with them for a short time.

As January unfolded, George once again found himself sinking deeper into depression, a familiar weight he could no longer bear alone. In late January, he made the decision to seek help from a counselor, a step that marked the beginning of a difficult but crucial journey of self-care and healing.

Amidst these challenges, the year was filled with moments of joy and achievement. With Antonia & Julia becoming more involved with 4-H, and as a time of family bonding, In April George, Antonia, and Julia started a tractor safety course and a month later in May they completed the course together with all three earning their tractor safety licenses, marking a shared accomplishment that would later be a fond memory for the family.

## **COUNSELING**

By the **Summer of 2018**, George and Jodell had come a long way in their personal journey, though the path had been anything but easy. What started with George seeking help months earlier gradually evolved into Jodell joining him during his counseling sessions. As time went on, they worked on working together, and on strengthening their bond, uncovering layers of understanding and healing that would eventually bring them closer than ever before. Just as they began to feel the fruits of this emotional work, life threw them into another profound challenge—one that would test their strength and leave an indelible mark on their hearts.

## **SUMMER OF 2018**

In **June of 2018**, Julia graduated from eighth grade on **June 20th**—a moment celebrated with immense pride by the whole family. It was a day of reflection and joy, marking the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

Then, the next day, **June 21st**, the family packed up and headed to Pennsylvania for a much-needed vacation. It was the perfect opportunity to reset, recharge, and spend quality time together. The trip turned out to be a joyful escape filled with laughter and adventure, a beautiful reminder of the importance of family amidst life's inevitable challenges.

While in Pennsylvania, they visited George's college friends, who owned horses. Antonia and Julia, never ones to shy away from new experiences, eagerly took the chance to ride for the very first time. Their excitement was palpable, and it quickly became one of the highlights of the trip—a thrilling and memorable experience that left everyone with big smiles. The family also indulged in some homemade ice cream at an Amish farm, a treat so delicious that it would warrant many more visits in the years to come. They even dared to go zip-lining, soaring over treetops and sharing shouts of joy (and maybe a little fear). These moments of shared adventure were priceless, weaving memories that would last a lifetime.

## **A HIT FROM ABOVE**

Then came July 4th, a day that will forever be infamous in Benson family lore. During a family outing to watch fireworks in Thomaston, an unexpected mishap transformed the night from awe-inspiring to downright hilarious. As the fireworks lit up the sky, a rogue round tube from the display had a perfect arc that hit George square on the head. The result?



A perfect black circle on his forehead—painful at the moment, but the kind of event that quickly turned into one of those stories destined to be retold in the years ahead. George's misfortune was met with plenty of laughter—his perfectly round battle scar, a humorous reminder that sometimes life delivers unexpected blows, but you can still laugh about them.

## DAD BENSON'S DEATH

It started on the morning of Friday, **August 17, 2018**. The day began like any other—Julia had gone to soccer practice, and the family was going about their usual tasks. A few miles away, at Pen-Bay Medical Center in Rockport, George Sr. was having a conversation with his nurse. The nurse had come in to check on him and ask him how he was doing today to which he calmly mentioned, “Today is the day I’m going to kick the bucket.” The nurse, struck by the statement, made note of it, and later that morning, George Sr. repeated the same unsettling comment to his daughter Connie.

Connie, although concerned, wasn’t sure what to make of her father’s words. When she called the family to inform them, her tone reflected that uncertainty. She seemed a little nervous, caught between the weight of her father’s remark and her desire to remain optimistic. While the comment worried her, she was hesitant to fully believe the gravity of the situation. Nonetheless, she felt it was important to notify the rest of the family.

When George received the call, he shared the news with Jodell, and together they decided that Jodell should leave work early so they could take the kids to visit with their grandfather. There was a growing sense that something significant was happening, even though the family still hoped for the best. After picking Julia up from soccer practice around noon, the family quietly gathered themselves and headed to the hospital, knowing that this visit might be their last chance to see George Sr.

During the visit George Sr. was sleeping as the hospital room was filled with loved ones coming to visit. In the room were George and Jodell, Antonia, Julia, and George’s sister Connie and her husband Pat with their son Sheldon and his wife Hannah, who had brought their two oldest children. Connie and Pat’s other children Scott and Shaina were also present and at one point George’s brother Donald arrived.

At some point during the visit Connie left the room to go care for the younger children as the others in the room continued talking. Then at some point during the visit, George Sr. opened his eyes, slowly scanning the room with a deliberate gaze, as if searching for something—or someone. George and Patrick, seated near him, noticed that his eyes had opened and gently called out to him, hoping for a response. But George Sr. remained silent. His eyes seemed to focus upward, and he slowly turned his head from side to side, as though seeing something beyond the room—a sight only he could witness. Julia, sitting quietly nearby, noticed a change in his breathing. It had become irregular and uneven and then silent. A quiet voice within her began questioning whether her grandfather was still alive.

The minutes that followed felt suspended in time, the room filled with quiet anticipation of what was to come. At some point, someone finally voiced the concern that had been quietly growing in Julia’s mind. A nurse was summoned and the weight of what just happened started to settle in: George Sr. had taken his final breath at **2:37 PM**.

His passing was peaceful, a gentle slipping away surrounded by those he loved most. Though sorrow filled the room, there was also a strange serenity. The family grieved the loss of a father and grandfather, yet there was an unspoken bond in knowing they had been

present to witness his final moments—a sacred transition that felt like a bridge between life and what lay beyond.

As George Sr. looked around the room before passing, it seemed as though he had glimpsed something none of them could see. His final moments were quiet, marked by a deep sense of love—both spoken and unspoken. He was at peace and though the family mourned, they found solace in the shared experience, knowing they had been present with him as he took his last breath. Though his physical presence was gone, the love and memories he left behind would continue to live on in the hearts of his children and grandchildren.

For George, losing his father was profoundly difficult, but he was able to approach the moment with a sense of peace that might not have been possible before. The months of counseling, which had helped him process the grief of losing his mother the year before, combined with Jodell's unwavering love and support, along with the wisdom, comfort, and peace he found through his faith in God, enabled him to face his father's death with strength. These anchors—his emotional healing, the steadfast love of his wife, and the deep faith that sustained him—allowed him to grieve while cherishing the time he had spent with his father. It was a deeply challenging season, but one that George and Jodell faced together with strength, grounded in their love for each other and the assurance that George Sr. was now in the presence of God.

## GRAVESTONES

In the months that followed, this sense of closure and preparation extended into other areas of George and Jodell's lives. They purchased a new gravestone for George's grandfather's cemetery plot, honoring the family lineage and its enduring legacy. With a practical eye toward the future, they also decided to plan for their own eventual passing. Together, they purchased grave plots for themselves and their children, establishing a family plot that symbolized their commitment to staying united—even in the face of mortality. It was a gesture not only of foresight but of love, ensuring that, no matter what, they would remain connected as a family, even beyond this life.

## COUNSELING ENDS

As their counseling journey came to a close on **August 27, 2018**, it marked the end of an intense period of introspection and healing—not just for George individually, but for them as a couple. This time symbolized growth, resilience, and a renewed commitment to face life's challenges together. Having confronted emotional struggles head-on, and with the continued support of each other and their faith, they emerged stronger, more united, and ready to embrace the next steps in both their spiritual and relational journey.



# 13

## Milestones

### ANTONIA NHS & MERCYHURST

In the months that followed, new milestones brought joy to the family. In **January of 2019**, Antonia began exploring colleges, a process that brought both excitement and reflection. On **May 10, 2019**, Antonia was inducted into the National Honor Society, an accomplishment celebrated with pride by her family. The following month, the family took a vacation to **Erie, Pennsylvania**, to visit **Mercyhurst College**, one of Antonia's potential choices. It was a time of exploration and bonding, offering the family a chance to look toward the future while savoring the present.

### DRIVERS ED

Just a few weeks later, in **July of 2019**, both Antonia and Julia began another rite of passage—driver's education. This new chapter, marked by driving lessons and the inevitable mix of nerves and excitement, became a new adventure for the family to navigate together. George and Jodell alternated between moments of pride and moments of gripping the dashboard, as their daughters learned the finer points of staying between the lines. Despite the occasional heart-stopping close calls that come with learning to drive, it was a bonding experience, adding yet another layer to the memories they were building as a family.

As **August** rolled around, George and Jodell decided that if they were going to survive teaching two teenagers how to drive, they needed to do it in something a little more reliable than their aging van—okay, so that might be a slight exaggeration, but the result was the same—they finally upgraded to a **2009 Chrysler Town & Country**. The van was a step up from their trusty old vehicle, which had seen countless family trips and a few too many repairs. While it wasn't brand new, it felt like a luxury compared to what they had been driving, and it would quickly become the new "Bessy"—just like all the others! More than just a vehicle, "Bessy" symbolized a fresh start for the next phase of family life, with plenty of space for the growing adventures ahead.

### DEVELOPING SCHOLARSHIP SYSTEM

Then starting in **October of 2019**, George took on a new challenge—developing a

scholarship system to help Antonia and Julia pursue their academic dreams. In the months and years that followed, both would go on to use the system to apply for numerous scholarships. (NOTE: By February 2020, Antonia would apply for nearly 60 scholarships, and by February 2022, Julia would follow suit, applying for nearly 50. Combined, they would go on to earn over \$350,000 in scholarships—a testament to George’s innovative system, their hard work, and perhaps a little divine intervention.)

## **NAILE (North American International Livestock Exposition)**

A few weeks later, in **November 2019**, after months of tireless fundraising for their local 4-H group, the moment they had all been working toward finally arrived. Antonia, Julia, Jodell, and others from the group had spent countless hours organizing bake sales, hosting community events, and participating in various activities to make their goal a reality. It was a true team effort, with each person pouring their heart into the cause. The goal was not just about raising money, but about fostering a spirit of teamwork and perseverance within their 4-H community.

When the time came, Antonia, Julia, Jodell, and several members of the 4-H group traveled to Kentucky to participate in the prestigious North American International Livestock Exposition. For many of the young participants, it was more than just a trip—it was the culmination of months of hard work, dedication, and personal growth. The atmosphere was filled with excitement and anticipation as the group prepared to take part in one of the largest livestock events in the world.

The experience was more than just about competition; it was an opportunity for learning, bonding, and testing the values of teamwork and commitment. Some of the 4-H members had the honor of showing their cattle, showcasing the dedication they had poured into their livestock over the past year. But even those who didn’t compete directly were vital to the group’s success. Everyone supported one another, whether it was grooming cattle, lending a hand with equipment, or offering encouragement. The sense of camaraderie was palpable.

