



It's My Time

# IT'S MY TIME

*Learning How to Let  
God Write Your Story*

# JOSH PHILLIPS



NASHVILLE

NEW YORK • LONDON • MELBOURNE • VANCOUVER

# It's My Time

## Learning How to Let God Write Your Story

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*To my ferociously loving father, Jerry “The Jet” Phillips.*

*You showed me how to fight for what matters,  
boldly chase my dreams, repent wholeheartedly,  
and daily walk in humble submission to Jesus.*

*I’ve taken the baton; I’m running my race,  
and I will strike at least one more blow for Christ.*

SAMPLE

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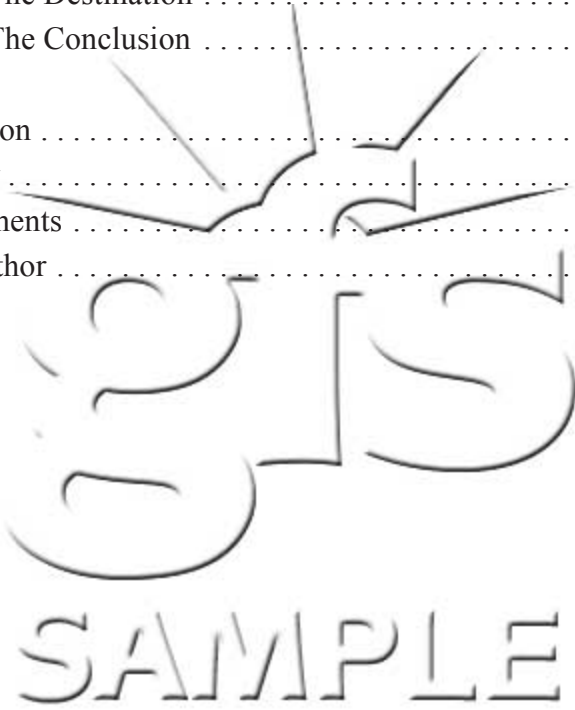
  

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## FOREWORD

**M**y first connection to the Phillips family dates back to the earliest days of Joe Gibbs Racing.

I met Josh in 1992, when his mother Judy, who worked with us in our front office at JGR, was severely injured in a car accident not far from our shop. Her injuries left her in traction at a Charlotte hospital for over a month. Josh and his dad, Jerry, spent all that time in a local hotel, visiting her daily, while dealing with the stress of having their lives uprooted during Judy's tenuous recovery. Josh was only eleven years old at the time, and I can only imagine how scared he must have been.

My roommates and two of my best friends, J. D. Gibbs and Todd Meredith, had a close relationship with the Phillips family and especially Josh's older brothers, Jacob and Conard. They brought Josh with them over to our apartment a few times and we played video games and did whatever we could to take Josh's mind off what he and his family were going through.

I still remember just how positive and full of energy this young man was, despite all he was going through. I assumed that was a trait he inherited from his dad, Jerry. "Big Jer" worked for us at JGR and had a big personality to fit his six-foot-two-inch former NFL wide receiver

frame and infectious smile. Josh was like Jerry's mini me, becoming a great athlete himself, both in football and as an elite CrossFit competitor. But Josh possessed a distinct vulnerability that I found refreshing. I always knew exactly where I stood with Josh and how he was feeling—no sugar coating. Josh also communicated his thoughts with a clarity that's rare among men. As Josh matured into a Christ-following man of character, God has only continued to sharpen and develop these traits.

Josh's story is a testimony of God's goodness, mercy, and faithfulness. Despite countless blessings, Josh's journey has also been marked by failures, heartbreak, tragic loss, and setbacks that God used to mold and shape his heart. I am the father of three boys, and by the grace of God, they have all come to know Jesus and given their lives to Him. However, I plan to give this book to each of them in hopes that it reminds them to see God's hand on their lives as they read how God guided Josh's steps.

One of my favorite parts of *It's My Time* is the Red Zone Checks at the end of each chapter. Josh doesn't just tell you his story and leave you, the reader, as a passive observer. These Red Zone check questions draw you into the story, challenging you to think critically about what God is doing in your own life.

