

LORD JESUS,

I remember the day I gave my life to You. It was Palm Sunday, and I was 12. You overwhelmed me with Your love. I was Yours already. You created me; You raised me. As an infant, I was baptized in Your name. This day was different. This was my decision, prompted by Your love. I made a lot of promises to You that day. I didn't realize that, on my own, I couldn't keep a single promise. I didn't understand, Lord, that only by Your grace and intervention would I be able to walk out Your plan for my life. We learned a song in the kids' choir that year. It began with, "Teach me Your ways..." I didn't know how significant those words would be for my life. Though I was raised in the church, though I talked freely with You from a young age, I didn't yet know Your ways. All I knew was how much I loved You. I didn't understand the depth of Your love for me; that what I felt for You came from Your heart touching mine.

I remember another Palm Sunday, when I was 38. I was sitting in the corner of a motel room, crying. I was hungry and had no money for food. The phone kept ringing, the motel clerk trying to tell me my debit card was declined. I was miles from "home," on a business trip, and my husband had wiped out our bank account to take one of his girlfriends on a trip overseas. It wasn't the first time, but I couldn't confront him. I was terrified of him. I knew our marriage was failing, and that wasn't all. My most recent blood tests showed I was dying. I didn't have a church family; I barely had any family. I felt totally alone. At the time, I couldn't have admitted that. I'd worked so hard to disguise my loneliness. Few people would have guessed how I felt, including myself. I was so deep in denial.

But I wasn't alone that day. In my hand, I held onto a small wooden cross. I didn't know You were there in the motel room with me, holding me in Your arms. But I knew You were... somewhere. Though I'd failed on every promise, my life still belonged to You. You were my greatest hope, the reason I kept going. I still didn't know Your ways, or how much You loved and protected me. But I knew I loved You. I hadn't let go of my love for You – because You never let go of me. That day, I began to admit to You that I couldn't do it on my own. As I walked with You on the beach that afternoon, You gently began to show me that it wasn't about my broken promises to You. It was about Your everlasting promises to me. I was not Your savior; You were mine. I did not choose You, but You chose me. That's when I finally asked the question You'd been waiting so long to hear: "Lord, will You teach me Your ways?"

It's Palm Sunday again, four years later, and You've walked me through the most incredible six months of my life: Elijah House. I'm blown away by the work You've done in me. Lord Jesus, because of what You've done through Elijah House, everything in my life has changed. *Everything!* You've changed the way I think, the way I talk, the way I act. You've restored and healed relationships, and nurtured me back to life. Freed me from fear and loneliness. Taught me how to play, and how to dance! You've calmed all the striving, all the noise. Opened my heart to receive love, and helped me to love who You created me to be. You've shown me how to lay down my life for others – Your way, not mine. You've brought wholeness to my life, a new joy, a deep peace.

And very patiently, You've begun to teach me Your ways, so I can walk in Your perfect plan for me – a plan You lovingly created for me long before I was born. Lord Jesus, thank You for all You've done in Elijah House, and for all You continue to do in my life every day. I'm overwhelmed by Your faithfulness. I'm overwhelmed by Your love.

You've blessed me so much through Elijah House that it would take hundreds of pages for me to share it all. And Lord, You already know what You've done in me – You've done much more than I could ever comprehend. But there are certain things I want to remember and share with You right now, in thanksgiving. Let's start with the "symptoms" I had as we began Elijah House together:

- I feel invisible. No one notices me. When I talk, no one hears me. I don't belong anywhere; no one wants me around. I don't really know what it's like to have a family. I'm so tired of feeling lonely.
- I run at 500 mph and I can't slow down. I'm tied into knots. I feel like I'm never allowed to rest. No matter how hard I work, it'll never be enough. I'm exhausted – the world makes so much noise.

- I'm defensive. I argue constantly, trying to justify myself. I'm not allowed to make a mistake, or admit I don't know something. I have to be perfect.
- I walk on eggshells in conversations and relationships to avoid conflict.
- I take on everyone's burdens. I feel like I have to be everyone's savior. I get into fights defending others. I love people and I'm always trying to help; but they end up lashing out at me.
- I'm afraid of everything. You wouldn't know it by the situations I get into, or the fearless way I act. The truth is, I'm terrified. Anxiety has been part of my life for so long, I barely recognize it.
- The trauma never ends. How much does one person have to take? No matter how hard I try, I never break through. I get so close, but the earth falls out beneath me. I'm blindsided at every turn; I always fall through the cracks. I want to believe all this will be worth it some day; I want to believe in eternal life with You, Lord. But the truth is, I'm afraid that by the time I get to heaven, it'll be over. You'll be gone. I'll have missed it.
- I don't take care of myself. I'm always sick, and I'm accident prone. I beat myself up emotionally, and I sabotage everything I do. Though I act like I'm happy and optimistic, inside I'm miserable. The truth is, I can't stand myself.