Throughout the event, the 4-H members demonstrated not only skill but an unwavering commitment to each other. They displayed the very essence of what 4-H stood for—community, responsibility, and hard work. The trip was a celebration of these values, and the sense of pride in their accomplishments was shared by everyone who had been part of the journey. For Antonia, Julia, and Jodell, it wasn’t just about the livestock exhibition—it was about the bonds they had strengthened with their peers and the lessons of dedication, cooperation, and perseverance that would stay with them long after the event ended.

In the end, the trip to Kentucky felt like so much more than a destination. It was a rewarding culmination of all their efforts, a reflection of the powerful impact that hard work and unity can have, and a memory that they would carry with them as a testament to the power of community and collective perseverance.

## COVID-19

By now, it should come as no surprise that life wasn't done throwing challenges at George and Jodell—because, of course, why would it be? Shortly after they returned home in **December 2019**, Julia came down with what seemed like a mild case of the flu, starting with a sore throat. At first, it felt like just another seasonal bug. But something about it was different—it wasn't quite like the usual flu she was used to. Still, they didn't think much of it, especially as her symptoms started to subside.

Not long after Julia began feeling better, George started feeling "off." At first, he dismissed it, thinking it might be a mild case of whatever Julia had or perhaps just the stress of work and the typical winter blues. But what began as vague discomfort soon escalated into something far more concerning.

By **January 2020**, George's symptoms had worsened significantly, though no one yet knew what he was really dealing with. The illness that gripped him was brutal, leaving him flat on his back exhausted and struggling to breathe. It would later become clear that the symptoms George had were the same symptoms for what would become known as COVID-19, a virus that the world was just beginning to understand. At the time, COVID-19 hadn't been widely recognized, and George's doctor had no idea that the mysterious illness plaguing him was the same virus that would become a global pandemic. What was clear, though, was that this wasn't your typical flu. The fatigue, fever, and breathlessness lingered, and George's recovery stretched on for months, taking a toll not just on his health but also on their family's stability.

As George battled the long road to recovery, the weight of years of financial hits began to feel insurmountable. The debt that had steadily mounted from one blow after another had always been something George and Jodell were committed to managing. They had always prided themselves on paying their way, no matter how difficult it became. But as George's illness worsened, it became clear that something had to change. The dam, so to speak, was about to finally break.

## BANKRUPTCY

With the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the country and George unable to work, the combination of medical bills, past debts, and the overwhelming uncertainty of the future became too much. George realized he couldn't carry the burden any longer. Even though he hated the idea of declaring bankruptcy, he knew that the time had come. It wasn't just about the financial strain anymore; it was about survival.

After making the difficult decision himself, George sat down with Jodell and told her what he was planning to do. Though they had worked hard for years to avoid this outcome, Jodell agreed that, given the circumstances, it was the right choice for both of them. Together, they made the painful but necessary decision to file for bankruptcy.

# 14

## A New Beginning

### TESTAMENT OF FAITH

Despite the many challenges George and Jodell have faced—financial hardships, health crises, and personal struggles—one constant remains: their unshakable trust in God’s plan and their unwavering support for each other. Life has tested them in ways they could never have imagined, yet through it all, they have held tightly to their faith, believing that every hardship carries a lesson and every struggle has a purpose. Over the years, their partnership has grown stronger, not only as husband and wife but as teammates—leaning on each other in moments of doubt, celebrating small victories, and lifting each other when life feels too heavy.

As they reflect on their journey, George and Jodell can’t help but acknowledge the quiet, persistent work of God’s hand in their lives. George often thinks back to a prayer he made in his younger years, asking God for patience. Little did he know that this simple prayer would set in motion a series of life events—some joyful, others deeply challenging—that would shape them into who they are today. God’s answer to that prayer didn’t come through instant gratification, but through a lifetime of experiences that cultivated patience, resilience, and grace. Slowly, these moments have woven together into a beautiful tapestry—a testament to the many blessings God has bestowed upon them. Every thread, even the difficult ones, has contributed to a story of growth, love, and deep faith.

### ALDERPEN MEDIA, INC.

By **May 2021**, after years of overcoming obstacles and reflecting on their path, George experienced a renewed sense of purpose. He feels deeply compelled to share the lessons they have learned and the strategies they’ve developed to navigate the often chaotic balance of running a home-based business while raising a family. With this newfound clarity, George and Jodell decided to take a bold step forward by founding Alderpen Media, INC., a company with a clear and powerful mission: to equip purpose-driven parents with the resources to thrive at working, or running a business, from home—while minimizing the chaos, enjoying the fun times, and keeping up with the responsibilities of parenthood.

Alderpen Media, INC. is becoming more than just a business venture for George and Jodell—it’s a fresh start, a new chapter deeply rooted in their shared values of faith, family, and empowerment. It’s a way to give back and help others facing the same challenges

they've experienced. For George, this is also a personal calling. Through Alderpen Media, INC., he hopes to guide others on a path that blends entrepreneurship, parenthood, and purpose. He draws from decades of experience managing home-based businesses while he and Jodell raised their own children. It isn't just about teaching people how to manage time or be more productive—it's about helping families find joy in the journey, even amidst the chaos.

As they embrace this new venture, their focus on family remains at the forefront, never losing sight of what matters most: the relationships they have with their spouse and their children. Alderpen Media, INC. is a manifestation of their belief that with the right tools and mindset, families can not only survive but thrive in today's world—where working from home is becoming a new way of life. For George and Jodell, the foundation of their business is built on faith: faith in each other, faith in their vision, and faith that God has brought them to this moment for a reason. And it's this faith, along with their unwavering commitment to helping others, that is carrying Alderpen Media, INC. forward, making it more than just a company—making it a beacon of hope and a testament to the strength of family, perseverance, and purpose.

Through The Home Work Parenting Podcast and The Home Work Dad YouTube channel, George and Jodell are combining their experiences, faith, and lessons learned to help others navigate all that life throws at them. Their message is simple yet profound: no matter how overwhelming life may feel, with faith, resilience, and the support of loved ones, you can persevere. With the right choices, you too can build riches that last a lifetime by pouring your heart and soul into what matters most—your children and family—because this is the true profit that lasts a lifetime.

## OUR LEGACY

As a testament to what success truly looks like with God's help, George and Jodell have somehow managed to raise two remarkable daughters, Antonia and Julia. Watching them grow into strong, independent women pursuing their dreams has been the greatest joy of their lives—a culmination of years of love, guidance, and faith.

Antonia, who graduated in **May 2024** with dual degrees in archaeology and religion, is now on a path toward becoming an Episcopal Minister. She is currently participating in a one year internship, serving others, and following her passion for faith and discovery. Julia, who is currently in her last year of college and is on track to graduate in **May 2025**, is working as a Firefighter and EMT while working toward earning dual degrees in Fire Science and Paramedicine. Her dream of becoming a paramedic is well within reach.

Both daughters have been deeply involved in their communities from a young age. They have excelled academically, graduating from one of Maine's top high schools with nearly perfect GPAs, each are members of the **National Honor Society** (NHS) and the **National Technical Honor Society** (NTHS), and earned over 20 college credits each through the **Maine Aspirations Program**. Each have been active in band, chorus, and **4-H**, and each have contributed over five hundred hours volunteering with various community organizations including at Aldermere Farm, Knox County Sheriffs Dept, and the Camden

Community Breakfast before graduating high school.

More importantly, neither Antonia nor Julia carries the burden of student debt. Despite their college education costing over **\$350,000** combined, almost all of it has been covered through scholarships and grants. George's scholarship system, paired with the hard work and dedication of their daughters, made it possible for them to pursue their dreams without the weight of financial strain. For George and Jodell, this is one of the greatest gifts they could give their children.

Through it all, George and Jodell's faith has remained at the center of their family life. Through financial collapse, health crises, and the grief of loss, God has remained a constant pillar of strength. Today, they are healthy, alive, and living the life God has called each of them to live. Their greatest accomplishment isn't in amassing wealth or building successful businesses—it's in raising a loving family and knowing they have been there for their children every step of the way.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout their journey, George and Jodell Benson have faced an extraordinary range of experiences—from the heartbreaking and life-changing to the unexpected and humorous. Each challenge and joy has shaped them into the resilient, purpose-driven people they are today. Together, they have stood through trials that would test anyone's faith, but instead of being broken, they have found strength in their love for each other and in their unwavering trust in God's guidance.

Their story is a testament to the quiet power of faith, not because the path is easy, but because the destination is worth the struggle. George and Jodell's life is a reminder that even in the darkest moments, light is waiting to be found—and sometimes, it takes the courage to laugh in the face of adversity to truly find that light.

As George reflects on all they've been through, one simple truth remains: "Life isn't about waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain."

# APPENDICES

# VILLAGE SOUP ARTICLE ABOUT SHOOTING INCIDENT

<http://knox.villagesoup.com/news/story/warren-man-nabbed-for-shooting-spree-at-passing-cars/442470>

## Warren man nabbed for shooting spree at passing cars

By Stephen Betts | Sep 06, 2011

**Warren** — A 21-year-old Warren man remains in jail after police said he used a pellet gun to shoot at cars traveling along Route 90 Saturday night and then refused to allow a deputy to leave his home.

Nicholas D. Adkins was arrested Saturday night, Sept. 3 and charged with three counts of aggravated criminal mischief, criminal restraint, and obstructing government administration.

The sheriff's office had received reports that evening of cars being struck by rocks or pellets from a BB gun. Deputy Michael Sprague responded and found matted down grass behind a guardrail near the road. He called for assistance from a canine tracking dog from the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office.

The dog tracked a scent to a home. The deputy knocked on the door and was allowed into the residence by one of the occupants. Adkins, who Sprague said was very intoxicated, was on the couch and got up when he entered the room. Adkins was not cooperative and refused to come outside to talk, the deputy said.

Instead, Adkins got between the deputy and the outside door and refused to let him leave, eventually closing the door and locking it. The deputy brought Adkins to the ground by force and arrested him for criminal restraint and obstruction. At the Knox County Jail, .177-caliber pellets were reportedly found on the suspect.

Bail was set Tuesday, Sept. 6 in 6th District Court at \$1,500 cash for Adkins.



# **BELIEFS THAT MATTER**

# DEFINING THE BELIEFS THAT SHAPE MY LIFE

## Who Am I?

Although my given name is George Benson, and many of you know me by my brand name, The Home Work Dad (#TheHomeWorkDad), my identity begins with understanding that I am a child of God, created in His image. I have a spirit that makes me who I am, and that spirit was created by God. By God's grace, that spirit was divinely breathed into my physical body.