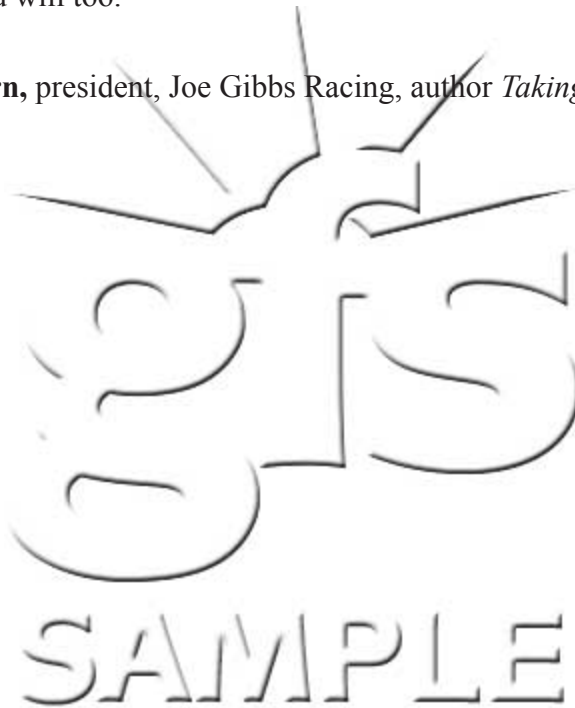
*It's My Time* is truly a testimony of a life lived for Christ. It is a great tool to encourage young, driven athletes to trust God to overcome obstacles and use life's challenges as an opportunity for growth. But beyond just young athletes, it's for anyone that has a desire to grow in their personal relationship with Christ. Over the years, Josh has become one of our favorite guest speakers at JGR chapel as his story resonates with many of our folks.

In my role as president of Joe Gibbs Racing, I've been blessed to observe and learn many qualities from some of the most influential leaders in the business world, and I share those in my book, *Taking the Lead*, which also shares my testimony of God's redeeming work in

my life. Josh models many of these principles himself in his life and in this book. My prayer for you is that *It's My Time* will help you draw closer to Jesus and drive you to take the lead in discipling others to know Him as well.

I am so proud of Josh for taking the initiative to write this book and for being so vulnerable in the process. I know his heart, and after reading this, you will too.

**Dave Alpern**, president, Joe Gibbs Racing, author *Taking the Lead*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**T**o protect the privacy of a few of the individuals in my life, some names in *It's My Time* have been changed. It is never my intention to place blame or point fingers. A memoir is a narrative, written from the perspective of the author, about an important part of their life. It does not share the whole story because, as we all know, there are multiple sides to any story. This is a memoir detailing *my* journey through trials and disappointments as God developed me into the man I am today, transforming my heart for His glory.

SAMPLE

## WHY I WROTE *IT'S MY TIME*

I know without a shadow of a doubt that God called me into ministry because I wasn't looking for it. Nearly everything I had done in my life leading up to my yes to God's call had been part of *my* great plan. I believed I was on the right track because I had asked God to jump on board and bless everything I did. But as He led me into ministry, God made it clear that it was *He* who had ordained my path, not me. It was His gifts and His providence that had paved the way, not my plans or dreams. And I'm so grateful for that truth. It takes some of life's pressures off our shoulders when we know God is in it with us, leading us on righteous paths.

Whether on righteous paths or not, there are moments that change our lives forever. Moments in time that we remember as if they happened yesterday or even a few hours or minutes ago. When we think about them, it's as if we get transported back in time, right to that significant time in our history, feeling it all over again in our minds, hearts, and bodies. The good moments. The bad moments. The hard moments. It doesn't matter.

My life has been a series of such moments, each one building upon the next, as God asked me to join Him, making a way for me to become the man I am meant to be. I say *am* meant to be and not *was* meant to be

because the journey continues—and will until the day Jesus returns or I'm brought home to Heaven.

Life's pivotal moments offer us much by way of choices, growth, change, and more. That is by God's design as He transforms us from the inside out. *It's My Time* is my God-story, my journey from a simple faith to life-giving intimacy with our Heavenly Father. From immature belief to an indelible faith that continues to mold me and give me purpose.

As we are transformed by God, it's important that we recognize and know our stories, learn to love our stories, and finally, share our stories. My hope and prayer is that by writing my testimony authentically, not hiding the worst parts of my life—or me—but sharing the good, bad, and hard, I can show you that courage and honesty create connections; connections inspire relationships, and relationships are the lifeblood of a life with Christ.

