

Adventures With God

How He Pursued Me When I Ran

A Complimentary Sample Chapter

Chapter 1: Running from God, Shame, and False Love

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CHAPTER 1

Running from God, Shame, and False Love

*I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
(Psalm 139:7 NLT)*

I didn't know it at the time, but one simple question would split my life in two. It began at a writers' Christmas dinner, where I was seated next to Dr. C—a friendly, plain-looking, mustached Christian psychology professor. In the midst of casual conversation, he leaned toward me and asked, “Do you know what will happen to your soul when you die?”

The question lingered in the air between us—unexpected, personal, impossible to ignore.

I smiled politely and said I hadn't thought about it. After all, my life looked full, successful, exciting, free. At the time, I was leading the swinging single life straight out of a Cosmopolitan magazine feature. I'd moved from New York City to Marina del Rey. I was separated from my husband, and worked as a freelance writer. Every night I was out with a different man. Sex, to me, was just another sport. It was 1979, before the AIDS crisis, when no one seemed to worry about consequences. We just did whatever felt good.

Outwardly, it appeared I had embraced freedom. Inwardly, something else was unfolding.

I liked to boast I was not immoral, but amoral. I was living “the good life.” I had it all together. Or so I thought. Inside, I was far from whole.

Early Faith, Later Abandonment

Yet my story with God had not begun in Marina del Rey.

When Dr. C asked about my soul, I told him I had attended church as a child, but had left the church many years ago. The truth is, I had been a devoted church “attender” until the age of 21.

As a child, I remember feeling afraid and lonely as I lay in bed praying to God for protection while my parents argued late into the night. I remember believing He heard my prayers and was my protector. As a teenager, I sat in church by myself, praying I would be good enough for God. I did all the “right” things.

At age 12, I used my babysitting money to buy my first Bible. I went through the Lutheran Confirmation, memorized the Creed and the Catechism, and even attended Leadership Training at Augsburg College before my senior year of high school. This wasn't enough to help me fully understand what it meant to be a committed follower of Jesus, however. My head knowledge didn't translate into heart understanding.

After graduating from high school, I attended Fairview Hospital's nursing school, which was affiliated with the Lutheran Church. Most of the students were Lutheran. We also attended church regularly. Yet, I learned to smoke and drink alcohol. I had close calls with men but kept my vow of purity.

After graduating from nursing school, I got a job at the Colorado Psychiatric Hospital and shared an apartment in Denver with another Fairview graduate. I found a Lutheran church that I attended. At my job, I met and started dating Terry, a charming, athletic orderly studying to be a social worker. Terry was a few years older and more experienced than me, sexually. He was also caring. Because I felt safe with him, he was able to seduce me in a way no other man had been able to do before. What had been restrained for years suddenly broke loose.

I threw all caution to the wind as I became addicted to the physical intimacy I had once guarded so carefully. Terry started staying overnight, and my roommate did not like it. She asked me to move out. I rented a room in another woman's basement, and when she found out Terry was staying overnight, she asked me to leave too. (This was 1965 and people did not normally condone premarital sex as they do today.)

Meanwhile, Terry and I became engaged and it was announced with my photo in my hometown paper. My parents were happy to see their daughter getting married. Terry and I drove to Minnesota in his VW bug to spend Christmas with them.

But two events prevented the marriage from happening. First, the head psychiatrist made a joke during morning rounds, "When is he going to make an honest woman out of you?"

Embarrassed, I laughed it off, but the seed of shame had begun to take root.

Why I Ran from God

Then one evening Terry and I were at a movie when he pointed to the couple sitting in front of us, and said in a disparaging way that they were "living together." In that moment, clarity pierced me: we were doing the very same thing.

I started to feel hypocritical about the relationship. Guilt began to outweigh desire. I was so convinced it was wrong, I broke off the engagement. I also felt I could not go back to church. Shame

whispered I was no longer worthy. Instead of running toward God, I ran from Him.

After all my years of believing I was a good Christian, I felt exposed and fraudulent. Instead of seeking forgiveness, I walked away from God and the church. It was guilt that drove me away.

I wonder, dear reader, if you have also felt too guilty to attend church. Do you feel like an outcast?

I vowed to remain chaste, but without Christian community, I had no support system. Isolation weakened resolve. Without meaning to, I fell into sexual sin again. When the temptation came, my body responded and my mind went blank. I was totally lost. Looking back, I can see God was protecting me and pursuing me even though I was not only ignoring Him but running away from Him.

The Question That Changed Everything

Years passed.

Then came the Christmas dinner—and Dr. C’s question.

Was it coincidence? Or was it God’s way of interrupting my carefully constructed independence?

By the time I met Dr. C, I had lived many years without serious thought of God. I was still married but separated. I had embraced the cultural narrative of “free love.” I had gone astray and wasn’t looking back.

Little did I know this meeting would be a crossroads in my journey with God.

Asking for my business card, Dr. C told me he was looking for a co-author to help him write a book on intimacy. Because I had worked with other doctors, this was not an unusual proposition. However, as I was to find out later, this was not all he had in mind.

A few days later, I received a letter from him, along with a copy of C.S. Lewis’s book, *Mere Christianity*. Dr. C enclosed a note: “Thank you very much for the joy of your presence last night at the publicists’ party. You are delightful and beautiful, and I greatly enjoyed being with you. Call me if you feel the inclination. Hope to see you soon.”

I did not call him, but he called a few days later and asked if he could come to my apartment in Marina del Rey to discuss his proposed book. He arrived under the pretense of reviewing his card notes on intimacy and discuss collaborating on a book. Very quickly, the conversation turned to why he really came over and how he felt about me. We walked on the Marina Pier enjoying the ocean breeze. Back at my apartment the atmosphere changed.

When I came out of the bathroom, he was half reclining on my blue velvet sofa with his stretched-out arms beckoning me toward him. Things became physical, and soon we were in my bedroom. I was startled how easily this Christian man was being unfaithful to his wife but I went along with the passion.

When he said he wanted to see me again, I protested’ “I don’t date married men.”

A few days later, he called and said he had left his wife and was interested in dating me. He said he had moved in with a colleague. Now, he said, he was free to pursue me.

A Crossroads I Couldn’t Yet See

I thought I had left God behind. What I didn’t realize was He had not let go of me. I had spent years believing guilt disqualified me from God, unaware that guilt never meant to drive me away—it was meant to lead me home. God was positioning a crossroads I couldn’t yet see. I did not understand that you can run from God—but you cannot outrun His presence.

By the time Dr. C entered my life, I was spiritually starved, emotionally vulnerable, and deeply confused about love, faith and truth. I didn’t know it then, but I was about to learn how dangerous it is to confuse desire with destiny—and how costly it can be to follow the wrong man while still longing for the right God.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever appeared outwardly “fine” while feeling inwardly fractured or empty?
2. In what ways have shame or guilt influenced your distance from God or the church?
3. Did you grow up with religious knowledge but struggled to translate it into a personal relationship with God?
4. Have you ever confused freedom with fulfillment?
5. When you look back, can you identify moments when God may have been present—even while you were running?