I am a purpose-driven individual, an Intuitive Empath with claircognizant tendencies, striving to live a life with intention by actively taking captive my motives and making intentional choices, rather than acting out of habit or tradition. These traits have shaped how I interact with the world and those around me.

I am the youngest of nine children, born to two loving parents who were married for over 60 years until their passing. In 1994, I married my loving wife, Jodell, and together we have been blessed with three children: Antonia, Julia, and our firstborn who was named Bobby-Jo and who passed away in the womb. Each of them has played a significant role in shaping who I have become.

I am a detail-oriented and systems-focused individual with over 30 years of experience working from home, and more than 20 years as a work-from-home dad. I am a college dropout who studied Youth Ministry but could not afford to finish. I am a teacher at heart, and I love to laugh and have fun with family and friends!

## My Faith: A Non-Traditional Walk with God

I hold what I consider to be a strong, though non-traditional, faith in God. I believe that God is All-Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Loving, and All-Present. I struggle with using labels and putting people into boxes, and I struggle with being labeled as a Christian. Instead, I prefer to be thought of as an individual who chooses to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as I understand them from the accounts that exist in the Bible.

I believe that when Jesus was on earth, He was God in bodily form. I believe that Jesus made a conscious and intentional choice to take on the consequences of sin for all of humanity. I believe that Jesus suffered a physical death, was buried in a tomb, and three days later rose again. Because of Jesus' actions and example, and by God's grace, I am able to live a life where I can strive daily to become the best version of myself, without fear of condemnation when I fail. I believe that God is with me at all times and is always willing to guide me in all that I say and do.

## **A Summary of Key Beliefs**

I believe that God is not only our creator but also our divine parent. I believe that God breathed the breath of life into us, both physically and spiritually. This act of grace is similar to a person who graciously chooses to give CPR to someone who has died in front of them, giving them the gift of life. In this way, God's breath sustains not only our physical existence but also grants us the gift of salvation. This connection to God, often referred to as the still small voice, serves as a constant guide, helping us navigate life with purpose and intention.

I believe that God, in His wisdom, allows us to face challenges and temptations, often using Satan and even the experience of hell—which I view not as eternal punishment, but as a temporary separation or divine "time-out"—to foster our spiritual growth. Through these trials, we are given the opportunity to reflect, learn, and realign ourselves with God's purpose, ultimately becoming the best versions of ourselves under His loving guidance.

I also believe that God grants us the gift of free will, which allows us to make our own choices. Along with that freedom comes the responsibility to make thoughtful decisions, respecting both our autonomy and the autonomy of others. I firmly believe that God doesn't make mistakes, and this belief extends to every person, regardless of how they may, or may not, fit into traditional societal categories. Whether it's issues of gender, identity, or other aspects of uniqueness, each person is created with divine intent and purpose.

## **Why These Beliefs Matter**

So, why am I writing this blog series, "Beliefs that Matter"? I am writing this series because I believe in being as open and honest as I can be without sacrificing the privacy of others, and I want you, my audience, to have the opportunity to know what I believe and why. This way, you can be more informed about the things I say, the resources I create, and the motives behind why I do what I do.

Each post in this series will hopefully give you insight into the nuances of who I am and how I approach others. Please know that this series is not meant to be presented as me saying this is what you should believe. Instead, it is about me striving to be open and honest about what I have come to believe based on my own research, struggles, and experience. Thank you!

# FAITH AND FREE WILL: MAKING CONSCIOUS CHOICES

In my journey of understanding my faith and what I believe, one of the most profound realizations I've come to is the link between faith and belief. Faith is making an intentional and conscious decision to trust, and belief is the result of understanding, personal experience, reflection, and, at times, divine revelation. Both require ongoing and active engagement, and neither can be reduced to a simple, one-time choice. Ultimately, what we believe evolves as we continuously explore, test, and refine the truths we encounter. In this post, I want to explore how faith and free will intersect, and how genuine belief is formed through understanding.

## The Nature of Belief

Belief, in my view, is not simply a choice. Our ability to believe comes from a deeper understanding of the truths that resonate with our experiences. When someone says, "I believe this or that," it's not as simple as choosing to believe it because they want to. Instead, belief must be rooted in a true understanding of the reality it reflects. Without understanding, the best we can do is accept an idea as a working hypothesis—something we hold tentatively until we have enough experience and insight to truly believe it.

Beliefs are acknowledged, not chosen. When I say that I believe something, I am acknowledging that I have made a conscious and intentional choice to accept a series of understandings. Some of these understandings come from personal experiences, some from insights shared by others, and some from what is perceived to be divine guidance. As these understandings grow and intertwine, they form a foundation that eventually leads to belief. This is where faith comes in.

## Faith as a Conscious Decision

Faith is not blind, nor is it something we can force ourselves to have. Instead, faith involves a conscious and intentional decision to trust—whether that's in the teachings of others, divine guidance, or personal intuition. When I choose to trust in certain teachings, I hold them as a working hypothesis that I accept tentatively, pending further experience, insights, and reflection.

This hypothesis guides my perceptions and actions, but it's always open to revision or rejection. Faith requires a willingness to question and test what we believe, especially as we encounter new experiences and insights. Faith, then, is an ongoing process that shapes our beliefs as we gain deeper understanding.

## **The Journey Toward True Belief**

True belief is not about blind acceptance, but instead is a journey of continually seeking, questioning, and growing. This allows our beliefs to evolve through a process of testing and refining. The teachings and ideas that align with my experiences and understanding grow stronger, becoming deeply rooted in personal conviction. Those that don't align, or that reveal inconsistencies, are reevaluated and sometimes discarded. Through this process of exploration, true belief emerges.

## **The Role of Free Will in Belief**

Free will is a God-given ability—the capacity to make independent choices based on our understanding, values, and desires. It allows us to explore different ideas, weigh possibilities, and make decisions that reflect our beliefs. Free will plays an essential role in the process of belief because, at its core, belief is shaped by what we understand. While our experiences, revelations, and teachings may influence us, it's through free will that we engage actively with these truths and decide whether or not to accept or reject them.

This process is what transforms understanding into genuine belief. It's not a forced or automatic response, but rather a choice made freely and with intention, one that aligns with what resonates as true in our lives.

## **The Influence of Divine Intervention on Free Will**

Although we are free to make choices, there are times when God intervenes, not to override our free will, but to guide us toward deeper understanding. In moments of divine intervention, God may choose to reveal something that shapes our belief more profoundly than personal exploration alone ever could.

A powerful example of divine intervention can be found in the biblical story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:6-16, Acts 26:12-18). Paul, who was originally known as Saul, was a fierce persecutor of early Christians often killing them. While on his way to Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus, he was suddenly struck by a bright light and fell to the ground. He heard the voice of Christ asking, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Blinded by the encounter, Paul was led into the city, where he remained without sight for three days. God then sent a disciple named Ananias to lay hands on Paul, restoring his sight and baptizing him. This divine encounter radically changed Paul's life, transforming him into one of the most passionate and influential followers of Christ. If you want to read this account yourself, I would encourage you to read it using either the New King James Version (NKJV) or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible where you can gain a deeper understanding of how this dramatic intervention shaped Paul's beliefs and mission.

In moments like these, divine grace and free will intersect. These experiences do not force belief, because we are still free to choose how to respond as we engage with what God reveals. Instead, God's divine intervention helps provide us with experiences that facilitate our ability to gain the understanding that allows true belief to take root.

## **Free Will and Divine Purpose**

Free will and divine purpose work together, shaping our spiritual journeys. While we have the freedom to explore, question, and decide what we believe, God's guidance often helps us make sense of our experiences and brings clarity when we seek answers. This doesn't negate free will; rather, it amplifies it by providing us with the understanding we need to make informed choices.

God's interventions serve as moments of grace where we encounter truth in a more direct way, allowing us to grow in our faith. These moments are not about God controlling our choices, but more about God giving us the understanding that helps us choose more wisely.

## **Conclusion**

As I close out this post, I am reminded that the process of believing is as much about the journey as it is about the destination. Faith is a journey that requires openness to growth, reflection, and divine guidance. While belief cannot simply be chosen, free will allows us to engage with the truths we encounter, deciding how we respond to them. Understanding plays a vital role in this process—belief deepens as we come to understand more fully, through experience and reflection, and as God, in moments of grace, offers the clarity we need to choose wisely. In those moments, faith and free will come together, shaping the path forward. I hope that you, too, find clarity and strength in your own journey as you engage with the truths that resonate with your heart and mind.

# **GOD AS OUR DIVINE PARENT: GROWING THE HUMAN SPIRIT**

In my journey of faith, one of the most profound realizations I've had is the understanding of God as a divine parent. Just as a loving parent provides guidance, correction, and unconditional love to their child, I believe God does the same for us on our spiritual journey. This parental role shapes my entire view of spiritual growth. Every challenge, every moment of joy or sorrow, is an opportunity to grow closer to God. And even in our struggles, I believe God never abandons us. This understanding of God's parental role forms the foundation of how I view our spiritual development, the trials we face in life, and even the role of temptation and hell—not as tools of punishment, but as mechanisms for growth.

## **The Breath of Life: Spiritual and Physical Creation**

I believe that every person carries the breath of life, which is both a physical and spiritual gift from God. This breath, breathed into us by God, connects our spirit to our physical body and gives us the opportunity to experience the material world, to learn, grow, and ultimately become who we were created to be. Our spirits, I believe, originate from God. They are divine in nature and carry with them a piece of God's essence. When bound to our physical form, our spirits experience the limitations and challenges of the material world, but this is part of the process of growth and refinement. When our physical body dies, I believe the spirit continues its journey, no longer constrained by the limitations of the material body but still connected to God.

## **God's Role in Spiritual Growth**

It is through this breath of life that we experience our physical existence and remain connected to God, who, as a divine parent, lovingly guides us through every phase of our journey—both in the physical world and beyond. God's guidance in our spiritual growth is not heavy-handed or authoritarian but compassionate and loving. As an all-knowing and all-powerful being, God could easily control every aspect of our lives. However, I believe that He chooses not to. Instead, God allows us to exercise free will, experience the consequences of our choices, and grow through them. This divine guidance is often subtle. God knows exactly what I need to face in order to develop, and He ensures that I am never alone on this journey. Even in the hardest moments, His presence is constant. He is the divine parent who allows us to stumble, fall, and learn, but He is always nearby, ready to help us up and guide us forward.