One of the first ways to glorify God and walk His path for you is to know your story. What is it that sets you apart from those who don't identify with Christ? What experiences, circumstances, and choices made you, well, *you*? There will be—if it hasn't happened already—a turning point in your life when you declare, "There is nothing more important than God" or "I need God over anything and anyone else." That is a watershed moment, the story you must know and ultimately share. It's your defining piece of HStory, your God-story. It's the narrative that will draw others to your Creator as you're reminded you must disown your plans in exchange for better plans—His plans.

Once we know our stories, learn to love our stories, and finally share our stories—which is what this book is all about—we can own our God-story in a way that casts His light into the darkness for others to see what He's done for us and what He can do for them.

There's one more thing to know about this book: In football, the space between the twenty-yard line and the end zone is the symbolic area known as the "Red Zone." The reason for this may be that red is a

warning color for the defense. Once the offense reaches the Red Zone, they are in prime scoring position. At the end of each chapter in *It's My Time*, I've included a personal Red Zone check for readers. This is the time for you to apply the Scripture and story from the chapter to your own life. It's where you enter your Red Zone with the Lord, priming your heart and mind for deepening your faith as you journey through life to glory. I hope you'll take the time to do this. It could change your life for eternity and help you learn to see the story God is writing with your life.

Thank you for getting to know me and learning about the story God has written and continues to write. I hope it challenges you to become the best version of you and experience the abundant life God desired for you before you were even born.

***Josh***

815  
SAMPLE

Chapter 1

## THE CEILING PANEL

*Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable.*

Brené Brown

I stood at the bottom of the dirty rubber-topped stairs that led up and into the bus, sniffing the diesel's fumes, and for a moment, relished the opportunity I found myself facing. Any feelings of victory and of being chosen, and the hope of finally *belonging*, would last only a few more minutes.

As the new kid at Lake Highland Prep High School, with my duffle bag in hand, I climbed the steps toward the bus driver, turned, and looked around. In the seats sat two dozen or so guys. All football players. All ages fourteen to eighteen, plus a couple of adult coaches sprinkled throughout. A sea of eyes fell on me. "Keep moving," I heard from behind me.

I chose a seat halfway down the aisle, quickly realizing everyone was already paired off, already grouped among their friends. Lake High-

land was a K–12 private Christian school. Most of these guys had built their friendships years ago—back in middle or even elementary school. Some had been together for nearly a decade. The murmuring started back up once I sat, and I vowed to forge my own new friendships once we arrived at the summer camp, the kick-off event for football season. It was my first high-school season playing football.

Earlier that summer, I had been invited to transfer to Lake Highland courtesy of the head of the school, Dr. Robert Mayfield, a friend of my parents. The school was known for its football program, and I had lofty dreams. When my transfer became official in the head football coach's office, Coach Rose shook my hand, threw me a T-shirt, and said, "Welcome to Lake Highland football." My chest expanded with gratitude and hope. Hope for change and a chance to build upon my opportunities.

You see, back in middle school, I did not have a football-worthy physique. I was an awkward kid, not overly chubby but maybe way too soft. I wasn't growing like my peers, and I ate more than my fair share of sweets. My mom used to make me cinnamon rolls for breakfast almost daily. And I gotta say, if you eat cinnamon rolls every day, you're going to get a little soft. The time came in middle school when I wanted to date girls, but I was unsuccessful. I just didn't feel like I belonged anywhere.

In eighth grade, I hit my growth spurt, stretching six inches taller that year. Finally, I felt a little more "normal," though I was still on the small side for the sport I loved.

Ever since I could understand the game, and possibly even before that, my dream was to play professional football. This dream made a lot of sense to me because my dad had played pro football—with the Bears and the Saints—and more than anything, I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I idolized him while growing up. Transferring from a public school to this small, private school after my eighth-grade year was part of my intentional journey toward that giant goal. It was well

known that many players from Lake Highland moved on to the elite college level.