Each "symptom" was a chain around me, Lord. I was imprisoned, locked away from the blessings You wanted to give me. Sometimes I couldn't even see the chains; I was so blinded. All I knew was their unbearable weight, and the separation they brought between You and me.

Through Elijah House, You spoke truth to me. You showed me that each chain was anchored to a moment in my childhood where I made a wrong judgment about You, or allowed unforgiveness into my heart, or made an inner vow, or believed a lie of the enemy. I didn't know it as a child, because I didn't understand Your ways. You opened my eyes to the truth. You did it lovingly, without condemnation. You led me through repentance; then you lifted each chain off of me, carried me into freedom, and began to nurture me to life. You didn't leave me imprisoned, Lord. You came for me! And you taught me how to live in Your freedom.

Gently, You also showed me that as a child, I was wounded in my heart. Because of that wounding, I had made a vow to protect my own heart, instead of trusting You with it. Love from others couldn't get in, so people stopped trying. But You never stopped. You continued to overwhelm me with Your love, and You melted the armor I had placed around my heart. Now others can see Your love shining in me. And I can feel Your love ALIVE in me.

Lord Jesus, You've transformed my chains into blessings. Through Elijah House, You rewrote my list:

- I'm no longer invisible. Everywhere I go, people talk to me – even strangers. I used to walk into a room and no one seemed to notice; now everyone smiles and comes up to me. I feel welcomed. People tell me they love having me around. I belong! I've experienced Your healing power in relationships and family. My relationship with my mom has been transformed – and You've brought new joy to her life! You've poured deep healing and strength into other relationships, making them what You created them to be. Friends have "adopted" me into their families. You've given me two beautiful church families where I feel loved. And my heart is ready for a new family, for kids to adopt, and for the youth ministry work You have called me to.
- I've stopped running. I've learned to rest in You. You've shown me that my best work doesn't come through striving, but from the work of Your Holy Spirit within me. If I soak in Your presence every day and let You guide the work I do, it's more than enough. Lord, this wasn't a "decision" I could have made. I can rest now, only because You showed me the root of my striving, and asked that I repent. The moment You lifted that chain from me, the noise stopped; the world stopped spinning; I could breathe again. In one precious beat of Your heart, everything was different. You lifted my hands from their fruitless task of tying knots. You held them in Yours, breathed new purpose into them, and set them to work for Your Kingdom. The world is a quieter, lovelier place in You.

- Lord Jesus, You showed me why I felt a constant need to justify myself. It came from a root way back in childhood. As You took me through repentance and forgiveness, everything inside me changed. Everything around me changed too. I started to hear myself say, “I don’t know the answer” or “I made a mistake.” The words came easily, and they were well received. Situations came up where I would have justified myself. Resting in You, I let them pass. My need to be perfect was gone. The only perfection I need, Lord Jesus, is You.
- I’m no longer afraid of conflict in relationships. Conflict happens, and relationships survive when they’re grounded in You. I’ve learned to invite You in, Lord Jesus, and seek Your help; to examine my heart for unforgiveness, and forgive quickly. I’ve stopped walking on eggshells. If a conversation goes badly, I bring it to You, and ask for Your guidance. A difficult conversation helps me discover areas where I need You to work in me. When I’m hurt by the words of others, I bring those to You, and ask that You keep my heart open, and bring healing to each of us.

Lord, You’ve also helped me understand why my marriage failed, and how my husband and I reaped many bitter seeds we had sown in childhood, and that were passed down through our families. I’m deeply grieved. But I praise You for leading me into repentance, and for instructing me in Your ways, in Your design for marriage and family. I thank You for Your promise of blessings for a future marriage, because of Your faithfulness to heal in our repentance. I pray that You will use me to believe in prayer for the healing of other marriages and families. Your design is perfect, and Your power to heal is awesome and true.