## **Temptation as a Catalyst for Growth**

Temptation plays a vital role in our spiritual journey. Without it, we would have no need for

free will, and our growth would be stagnant. I believe that temptations are not meant to lead us astray but to provide opportunities to choose our path. They present us with challenges, giving us the chance to either follow God's guidance or take a different route. It is through these moments of choice that we develop spiritual resilience, strength and understanding.

Satan, often perceived as an adversary, plays a part in this process, but not outside of God's will. I believe that Satan operates within boundaries set by God and that his influence is ultimately used by God to refine us. The temptations we face are not meant to destroy us but to provide opportunities to exercise our free will and demonstrate our commitment to God's guidance. Even when we fail, these moments of temptation serve a greater purpose—pushing us to reflect, learn, and return to a closer relationship with God.

## **Sin, Consequences, and Divine Love**

When we give in to temptation, the result is sin—acting outside of God's guidance. However, I do not believe that sin represents permanent failure. Instead, I see it as part of a learning process, much like a child who makes a mistake and faces the consequences. These consequences are not meant to punish us in the traditional sense but to help us understand where we've gone wrong and to learn from God's guidance.

God's love, I believe, is unwavering. Even when we sin, His love remains constant, and He uses the consequences of our actions as teaching tools. God, as our divine parent, never abandons us, no matter how far we stray. The experiences we face—both positive and negative—are all part of the journey toward spiritual growth, and God is always present, ready to guide us back to the right path.

## **Hell as a Space for Reflection and Growth**

The concept of hell as a place of spiritual refinement raises the question of whether a spirit can leave hell. My research into various religious traditions suggests that many view hell not as a final destination but as a temporary state where the spirit reflects and learns. Christian Universalism, Kabbalistic Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism all hold ideas that align with this view, presenting hell as a place for purification or reflection rather than eternal punishment.

So what do I believe about hell? I believe that hell is a created place by God, designed with a divine purpose that aligns with His other attributes. As such, I struggle to believe that hell is a place of eternal punishment, as this doesn't fit with the character of an all-loving God. Parents don't put children into eternal punishment without giving them as many opportunities as necessary to learn from their mistakes and be allowed to reunite with their parents. Instead, I believe that hell is more like a safe space, designed by God to give us the time and separation needed to reflect on our choices—much like a time-out where an unruly child can be away from stimuli to reflect on their behavior.

In this divine safe space we are given a time-out where I believe we experience a form of hell as God places us in a space to reflect on our actions. Keep in mind, though, that like a parent, He never truly abandons us. Hell is not about being forsaken, but about having the



opportunity to learn and grow in a state where we can feel the full weight of our separation from God. It is within this space that we are able to continue to experience our conscience and reflect on Satan's influence, but this serves as a tool for building spiritual resilience in an effort to help us make better choices in the future.

Ultimately though, I believe that God remains nearby, watching over us as we navigate this period of reflection. He is always ready to bring us back into His presence when we are prepared to return. The time we spend in this state of separation, whether brief or extended, is dependent on what God sees as necessary to allow us the time and space to learn the lessons that God knows we need to absorb. Hell, therefore, is not a permanent destination but a transformative space, designed to lead us back to God, stronger and more spiritually attuned.

## **Hell and The Possibility of Reincarnation**

If hell serves as a place of spiritual refinement, it would stand to reason that a spirit might indeed leave hell. I believe that God's love and mercy are too great to allow a spirit to remain in eternal separation without the opportunity for growth and redemption. Much like a parent who gives their child multiple chances to learn from their mistakes, God allows the spirit to continue its journey once it has learned its lessons.

This idea aligns with the biblical teachings found in Mark 5:1-13 where Jesus casts out a legion of spirits from a man, sending them into a herd of pigs. This story shows that spirits are not bound to one form—they can move between different forms. If spirits can leave one body and enter another, it opens up the possibility that God might use reincarnation as part of His divine plan, allowing spirits to re-enter new bodies to continue their process of growth and refinement.

The concept of reincarnation offers a powerful vision of divine justice. If we believe that God gives each spirit the opportunity to grow and learn, it makes sense that He might allow spirits to experience different circumstances across multiple lives. Through reincarnation, a spirit might be born into lives of wealth, poverty, privilege, or hardship, each offering unique challenges. These experiences allow the spirit to develop the empathy, wisdom, and resilience necessary to grow closer to God.

Reincarnation allows for a purposeful journey of spiritual growth across many lifetimes. It ensures that every spirit has the opportunity to continue its spiritual development, facing new challenges and learning from its mistakes. God's love is too vast to limit a spirit's journey to a single lifetime. Instead, He provides multiple chances for growth, just as a loving parent gives their child the time and space needed to learn and evolve.

## **Conclusion: God's Purpose in Our Growth**

Ultimately, I believe that God, as our divine parent, loves us unconditionally and uses every experience—temptation, sin, and even hell—to guide us toward spiritual growth. The breath of life that God has given us connects us to Him in ways that transcend our physical existence, allowing us to grow closer to Him through each step of our journey. Whether

through temptations, moments of separation, or the experience of hell, God is always present, watching over us, and ready to guide us back to His love.

The process of spiritual growth may be challenging, but it is through these challenges that we come to understand the depth of God's love and the purpose He has for our lives. Hell, far from being a place of eternal punishment, is part of that process—a space where we can reflect, learn, and grow. And just as a parent gives their child countless opportunities to learn and return, I believe God offers us the same grace, guiding us back to Him with love, patience, and a divine plan for our continued growth.

# **GOD DOESN'T MAKE MISTAKES: UNIQUENESS IN GOD'S CREATION**

In my journey of faith, one of the most powerful lessons I've learned is that God doesn't make mistakes. This belief is foundational to how I see the world, and it especially shapes how I view the existence of intersex individuals. Intersex people are born with variations in sex characteristics—whether chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical—that don't fit the typical definitions of male or female. While society often struggles to understand these differences, I believe that intersex individuals are an intentional part of God's creation.

## **Intersex as an Intentional Part of God's Creation**

When I first learned about the existence of intersex individuals, it challenged me to rethink many assumptions about gender and biological sex. With approximately 1.7% of the global population born with intersex traits, it's clear that the binary understanding of male and female doesn't capture the full complexity of God's creation. Whether intersex traits are evident at birth or later in life, I've come to believe that these individuals are part of God's intentional design, not a mistake or anomaly.

For many, the existence of intersex people raises difficult questions, particularly for parents. How would I react if my child were born with intersex traits? What decisions would I make regarding their medical care and upbringing? These questions have deepened my empathy for parents of intersex children who are faced with incredibly complex decisions.

## **The Challenges Parents of Intersex Children Face**

Parents of intersex children often grapple with whether to pursue early medical interventions—such as surgeries or hormone treatments—or to wait until the child is old enough to participate in these decisions. Each option comes with emotional, social, and medical implications. Early surgeries might help align a child's physical appearance with societal expectations, potentially reducing bullying and social isolation. However, such procedures carry risks, including the possibility of assigning a gender that doesn't align with the child's identity as they grow, leading to physical and emotional challenges.

On the other hand, waiting to make decisions about surgery can protect the child's autonomy, allowing them to grow into their gender identity naturally. Yet, this choice might expose the child to teasing or social stigma during formative years. Parents must carefully navigate these decisions, weighing the benefits of early intervention against the importance of bodily autonomy and the risk of future regret.

As a parent, I can only imagine the emotional weight of these decisions. The fear of making the wrong choice can be overwhelming. Parents want to protect their children from a world that might not understand them, yet they also want to give their children the freedom to

define their own identities. In these moments of uncertainty, I believe that God's grace is essential.

## **God's Grace in Decision-Making**

In the face of such difficult choices, I believe that God's grace is ever-present. God, in His all-knowing and all-loving nature, understands the struggles these parents and individuals face. I don't believe that there's always a clear right or wrong answer in these situations. Instead, I trust that if parents make decisions out of love and a desire to do what's best for their child, God's grace will guide them.

One of the most profound lessons I've learned from walking in the shoes of parents with intersex children is that love and grace must be at the heart of all decision-making. Even when the path is uncertain, I believe that God's love covers every step. Just as God extends grace to parents navigating these complex choices, I believe it's our responsibility to show grace and understanding toward others, especially when we don't fully grasp their experiences.

## **Biological Factors and Identity**

I have come to believe that the biological factors influencing intersex individuals may also play a role in shaping the gender identity and sexual orientation of transgender, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Research suggests that prenatal hormone exposure, genetics, and brain development all contribute to not just physical sex characteristics but also how individuals experience their gender and sexual orientation.

For example, variations in hormone levels during fetal development are known to affect both the body and the brain. In intersex individuals, these variations might result in physical traits that don't fit typical gender definitions. Similarly, these same hormonal processes may influence gender identity and sexual orientation, even if the variations aren't physically visible.

This growing body of research reveals the biological complexity of human experience and suggests that being intersex, transgender, or queer isn't a mistake—it's a reflection of the diversity in God's creation. I see these complexities as further evidence that God's design is far more intricate than we often realize, and it encourages me to approach each person with grace and understanding.

## **Extending Grace to All**

Ultimately, if God is willing to extend grace to intersex individuals and their families as they navigate these deeply personal decisions, I believe that grace must also be extended to everyone—including those who are transgender, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. God's love is unconditional, and we are not called to judge or second-guess the experiences of others. Instead, we are called to respect each person's journey, knowing that they are walking with God in their own way.

God has called me to love others as He loves me, and that love is rooted in grace. The same grace that God has shown me on my own journey is the grace I must extend to others. In doing so, I honor the uniqueness of God's creation and reflect His love in a world that often struggles to understand.

# **PRO-CHOICE FOR LIFE: A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE ON THE RIGHT TO LIFE**

Few topics are as polarizing as the debate between being Pro-Life or Pro-Choice. The clash between the sanctity of life and a woman's right to make choices about her body has become a dividing line in our society. For me, however, I believe that this debate is fundamentally focused on the wrong issue. The current discourse often revolves around taking a right away from one being to potentially give it to another. Instead of fueling the division, I think it's important to find a compassionate compromise. This is why I identify as a "Pro-Choice for Life" proponent—a position that balances both the sanctity of life and the autonomy of women.