Despite being filled with high hopes and ambition, the start of my first year of high school at Lake Highland was anything but wonderful. Back on the bus, I sat and listened to the conversations between the other players, feeling very much alone. We arrived at the camp and were herded into an immense dorm room filled with bunk beds. To no one's surprise, I ended up on a top bunk. After all, I was a ninth grader and the new kid—already two strikes against me. I spent the day trying to get to know the other guys, the pool of players from which I hoped close friendships would soon grow. Conversations quickly turned to football.

“I want to go to Florida State. I'd love to be a Seminole,” I told the group. “I hope to play for Bobby Bowden. My dad played for him at West Virginia.” I didn't stop there. “Then my dad went pro. He played for the Bears and the Saints. That's my goal. I'm going pro too.” I didn't say these things to boast. In my honesty and naivety, I was trying to make connections, share my dreams, be me.

My new teammates didn't see it that way. On the third night of camp, a bunch of them held me down in my sleeping bag and punched me in the stomach, chest, and legs; they ganged up to beat me and then left me alone, lying in my sleeping bag, with tears spilling through my tightly closed eyes as they scurried back to their beds.

Unfortunately, the backlash for being authentic and sharing my dreams didn't just come from the other players. One of the head junior varsity coaches—Coach Trask for the sake of anonymity—didn't like what I was saying either. He had played football at Florida State, but from what I gathered, his career didn't go as he had hoped. He didn't start many games, and the one big break he had earned didn't go well.

The night following the beating, a kid in the top bunk a few beds away from me pushed the ceiling panel up and retrieved a can of beer. I had no interest in beer. I had never drank and didn't have any plans to do

so. I was curious about where he'd gotten it and what else was up there, so I pushed up the ceiling panel to take a peek. At that moment, Coach Trask came in. And what I had envisioned as a week of skill building, newfound hope, and opportunities disappeared completely.

Coach Trask motioned for me to come down. As I approached him, he accused me of trying to “break out” of the dorm. “Come with me . . . and bring your cleats,” he whispered through clenched teeth. I don't know how many kids saw what happened. Most were already asleep.

At 10:30 that night, Coach Trask led me to the practice field and lit into me. For what I estimate to have been about forty minutes, he made me run and do up-downs, a conditioning drill often used for punishment that usually ends after ten to fifteen reps or has rest periods between sets. I did set after set and wasn't given any rest to recover. The humid air sucked me dry as my sweat dripped onto the grass. I was all alone. Using only a flashlight, Coach Trask punished me with exercise for nothing—for lifting a ceiling panel. He continued to justify the late-night workout with, “You were trying to escape.” My pleas and denials fell on ears that didn't want to hear.

Then he said something that made my heart jump and fear settle in. “If you don't come in the first three places in the morning run tomorrow, I'll call your parents to come get you and take you home.” In ninety degree plus morning temperatures, the team had been running three miles to “warm up” to prepare for the three-a-day practices the coaches held during camp.

I crawled back into my top bunk sleeping bag that night still drenched in sweat and completely exhausted. I laid in bed, trying to process what had just happened, and as tired as I was, I couldn't fall asleep because of what loomed before me. I was terrified of failing—and possibly even more scared of letting my parents down. The shame of having to be picked up from camp and the long car ride home seemed like more than I could bear. The night hours dragged on as I tossed and turned.

The next morning, the sun came up way too soon, and just as I felt the light pouring into the room, I heard Coach Trask's booming voice. "Get up, men! It's time to run." I quickly threw on my LHP football shirt as I stumbled out the door. I felt depleted and dehydrated, but I had to figure out a way to finish in the top three. As the whistle blew and we took off, I settled into third place behind two seniors. Through the first mile, a couple of other players strode up next to me and tried to pass me. The fear drove me to push through the burning in my lungs and the fatigue in my legs. I just couldn't go home.

The course continued to weave through the woods, and the path wasn't clear for those of us in the lead. Typically, a couple of the coaches were out directing us, but they weren't there that morning. I could see the two seniors I was trying to stay within striking distance of veer left at a fork in the path. I followed, assuming they knew where they were going. I had to fight to keep them in sight. During the last mile, I didn't feel the pressure of my other teammates chasing me down, and I kept a steady pace just a few yards behind the leaders. As we neared the finish, I was feeling confident that I had done it, that I had held my third-place position.

I was surprised to see several of my other teammates standing around the finish line drinking water.

*What the heck? Where did they come from?* I thought.