- Lord, You’ve shown me that while You gave me a heart to love and help others, I acted in my own strength, not Yours. Because of childhood wounding, I thought I had to defend everyone; I was their self-appointed savior. Though my intentions were “good,” I was in sin, because I was motivated by my wounding rather than by Your heart. Through Elijah House, You’ve healed me. You’ve taught me that burden bearing is a gift from You, and that I need Your guidance. You’ve shown me how to love and serve, and to lay down my life for others – Your way, through Your heart, through Your Cross.
- I am blown away by Your faithfulness, Lord, in delivering me from the spirit of fear. You stayed by my side through months of prayer and fasting, and I’m overwhelmed by the way You led me through it. I’ve never known such power and love as Yours, Lord Jesus. You protected and defended me. Convicted me of my sin. Showed me that the spirit of fear had been with my family for generations, that I’d come into agreement with it in the womb, and that I’d worshiped it every moment since birth. I grieved over that, but You never condemned me. Carefully, in Your perfect way, You unraveled that dark spirit’s hold on every area of my life, and You knelt with Your arms around me as I repented. I didn’t know how much of a claim the spirit of fear had on me until You delivered me. So much changed in that moment – so many aspects of my behavior, my life. I’ve never known such freedom. And Lord, I thank You for using me already as You work in others who need healing from fear.
- My father died when I was 15, and on that day, Lord, I made a judgment about You. I was afraid that You would die too. Though I professed my belief in eternal life, part of my heart stopped believing I could be with You forever. Lord, You didn’t leave me in my sin. You freed me from my unbelief, and healed my heart. I don’t know how You did it, Lord, but You proved to me that You are eternal, that You will never die, and that Your Kingdom is for Your children, forever. And I am one of Your kids! I used to wake up feeling depressed. Now I wake up alive with joy in Your Kingdom! Not because I “choose” to be joyful, but because You’ve changed my heart, and I can’t help the joy that overflows me. I know that each day is a glorious day for worship and praise, for learning and discovery, for love and fellowship... a day to be with You, and with Your family. Our eternity together is just beginning!

- From the moment I was conceived, I had a “death wish.” Oh, I wasn’t suicidal – You know that, Lord; but I wished I could be. I hated being here on earth; hated who I was; hated everything about my life. I wanted to be in heaven with You. I didn’t realize any of this about myself. I thought I was vibrant, optimistic, always seeking the most out of life. It was an illusion. I didn’t realize that in my spirit, I rejected the life You gave me; I rejected who You created me to be; I rejected the idea of happiness on earth. Why? Because embracing my life was too much of a risk. It was easier to reject than to be rejected. It was easier to wall off my heart than to have it broken.

The “death wish” made life miserable for me. It kept me from walking in Your blessings; kept me from receiving love; kept me from breaking through. It was self-fulfilling. I didn’t die a physical death, but I died to life. I lived each day just going through the motions. I laughed and smiled, but I felt no joy. I didn’t know what joy was. Repenting of that “death wish” was the hardest thing I’ve ever been through. It was so hard to let go. In my spirit, I still saw the “death wish” as “protection.” But You knew it was the biggest chain keeping me in bondage.

Lord Jesus, You didn’t give up on me. You helped me feel Your grief for the life I rejected, for Your precious child (me) that I didn’t want. Patiently, You waited until I couldn’t stand the grief and pain anymore. My life changed in that moment when Your message got through to my heart – a message You’d spoken to me from the beginning. You, the perfect Lamb, the beautiful and righteous King, took all of God’s wrath upon Yourself. You did it because, if even one precious child was missing from around Your table in the Kingdom, it would crush Your heart. I had never stopped to realize that one of those children was me. That I mattered to You – not because of anything I “bring” to You; but because You love me, and You want me forever. *Me!* If You could love me with Your precious life, how much did I grieve Your heart by not loving myself?

When I asked for Your forgiveness, You drew me to a place in You, where I could trust You with my heart and learn to celebrate the life You gave me. You guided my prayers of repentance and brought my “death wish” to death on Your Cross. Then You carried me in Your arms, out of that dark and lonely place, and nurtured me to life. You brought people into my life who were eager to celebrate “me”! And You kept loving me. Soon I started to see Your Holy Spirit alive in me. I started to see Your beautiful handiwork in every part of me – my personality, my appearance, my past. I fell in love with the person You created me to be. Through that love, I came to know a deeper love for everyone around me, and to celebrate Your presence and Your beautiful handiwork in them. Lord, I pray that You use me to stay open to other hearts that hate themselves, to draw them to You and Your Cross, so that they may truly understand how loved they are.

Lord Jesus, thank You. *Thank You.* You have overflowed my heart with Yours. You’ve made Your Kingdom real for me – not just a dream for the future, but right here, right now. My loneliness is gone. I know what it’s like to belong to Your family. I’m overwhelmed by the love You’ve given me and surrounded me with. My desire is to love and serve You with all that I am, and to lay down my life for others – Your way. I’m so excited by the new youth ministry You’ve called me into, and by the visions You’ve given me. I thank You for my life, and for the way You created me. I love who I am in You. You have made me whole.

I trust You with my heart, Lord Jesus. I ask that You help me keep my heart open, no matter what. It might be painful sometimes, but it’s worth it. I love knowing that when my heart is open, everyone around me, everyone I pray for, everyone I talk to can feel YOUR heart in mine. Whether they realize it or not, they can see and hear You in me, because You’ve got my heart. It’s worth it, Lord.

I love You.

Janet