## **What is "Pro-Choice for Life"?**

Being "Pro-Choice for Life" means holding a nuanced view that respects both the complexity of pregnancy and the right of women to make autonomous decisions. It acknowledges the sacredness of life, the responsibility that comes with free will, and the right of every woman to make informed decisions in consultation with her doctor and her personal beliefs. This balanced perspective is grounded in a few key principles:

### **1. Autonomy and Responsibility**

I believe that free will is a gift from God, and with that gift comes the right to make choices about our own bodies. A woman, as an autonomous being, has the right to choose whether to carry a pregnancy to term. This decision should be made in consultation with her doctor, based on her health, circumstances, and beliefs.

However, free will doesn't exist in isolation—it comes with responsibility. The choices we make shape not only our own lives but also those around us. A decision as significant as whether to continue a pregnancy carries emotional, physical, and spiritual consequences that must be weighed carefully. This is why it's so important that women are empowered with the information they need to make decisions rooted in responsibility and informed by the realities of both life and their autonomy.

### **2. Divine Timing and the Role of Spirit**

One of the mysteries that science has yet to explain is the significance of the spirit. At what point does a fetus become a living being with a spirit? I believe that God, at some point during pregnancy, breathes the breath of life into the fetus. This moment, known only to

God, transforms the fetus into a living being. It's a divine mystery, and because no one can definitively determine when this occurs, it's important to give women the space to listen to the voice of God within themselves as they consider their options.

While science provides valuable insights into pregnancy, it does not have all the answers—especially when it comes to the spiritual significance of life. I believe that when women are given clear, honest information and the opportunity to reflect, they are capable of making decisions that align with their values and with God's timing.

### **3. Honesty About Emotional Costs**

From the moment a woman knows she is pregnant, she is aware that something new exists within her—a potential life. Ignoring or downplaying this reality is disingenuous and fails to acknowledge the emotional complexity of pregnancy. Whether a pregnancy ends due to miscarriage, abortion, or delivery, it can bring significant emotional and psychological struggles. Every woman has the right to be fully informed of these potential consequences before making her decision.

This means that doctors and medical professionals have a responsibility to engage in open, honest conversations with women about the potential emotional, psychological, and spiritual impacts of ending a pregnancy. In doing so, women can make informed decisions based on all the facts, and they can better prepare for the emotional journey ahead, regardless of how the pregnancy ends.

### **4. Trust and the Right to Induce Labor**

If a pregnancy reaches a stage where the fetus is viable outside the womb, and the woman is considering terminating the pregnancy, I believe she should be offered the option to induce labor rather than terminate the life of the fetus. Inducing labor provides the opportunity for the fetus to survive, offering a chance at life through adoption or other means. This option respects both the woman's autonomy and the potential for life, allowing her to make the choice to end the pregnancy without ending the life of the fetus.

This approach fosters trust—trust in medical expertise, trust in the woman's judgment, and trust that her decision can honor both her autonomy and the life that exists within her.

### **Free Will and Responsibility: Balancing Choice with Accountability**

At the heart of the "Pro-Choice for Life" stance is the recognition that free will is both a right and a responsibility. God has given us the freedom to make choices, and with that freedom comes the responsibility to understand the weight of our decisions. Autonomy is important, but so is the recognition that our choices have consequences—not just for ourselves but for the lives we influence.

This means we must approach the right to choose with care. The choices we make about life, particularly in the context of pregnancy, are profound and should not be taken lightly.

They must be made with consideration of the spiritual, emotional, and physical consequences, as well as the responsibilities we bear as individuals with free will.

## **Conclusion: Compassionate Compromise**

Being “Pro-Choice for Life” means advocating for a woman’s right to make autonomous decisions about her body while recognizing the potential for life from the moment of conception. It respects the complexity of pregnancy, the emotional and spiritual dimensions of choice, and the belief that when women are given full information and the opportunity to listen to divine guidance, they will make decisions that reflect their values and their responsibilities.

This perspective is not about taking rights away from one being to give them to another. Instead, it’s about finding a compassionate balance that honors both the sanctity of life and the autonomy of women. It’s about trusting that with free will comes responsibility, and with responsibility comes the need for grace—grace for ourselves, for others, and for the lives we are entrusted with.

In the end, I believe that when we shift the focus away from division and toward compassion, we create space for better conversations, deeper understanding, and more thoughtful choices. Free will, life, and responsibility are deeply intertwined, and it’s through this lens of compassion that we can best navigate the complexities of the “Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice” debate with grace and integrity.



# SALVATION, GRATITUDE AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PURPOSE- DRIVEN

## What It Means to Be Purpose-Driven

In my journey of faith and understanding what I believe, one of the most profound realizations I've come to is that living with purpose is not merely about setting goals or seeking fulfillment—it's rooted in the recognition that there is something far greater than myself: an intelligent being that I call God. God, by choice, intentionally breathed life into me. This divine breath sustains not only my physical existence but also my spiritual existence, and fundamentally, that spiritual breath I believe is the gift of divine salvation.

This gift, freely given as an act of pure love by God's grace, is based solely on His sovereign will. It is independent of anything I have done or could ever do. The truth that God chose to save me, in the same way that someone might revive a lifeless body through CPR, shapes everything I do. My life is a response to this divine act of grace, and in this post, I want to share what it means for me to live with purpose in light of God's saving grace.

## Salvation and the Sovereignty of God

Being purpose-driven begins with the profound recognition that my life is not my own—it was given to me by God, who breathed both physical and spiritual life into me. This life, particularly the spiritual life, is a direct result of God's sovereign choice to offer me salvation through His grace. God's act of grace in saving me is something I could never have initiated or earned on my own; it was entirely His choice, a gift beyond my comprehension.

This understanding of salvation as a gift influences every aspect of my life. It compels me to live with intentionality, knowing that my life has meaning because God willed it to be so. His choice to save me is not only a display of His love but also a call to live in a way that reflects that love.

## Living a Life of Intentional Gratitude

In response to God's choice to save me, I am compelled—out of reverence and gratitude—to live my life intentionally, not out of habit or routine. This means that I strive to take captive every thought and action, ensuring that they reflect the values that Jesus demonstrated during His time on earth. These values—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—serve as a guide for how I try to live each day.

Living with purpose, then, is about making deliberate choices that honor the salvation I have already received. It's not about trying to earn God's favor through good deeds but responding to the grace that has already been given. I live intentionally because I am grateful for God's saving grace, and I want my life to reflect that gratitude in every possible way.

#### Sanctification: Working Out My Salvation

I believe that living a purpose-driven life is also about sanctification, the ongoing process of "working out my salvation" (Philippians 2:12-13). This process is not about earning salvation; rather, it's about living out the implications of the salvation I have already received. Sanctification is the transformation that takes place in my life as I respond to God's grace, striving to live in a way that reflects the love and example of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, who I believe is God's Son, demonstrated the perfect way to live a life that honors God. His life was characterized by compassion, humility, and a deep sense of purpose, and I believe that as I grow in my faith, I am called to follow that example. Sanctification is an ongoing journey, a process that shapes me more and more into the person God created me to be.

#### Purpose-Driven Doesn't Mean Perfect

One thing I've learned is that being purpose-driven doesn't mean being perfect. It's easy to feel like we have to get everything right, but that's not the case. Instead, it's about committing to the process of growth, recognizing that mistakes will happen but that God's grace is always present. When I fall short, I remind myself that I am still on the path of sanctification, still working out the salvation that God has already given me.

This understanding allows me to approach life with a sense of peace, knowing that my purpose is not contingent on my perfection but on my willingness to respond to God's grace each day.

#### Divine Guidance and Purpose

A purpose-driven life is one that is guided by God. I don't believe that I am responsible for figuring everything out on my own. Instead, I rely on God's guidance—through prayer, scripture, and the still small voice that directs me along the way. By seeking divine guidance, I can be confident that the decisions I make and the paths I take are in alignment with God's will for my life.

This doesn't mean that challenges disappear, but it does mean that I walk through life with a sense of peace, knowing that God is leading me. The purpose I live with is not of my own creation, but a response to the calling that God has placed on my life.

#### Why Purpose Matters

So why does living with purpose matter? For me, living with purpose is a response to the profound truth that God chose to save me out of His grace. My life is not just about getting through the day or achieving personal success—it's about living in a way that reflects the love, grace, and salvation I have received from God.

Living with purpose gives me direction, not only in the big decisions but also in the small, everyday moments. It reminds me that every action, every choice, is an opportunity to live out the grace that I have been given. It's about using the life that God has breathed into me to serve Him and others, in gratitude for the salvation I have received.

### Conclusion

Being purpose-driven is not about perfection or earning God's favor—it's about responding to the grace that has already been given to me. It's about living with intention, guided by God's love and grace, and striving to reflect the values that Jesus demonstrated. As I continue on this journey, I am reminded that my purpose is not self-created, but rooted in the divine plan that God has for my life. Living with purpose is a daily response to the gift of salvation, and it's what drives me to live each day with gratitude, love, and intentionality.

# THE ROLE OF SATAN: A CATALYST FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In my journey of faith and understanding, I've come to believe that everything in life serves a purpose in our spiritual development, including the role of Satan. While Satan is often viewed as the embodiment of evil and opposition to God, I see Satan's role in a broader, more purposeful context. In my belief, Satan operates within boundaries set by God, and rather than existing solely as an adversary, he functions as a catalyst for spiritual growth.

## The Garden of Eden: Temptation as Part of God's Plan

To understand the role of Satan, we must go back to one of the earliest stories in the Bible—the story of the Garden of Eden. According to the account, God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden, a place of peace, safety, and abundance. Everything they needed was provided for them, and they had a close relationship with God. However, within this perfect environment, God chose to place a tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—and He commanded them not to eat from it (Genesis 2:8-9, 2:15-17).

At first glance, it may seem puzzling that God would put temptation in the Garden in the first place. Why would He create a safe space for Adam and Eve, only to place something that He didn't want them to touch within their reach? I mean, it would be irresponsible of a parent to have a playpen for their child and to then put something within that space that the parent didn't want their child to touch—right? So why would God do this very thing?

I believe this was intentional. God, in His omniscience, knew that at some point Adam and Eve would face the temptation to eat from the tree, and He placed it there anyway—not to entrap them but to provide them with the catalyst necessary for their spiritual growth (Genesis 3:1-7). Whether we view the story of Adam and Eve as literal or as an analogy, it reveals a deep spiritual truth: without temptation, growth is not possible. God knew that in order for Adam and Eve—and humanity—to become more like Him, knowing good from evil, they would need to face choices that would stretch their spiritual capacity. Without the understanding of what evil is, you cannot value good; without understanding what it means to hate, you cannot value love. Without experiencing the consequences of a wrong choice, you cannot value making right choices. This is why I believe that the placement of the tree and the introduction of the serpent (Satan) was not an accident but a necessary part of God's plan for their spiritual development.

## Temptation as a Catalyst for Growth

Just as in the Garden of Eden, Satan's role in the broader spiritual journey of humanity serves as a means to test and strengthen our spiritual resolve. Temptation plays a vital role in our spiritual journey. Without it, we would have no need for free will, and our growth would stagnate. I believe that temptations are not meant to lead us astray but to provide

opportunities to choose our path. They present us with challenges, giving us the chance to either follow God's guidance or take a different route. It is through these moments of choice that we develop spiritual resilience, strength, and understanding.

Satan, often perceived as an adversary, plays a part in this process, but not outside of God's will. A key example of this is found in the biblical story of Job, where Satan comes before God and challenges Job's faithfulness. Rather than forbidding Satan, God allows him to test Job but sets clear boundaries on what Satan is permitted to do (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-6). This shows that Satan operates within limits set by God, and his actions, while difficult, are used by God to refine us. The temptations we face are not meant to destroy us but to provide opportunities to exercise our free will and demonstrate our commitment to God's guidance. Even when we fail, these moments of temptation serve a greater purpose—pushing us to reflect, learn, and return to a closer relationship with God.

## **Should We Give in to Temptation to Grow?**

Some might argue that if temptation leads to growth, then perhaps we should choose to give in to temptation because doing so would result in more opportunities for growth. However, I believe this reasoning is flawed. While it's true that God uses our failures to teach us and guide us back to Him, giving in to temptation, much like making mistakes, ultimately slows down our growth. When we give in to temptation, it clouds our ability to think clearly, creates emotional and spiritual baggage, and leaves us dealing with consequences that hold us back, rather than propel us forward.

The lessons we learn from giving in to temptations often reinforce the barriers that hold us back, such as fear, guilt, or regret, instead of helping us become the best version of ourselves as God intends for us to be. Yes, we learn from failure, but often what we learn are lessons we did not need to know and these lessons only act as obstacles preventing us from fully realizing the potential that God has placed within us.

In contrast, resisting temptation leads to true spiritual strength and helps us move toward becoming more aligned with the best version of ourselves. God's will, as seen in Matthew 5:48, is that we become "perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." This call to perfection is not about flawless behavior but about striving to become the best version of ourselves as we strive to live in alignment with the values of love, compassion, and wisdom. Resisting temptation helps us achieve that by fostering growth that is clear-minded, purposeful, and transformative.

The struggle with temptation is part of being human. Even Jesus, during His time in the wilderness, was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). However, by resisting temptation, He demonstrated the strength and spiritual alignment necessary to fulfill His purpose. We, too, grow spiritually when we resist temptation, striving to become the best version of ourselves, as God intends.

Ultimately, while failure and temptation can still lead to learning, the most meaningful growth comes from making choices that help us become more like the divine image within us. This is where we align with our true potential, experiencing a life of greater clarity, joy, and purpose.

## **The Role of Sin and God's Grace**

Although it is true that when we give in to temptation, the result is sin and it can slow our spiritual progress, it's also important to remember that sin does not represent permanent failure. Instead it represents a momentary lapse in judgment. In the same way, however, it's important to remember that God's love for us is unwavering, and His grace is always present. Rather than being condemned by our mistakes, we are invited to learn from them and to grow closer to God in the process as we remember that God's love, as our divine parent, remains constant, and His grace provides the encouragement we need to continue our journey.

## **Conclusion: Embracing Grace and Growth**

So then, ultimately, while resisting temptation leads to the most meaningful growth, we should also recognize that failure is a part of the human experience. It's not in our best interest to sin intentionally, but when we do stumble, we should not be weighed down by guilt. Instead, we must remember that God's grace is sufficient and His love is everlasting.

Rather than beating ourselves up over our shortcomings, we should embrace the opportunity to learn from them, knowing that God's love never fails. In every trial and every temptation, His grace is there to lift us up, refine us, and draw us closer to becoming the best version of ourselves that He intended. With His help, we continue to grow in strength, wisdom, and purpose, guided by the eternal truth of His love.

# **WALKING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES: LOVE, EMPATHY, AND UNDERSTANDING**

In my journey of faith, one of the most significant lessons I've learned is the power of empathy—truly understanding and walking in another person's shoes. I believe that love and understanding are at the core of what it means to follow the teachings of Jesus, and that we are called to show compassion to others, even when we don't fully understand their experiences. It's not enough to simply walk alongside someone; we must intentionally choose to walk in their shoes, attempting to see the world through their eyes. This is the foundation for building relationships rooted in love, compassion, and genuine understanding.

## **Why Walking in Someone Else's Shoes Matters**

In the same way that labels often oversimplify complex issues, our unwillingness to understand another person's point of view divides us. This lack of empathy and understanding fuels misunderstanding, judgment, and division in society. I believe that Jesus' life and teachings provide the clearest example of what it means to truly love and walk with others. He consistently demonstrated empathy and compassion, especially toward those who were marginalized, misunderstood, or judged by society.

Jesus didn't just sympathize with people from a distance; He entered into their lives, understood their struggles, and carried their burdens. Whether it was the tax collector, the leper, or the Samaritan woman, Jesus showed that love is about stepping into someone else's shoes and seeing the world from their perspective. In doing so, He broke down barriers of prejudice, judgment, and social labels. For me, this is the essence of what it means to follow Christ—to live with compassion and intentionality in every interaction.

## **Empathy and Individuality**

When we choose to walk in someone else's shoes, we are acknowledging that each person is created by God with unique struggles, experiences, and perspectives. We're all made in God's image, but our individual paths are shaped by different circumstances. By focusing on the person behind the issue, rather than the issue itself, we demonstrate love in its most genuine form.

Too often, people are defined by their struggles or choices rather than their humanity. When we focus only on a person's actions, we risk overlooking the deeper story of who they are. Walking in someone else's shoes means taking the time to understand their journey—why they've made certain choices and how their experiences have shaped their worldview. This level of empathy goes beyond surface-level judgments and seeks to connect with the heart of a person's experience.

## **Truth, Understanding, and Grace**

At the core of walking in someone else's shoes is the principle of understanding. I believe that true understanding requires both access to knowledge and the ability to comprehend that knowledge fully. As a result, I don't believe that God holds us accountable for things we don't understand. If God is going to hold us responsible for our actions, He must first ensure we have the information and understanding necessary to make informed choices.

In human relationships, we must extend the same grace to others. Before we hold someone accountable for their actions, we must first make sure they understand the consequences of their choices. To know whether someone truly comprehends, we need to take the time to understand their thinking and motives. This is only possible when we are willing to step into their shoes and see the world from their perspective.

Empathy also requires humility. There are times when we may believe we fully understand a situation, only to later realize that we were wrong. This is where grace comes in—for both the teacher and the student. Understanding is not always immediate, and often, it develops over time. Grace allows for mistakes and misinterpretations, providing space for growth and deeper comprehension. When we walk in someone else's shoes, we open ourselves up to learning from their experiences and seeing life from a different angle.

## **Balancing Love and Accountability**

Walking in other people's shoes doesn't mean ignoring accountability. Love and empathy do not require us to excuse harmful actions. Instead, they call us to understand the person behind the action, ensuring that we approach situations with grace and a desire for growth and restoration. God holds us accountable for our choices, but He does so with full knowledge of our hearts and our understanding.

In contrast, human societies rely on laws to maintain order and accountability. However, laws are created by imperfect people who cannot see the hearts and minds of others as God can. This is why laws, while necessary, often fall short of true justice and fairness. Walking in someone else's shoes teaches us that, while laws are essential, they must be balanced with empathy, fairness, and a genuine understanding of the people they affect.

## **Love as the Foundation**

Ultimately, walking in someone else's shoes is about love. It's about choosing to see others not as the sum of their actions or the labels they wear, but as individuals created by God, each on their own unique journey. Jesus' teachings call us to love others as we love ourselves, which means extending grace, showing compassion, and seeking to understand before we judge.

This kind of love breaks down barriers, builds bridges, and fosters deeper connections. It requires intentionality—choosing to listen, to empathize, and to walk alongside others, even when their experiences differ from our own. By walking in other people's shoes, we



can show the world a love that is transformative, healing, and reflective of the love that God shows us every day.

## **Conclusion: Empathy as a Path to Unity**

In a world that is increasingly divided, I believe that empathy—choosing to walk in other people’s shoes—is a powerful way to bring us back together. When we let go of labels and assumptions, and instead seek to understand the individual stories of those around us, we create space for deeper relationships rooted in love, compassion, and understanding.

Walking in someone else’s shoes reminds us that we are all on a journey, each with our own challenges, fears, and dreams. By embracing empathy, we become agents of God’s love, reflecting the compassion of Christ in our interactions with others. Ultimately, this is how we foster unity, break down divisions, and build a world where love and understanding prevail.

# WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

In my journey of faith, understanding the attributes of God has been essential in shaping not only my beliefs about God, and how we are connected, but also how I approach life, providing a framework for how I view God's presence in the world. Throughout this post, there will be times that I will use male pronouns when referring to God, but this is done solely for ease of reading and flow. I do not believe that God is limited by human gender categories; rather, God is beyond any specific gender.

When thinking about the attributes of God, I believe that He is not just an abstract force but an all-encompassing presence with specific attributes that reveal His nature. In this post, I want to expand on what I believe about the attributes of God: specifically that He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Loving, and All-Present.

## God is All-Knowing (Omniscient)

To say that God is All-Knowing means that His knowledge is limitless. Traditionally, omniscience is understood to mean that God knows everything—past, present, and future—including the choices that people will make. However, there are different perspectives on what God's omniscience entails, especially in relation to human free will. Some believe that God knows every specific future event, while others suggest that He knows all possible outcomes of future events, allowing for human freedom to play out.

One particular view, known as Open Theism, suggests that while God is fully capable of knowing the future in its entirety, He intentionally chooses not to know the specific future decisions of individuals in order to preserve human free will. In this view, God knows all possibilities and outcomes but allows the future to unfold without fully determining or predicting it in advance, respecting the genuine freedom of human choice. By choosing to limit His own knowledge of specific future outcomes, God creates room for real interaction between divine will and human freedom. This approach maintains that God's omniscience still includes knowing everything that can be known—such as the past, present, and all potential outcomes—while allowing the future to remain open and dynamic. God remains fully capable of responding to any situation as it unfolds, ensuring that our choices are meaningful and not predetermined.

For me, I tend to lean toward the belief that God has the capacity and wisdom to know all possible outcomes of future events. God knows every choice I could make, and His wisdom allows Him to understand what is most likely to happen. This doesn't mean that God's knowledge is limited or uncertain, but rather that His understanding of possibilities is infinite. This gives me peace, knowing that when I don't understand my own struggles or the bigger picture, He does.

## God is All-Powerful (Omnipotent)

I also believe that God is All-Powerful, meaning that there is nothing beyond His ability. However, this power is not random or harsh; it is exercised with purpose and care. God's omnipotence reflects His sovereignty—He is in control of all things, and nothing happens outside of His will. For me, this isn't about expecting God to intervene in every little problem, but rather trusting that everything unfolds under His authority and plan. Even in hardship, God's power is at work, shaping things for good in ways I may not see immediately. His omnipotence reassures me that the challenges I face are not beyond His control, and nothing in my life escapes His attention.

## **God is All-Loving (Omnibenevolent)**

This attribute is the one I find most compelling—God is All-Loving. I believe that His nature is rooted in love, and His love extends to all of creation. God's love is not contingent upon my actions or worthiness but is unconditional and steadfast. He loves us, even in our brokenness, and that love is the foundation for everything He does. For me, God's omnibenevolence is most clearly expressed in His willingness to take on bodily form as Jesus Christ so that we would have a perfect example of what it means to be a child of God. His Love, Joy, Peace, Patience & Grace, His Mercy, and His Self-Control. Furthermore, I believe that God's discipline is always rooted in love, not as punishment but as a way to teach us, help us grow, and guide us toward becoming who we were created to be.

## **God is All-Present (Omnipresent)**

Finally, I believe that God is All-Present, meaning that He is everywhere at all times. There is no place where God is not present—whether in the vastness of the universe or in the depths of our hearts. His presence is constant, even when we don't feel it. This belief brings me comfort, especially during times of loneliness or struggle. Knowing that God is always with me, no matter where I am or what I am going through, gives me strength. I don't have to rely on my feelings to know that God is near because His omnipresence assures me that He is always close, guiding and watching over me.

## **Why These Attributes Matter to Me**

So why do these attributes matter? For me, they aren't just abstract theological ideas but rather the foundation of my relationship with God, who I view as a divine parent. Just as a loving parent would guide, protect, and care for their child, God's attributes reveal how He interacts with me and the world. These attributes help me understand who He is and why I can trust Him in every area of my life.

Because God is All-Knowing, I can rely on His wisdom when I lack understanding, trusting that He sees the bigger picture, even when I do not. Because He is All-Powerful, I can rest assured that no challenge or struggle is beyond His control. I know that, like a parent, He is always working behind the scenes to shape situations for good, even if I don't immediately see how. Because God is All-Loving, I can trust that His intentions for me are always rooted

in love, just like a parent who disciplines with care—not to harm, but to help me grow and become who I am meant to be. His love is unconditional, not based on my actions, but on who I am as His child. Because God is All-Present, I never have to feel alone. Just as a child can always find comfort in knowing their parent is nearby, I find comfort in knowing that God is with me at all times, guiding and watching over me, whether I feel His presence or not.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding the attributes of God has helped me navigate life with greater clarity and trust. This belief isn't just about defining God's characteristics, but about building a relationship with Him as a divine parent, based on these attributes. God's omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omnipresence form the cornerstone of my faith. They provide a roadmap for how I approach every aspect of my life and give me the confidence that He is always working in ways I may never fully understand. In my next post, I'll explore what it means to live a purpose-driven life, and how these attributes of God play a role in helping me walk that path.

## WHAT IS AN EMPATH WITH CLAIRCOGNIZANT TENDENCIES

In my journey of self-discovery and understanding the spiritual gifts that God has given me, I've come to recognize two powerful traits that deeply shape how I experience the world: being an empath and having claircognizant tendencies. These traits influence not only my interactions with others but also how I connect with the divine, process emotions, and navigate life. In this post, I want to share what it means to me to be both an 'intuitive' empath and claircognizant, how these gifts have shaped my perception of the world, and the challenges that come with them.

### **What Does It Mean to Be an Empath?**

#### **Internal Dialogue and Connection to the Divine**

I believe that within each of us exists an internal dialogue—a constant stream of thoughts, feelings, and impressions that originate from various sources. For me, this internal dialogue is not just about my own thoughts but includes a sensitivity to the emotions and energies of others. As an empath, one of the challenges I face is discerning the source of these voices. Some of the thoughts and feelings I experience come from my own heart and mind, but others are absorbed from the people and environments around me.

Among these internal voices is what many refer to as intuition. For some, intuition is a single, subtle feeling. However, I experience it as a complex blend of emotions, insights, and sensations that are often tied to the people and places around me. One part of my intuition comes from my own experiences, another from my connection to the natural world, and another from what I perceive to be divine guidance—a still, small voice that directs me in life.

#### **The Influence of External Energies**

As an empath, I also sense and absorb external energies, often referred to as auras. These energies, much like sound waves, are sensed and processed by my body. Just as I hear sound and see light, I can feel the emotional and energetic waves projected by others. These energies can blend with my internal dialogue, sometimes making it difficult to separate my own feelings from those of others.

When I walk into a room, I can often feel the emotional tone—whether it's peaceful, tense, joyful, or sad—without anyone saying a word. This ability can be a powerful tool for connecting with others, but it also means that I can be easily overwhelmed by the emotions of those around me, especially in highly charged environments.

## **The Experience of Being an Empath**

Being an empath is more than just understanding other people's emotions; it's feeling them as if they are my own. When someone around me is happy, I often feel uplifted. When someone is suffering, I feel their pain deeply. It's as though I can step into another person's emotional experience without any barriers.

For an empath like me, the challenge is managing this heightened sensitivity. Emotions and energies can blend with my internal thoughts, making it difficult to distinguish between what I am truly feeling and what I have absorbed from others. Learning to navigate these overlapping feelings is essential for maintaining a sense of self and emotional balance.

What Is an 'Intuitive' Empath?

Empaths exist on a spectrum, and for me, my empathic abilities go beyond simply sensing emotions—I am an 'intuitive' empath. This means that, at times, I have a deep, inner knowing about people or situations that goes beyond physical or emotional awareness. It's as though I can sense the underlying truths about a person's situation or emotional state without them ever telling me.

For example, there have been moments when this gift has allowed me to help people in unexpected ways. I've helped to find a missing girl, comforted those who were suffering without being asked, and even surprised people with insights about their lives that I had no way of knowing beforehand. But this intuitive gift also comes with its challenges. Sometimes, I'll know something difficult about someone's life or struggles but have no way to intervene or help. In those moments, I must trust that prayer is enough and that God is in control.

## **What Does It Mean to Be Claircognizant?**

### **Claircognizant Defined**

So what does it mean to be claircognizant? Based on my research, it is the ability to know or sense truths without prior evidence or direct information. It's an inner knowing that goes beyond logic or reason, where insights arrive suddenly and clearly, often without explanation. These moments of clarity can feel like sudden downloads of information that come from outside my usual thought processes.

### **My Experience – Both a Blessing and a Curse**

I believe that my claircognizance is part of how God designed me, and it's an extension of my connection to Him. These moments of knowing feel like divine revelations, where I receive insights that I couldn't have gained through normal means. However, I don't view

this gift as mystical or magical—it's more of a deep inner connection to God's voice that guides me through life's complexities.

On the positive side, being an 'intuitive' empath with claircognizant tendencies allows me to connect deeply with others, to offer help when it's most needed, and to provide comfort through understanding in times when people can't put into words what they are struggling with.

One lighthearted example of this is when I went to the dentist for a routine cleaning. During the appointment, I had a sudden, unexplainable knowing that my dental hygienist was pregnant. I asked her when she was due, which led her to gasp in surprise. "How did you know?" she asked. "I just found out this morning, and I haven't even told my husband yet!" We both laughed about it, but moments like this show how claircognizance can bring unexpected insights that often surprise both me and those around me.

On the other hand, the burden of knowing can sometimes lead to feelings of helplessness or even depression. One profound example of this is when I woke up suddenly on the morning of September 11th, 2001, with a heavy sense of dread. I immediately turned on the TV and saw the breaking news about the first plane hitting the World Trade Center. As I watched, I had a strong inner knowing that another plane was about to hit—and moments later, it did. It's in these moments that being claircognizant can be a burden, as I receive information that I cannot change or influence.

That's why it's crucial for me to practice self-care and to set boundaries. There are times when I need to step back, ground myself, and take time to process everything I've absorbed from the world around me. Whether it's leaving an event early, leaving a store without finishing my shopping, or simply choosing to be by myself, like taking a ride in the car or a walk by the ocean, these practices help me stay balanced as I strive to prevent emotional overwhelm.

## **Conclusion**

For me, it took years before I came to accept that I wasn't crazy and that the way I am is indeed the way that God created me to be. Over the years, with God's help, I have learned ways to interact with the world that allow me to connect with others on a deeper level, offer guidance when needed, and navigate the emotional and spiritual landscapes of those around me. I have come to trust in God's plan, and through prayer, reflection, and self-care, I strive daily to use these gifts in ways that align with God's purpose, always seeking to grow closer to God in my understanding as I strive to be the person God created me to be.

# WHY LABELS DON'T DEFINE MY FAITH

In my journey of faith, one of the most significant realizations I've come to is that labels often do more harm than good. While they are intended to provide clarity, labels frequently put people into boxes that don't truly represent who they are. They oversimplify the complexities of our lives, beliefs, and relationships, often leading to misunderstandings, wrong assumptions, and even judgment.

## Why I Don't Like Labels

I've always struggled with the way society uses labels. We apply them to others—and ourselves—sometimes without much thought. Whether it's to categorize someone's religion, political stance, or lifestyle, labels often lead to oversimplifications. They make assumptions that strip away the depth and uniqueness of a person.

For me, labels create more division than connection. They build walls, causing us to see someone as part of a category rather than as an individual with their own unique story. When we rely on labels, we stop asking deeper questions and miss the opportunity to truly know one another.

Take the label "Christian," for example. For some, it's a symbol of hope and identity. For others, it may bring up negative associations with judgment, exclusion, or past hurt. When I hear the label "Christian," I don't know what someone truly means unless we have a real conversation about their beliefs, values, and experiences.

That's why I hesitate to embrace it for myself. I want people to know me for my actions, values, and character, not by a single word that may not fully capture what I believe.

## Do I Consider Myself a Christian?

When asked if I consider myself a Christian, my answer depends on how one defines the term. Even then, I struggle with using the label because of the assumptions that often come with it. Instead, I describe myself as a follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

For many, the word "Christian" carries assumptions—both positive and negative—that may not reflect my personal faith journey. Over time, the term has become more of a cultural or social identifier than a reflection of one's relationship with God. For me, my faith is deeply personal, and I don't believe God wants me to reduce it to a label that risks misunderstanding.

I strive to live out my faith and welcome conversations about what I believe and why. To me, being a follower of Christ is about how I live my life and treat others. It's about the relationships I build, the compassion I show, and the way I strive to embody the teachings of Jesus in my everyday actions. It's not about conforming to the rules or expectations that



have become tied to the word "Christian."

By stepping away from the label, I hope to foster conversations that focus on actions, character, and connection, rather than on preconceived notions. I want my faith to be understood through how I live and the love I show, rather than by a label that may carry different meanings for different people.

## Labels and Division

One of the greatest risks of labels is how they create division rather than unity. When we categorize people based on labels, we make assumptions about what they think, how they live, and who they are—often without ever engaging with them. This creates barriers that prevent genuine relationships from forming.

In my faith journey, I believe God calls us to unity and love, not division. Jesus spent much of His ministry breaking down barriers, reaching out to those who were marginalized or excluded because of social labels. Whether it was the tax collectors, the lepers, or the Samaritans, Jesus showed that love transcends labels. He focused on people's hearts, their needs, and their potential for transformation rather than defining them by the labels society placed on them.

I believe we are called to do the same. Labels can create an "us vs. them" mindset, encouraging judgment instead of understanding. By choosing to let go of labels, we create more space to see each person as they are—created by God with their own unique journey.

## Living Without Labels: A Focus on Values and Actions

Rather than using labels, I prefer to focus on the actions and values that reflect who I am. Am I treating others with kindness? Am I showing love, compassion, and forgiveness as Jesus taught? Am I striving to live in a way that reflects the teachings of Christ, not just in words but in my everyday life?

These are the questions that guide my faith. For me, living without labels means living with intentionality, seeking to build relationships based on shared values rather than assumptions. It's about choosing to engage with others as unique individuals rather than as representatives of a particular group.

By letting go of labels, we create more room for understanding, compassion, and genuine connection. We allow ourselves to truly see each other as the unique individuals God created us to be, free from the limitations that labels often impose.

## Conclusion: A Faith Beyond Labels

At the heart of my faith is a desire to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. This journey is not

about fitting into a specific label or category—it's about how I live my life, how I treat others, and how I relate to God.

While labels can sometimes offer clarity, I believe they often do more harm than good when it comes to matters of faith. By distancing myself from labels, I hope to create space for deeper conversations about what truly matters—our values, our actions, and our relationships with God and each other.

In the end, I want my faith to be defined by love, compassion, and the desire to reflect Christ's teachings—not by a label that may carry assumptions or misconceptions. When we let go of labels, we open ourselves to a more authentic, grace-filled way of connecting with others and with God.

# **TABLE OF KEY DATES**

## TABLE OF DATES

| Date                  | Event                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 31, 1970      | George Benson is born in Camden, Maine.                                                                    |
| November 1970         | Jodell is born in the same town in Maine.                                                                  |
| July 17, 1973         | George's father is attacked while attempting to stop a robbery.                                            |
| August 5, 1973        | George's father is attacked again, abducted, and left for dead but survives.                               |
| 1974–1975             | George begins to realize his empathic abilities.                                                           |
| Summer/Fall 1976–1977 | George faces painful neighborhood incidents, reinforcing mistrust.                                         |
| 1978                  | George's trust in others is further shaken during a Sunday School trust exercise.                          |
| April 1979            | George's parents celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.                                                 |
| 1983–1985             | George works with a janitor during antique shows, developing a strong work ethic.                          |
| 1985–1989             | George excels in math, joins the YMCA swim team and the library club during high school.                   |
| June 1988/1989        | George has an experience revealing his empathic gift, sensing a woman's miscarriage.                       |
| June 1989             | George graduates from high school.                                                                         |
| January 1989          | George discovers Asbury College through a magazine ad and applies.                                         |
| Fall 1989             | George enrolls at Asbury College, meets Debbie, Tim, and eventually Craig.                                 |
| November 1989         | George and Craig become close friends and decide to become roommates.                                      |
| Fall 1989             | George struggles with empathic abilities and financial issues at Asbury.                                   |
| Fall 1989             | George experiences a crisis of faith, standing on train tracks and challenging God to prove His existence. |
| Fall 1989             | A microburst storm leads to a divine intervention that restores George's faith.                            |
| Early 1990            | George leaves Asbury due to financial difficulties.                                                        |
| Fall 1991             | George and Craig attend Catherine Boothe Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba.                              |
| December 1991         | George saves a man's life by following his empathic intuition in Winnipeg.                                 |
| December 1991         | George and Craig leave Bible College due to financial struggles.                                           |
| 1992                  | George moves to Alaska to live with his sister.                                                            |
| 1992                  | George helps find a runaway girl through empathic guidance in Alaska.                                      |
| July 1992             | George moves back to Maine from Alaska after deciding not to stay in Seattle.                              |

## TABLE CONTINUED

| Date               | Event                                                                                                              |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 1992       | George is hired full-time at Wal-Mart after working part-time at a grocery store and McDonald's.                   |
| January 1993       | George meets Jodell, a manager trainee at Wal-Mart.                                                                |
| June 1993          | George asks Jodell on their first date after getting permission from the store manager.                            |
| November 1993      | George is involved in a car accident and suffers a traumatic brain injury.                                         |
| December 1993      | George proposes to Jodell with a Christmas gift plan, and Jodell says yes.                                         |
| October 1994       | George and Jodell get married in Morrill, Maine.                                                                   |
| March 1995         | George and Jodell adopt their first cat, Shadow.                                                                   |
| November 1995      | George and Jodell adopt their second cat, Cola.                                                                    |
| December 1995      | George starts working for an electronics repair company.                                                           |
| June 1996          | George quits his job and starts his own business.                                                                  |
| July 1996          | George's computer repair business starts to take off.                                                              |
| 1997               | George and Jodell purchase a three-story property and face legal challenges from a neighbor regarding renovations. |
| Summer 1997        | George volunteers for the town's zoning board of appeals after the legal battle.                                   |
| September 1997     | George and Jodell are involved in a car accident in Jay, Maine.                                                    |
| October 1997       | George transitions his business to a brick-and-mortar location, naming it The PC Café & Service Center.            |
| January 1998       | George and Jodell meet Charlene and offer her a place to stay temporarily.                                         |
| July 1998          | Charlene moves out after finding her own home nearby.                                                              |
| September 1998     | Construction begins on a dormer for George and Jodell's home.                                                      |
| October 1998       | The parking lot of the business is upgraded.                                                                       |
| October 1998       | George and Jodell go on a vacation to Italy.                                                                       |
| April 1999         | Jodell begins working for the Town of Thomaston.                                                                   |
| May 1999           | George's parked Subaru is hit by a neighbor while George is working at a customer's home in Orono, Maine.          |
| January 29, 2000   | George starts experiencing symptoms related to Couvade Syndrome.                                                   |
| January 30, 2000   | Jodell shares the news of her pregnancy with George.                                                               |
| February 2000      | Bobby-Jo's passing at six weeks gestation.                                                                         |
| Late October 2000  | George's Subaru is damaged at a Wal-Mart parking lot.                                                              |
| Late November 2000 | George's Subaru is damaged again at a convenience store.                                                           |
| September 11, 2001 | George experiences intense empathic feelings during the 9/11 attacks.                                              |

## TABLE CONTINUED

| Date              | Event                                                                               |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| April 25, 2002    | Antonia's birth.                                                                    |
| January 20, 2004  | Jodell's brother, Cliff, passes away.                                               |
| February 12, 2004 | Julia's birth.                                                                      |
| June 2004         | Purchase of the family's first minivan, a 1997 Plymouth Grand Voyager.              |
| August 2004       | Jodell's best friend, Charlene, passes away.                                        |
| January 2005      | George founds Amerilake Incorporated.                                               |
| January 2006      | George incorporates "The Service Center, INC."                                      |
| June 2007         | Antonia graduates from preschool.                                                   |
| October 2007      | George's brother, Roland, passes away.                                              |
| November 13, 2007 | Family cat, Shadow, passes away.                                                    |
| April 2008        | Antonia wins a drawing contest.                                                     |
| June 2008         | Antonia's kindergarten graduation.                                                  |
| December 2008     | George and Julia are involved in a minor car accident at Wasse's Hot Dog Stand.     |
| May 1, 2009       | George is involved in a serious car accident.                                       |
| November 2009     | George experiences empathic feelings surrounding his nephew Scott's accident.       |
| September 3, 2011 | The family is shot at while driving, leading to a harrowing experience.             |
| April 18, 2012    | The family participates in a Restorative Justice meeting.                           |
| February 2013     | The family experiences a massive snowstorm.                                         |
| May 18, 2013      | George's nephew Scott graduates from Georgetown University.                         |
| June 2014         | Family trip to see local waterfalls for George's parents' 60th wedding anniversary. |
| April 11, 2014    | George's parents' 60th wedding anniversary.                                         |
| March 2015        | Purchase of the 2006 Chevy Aveo, nicknamed "Blueberry."                             |
| June 10, 2015     | Basement windows damaged by a BB gun.                                               |
| January 30, 2016  | George's two best friends, Bill and Craig, pass away.                               |
| Late May 2016     | George takes a solo trip to Kentucky for personal healing.                          |
| June 16, 2016     | Antonia's eighth-grade graduation.                                                  |
| August 17, 2018   | George Sr. passes away.                                                             |
| August 27, 2018   | George and Jodell's counseling journey comes to an end.                             |
| May 10, 2019      | Antonia is inducted into the National Honor Society.                                |
| July 2019         | Antonia and Julia begin driver's education.                                         |
| October 2019      | George begins developing the scholarship system.                                    |

## TABLE CONTINUED

| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Event</b>                                                                              |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| November 2019 | The family travels to Kentucky for the North American International Livestock Exposition. |
| May 2021      | Founding of Alderpen Media, INC.                                                          |
| May 2024      | Antonia graduates from college.                                                           |
| May 2025      | Julia is on track to graduate from college.                                               |