Soon, it dawned on me. We had gotten off course! The next realization hit me flat in the face. *I failed.* Tears filled my eyes and snaked down my cheeks. *Does this mean Coach will send me home?* I wondered.

Coach Trask sauntered over to me. "I'm not going to send you home, but you need to get it together," he warned. I did my best to do just that as I pushed everything down into my gut where I could seal it up and ignore it. I didn't know that the effects of what happened at football camp—the mistreatment from my teammates and Coach Trask—would seep out later, creating problems because while I had

sealed up all the pain, fear, and anger deep inside, I never gave it space to be healed.

Coach Trask continued to ride me all year. A few months later, in front of other team members, he said, “You’ll never play college football, and if you do, you’ll be the guy that holds the ball for the kicker on windy days.” His ongoing assessment of me was this: You’re small, white, and not that fast. He routinely asked me, “What makes you think you can do this?” and many of my teammates stared at me, persuaded to wonder the same thing.

I know the sting of feeling like an outsider and how deflating it is to be told that you’re not good enough. I desperately wanted to belong, but instead, I was abused. Some of those teammates that—for whatever reason—didn’t like me, who took exception to me, never accepted me. I wasn’t invited to their parties. I was ostracized and didn’t have many friends that first year of school. The older players on the team called me “Jerry” in reference to being one of the kids supported by Jerry Lewis’s fundraising efforts (someone with special needs). So I know what it’s like to be ridiculed, to be bullied even.

It seemed to me that I had just moved from one hard road in middle school to a different long and hard road in high school. I wasn’t a popular kid. Not at all. And I thought maybe I never would be.

It’s not easy being a teenager. I had tormentors at all levels, including adults who discouraged me from full-scale dreaming. Not only was I discouraged, I was ridiculed, though the worst of it came from Coach Trask.

“You’re not big enough.”

“You’re not fast enough.”

“You’re out of your league.”

But here’s a hard truth: The world does that. The world can be a discouraging place, and people can be unkind, even ruthless. And this is true for everyone, including those who may appear to have it all together—the

popular kids too. Why? There is an evil tormentor that lurks, trying to disrupt, steal, and destroy. He's especially greedy when it comes to Christ-followers.

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).*

Thankfully, there were some positive influencers in my life during this time. First, my parents. They poured God's truth into me, reminding me I was capable and loved. They built a solid Christian home for me and my six older siblings to grow up in. We were taught from a young age the truth of the gospel, Jesus Christ's love for us, and that He has a good and perfect plan for our lives. I watched my dad lead worship at church and my mom serve as the consummate team mom and youth group volunteer. So I was blessed with an amazingly loving, yet very imperfect, family. I also had a youth pastor who mentored me. Joe Sims encouraged me to dive into God's Word. Unfortunately, I can't say that I read my Bible every day. I wish I had. Because every time I would turn to God for comfort and encouragement, His Word held something special for me. God speaks in lots of ways, but His Holy Word is the primary tool He uses to communicate with us. My favorite verse during these years was Jeremiah 29:11:

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

I wrote it everywhere my eyes might land in my daily routine: on the bathroom mirror, in my locker, in my notebooks, and so on. And while the plans I dedicated my efforts, heart, and soul to were more my plans than God's, I found peace and comfort in Scripture. Though these were words that God wrote to a specific people at a specific time

in history, I clung to them as if they were His promise to me. This verse and the encouragement from Joe and my parents sustained me. I knew that regardless of what others were saying or doing to me, God had a plan for me. And I kept believing, even when the odds were stacked against me.



## ***RED ZONE CHECK***



1. Have you made a conscious decision to surrender your will and your dreams to Christ? Surrender. Submit. Those are not fun words for any of us to read, let alone do. Submission is the spirit with which Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, recorded in Matthew 6:10: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What is one thing you can surrender to God today and every day for the next forty days?
2. Do you have a dream in your heart—or did you have a dream? One you've been told you don't have what it takes to accomplish? What does God say about the purpose for which you were created? Read Ephesians 2:10. Do you believe this is a dream that God has placed in your heart?

SAMPLE

Chapter 2

## THE BETRAYAL

*Bitterness is deadlier than betrayal.*

Mike Murdock

**D**espite the summer football camp nightmare, I was pulled up to Lake Highland's varsity team as a freshman, in preparation for the next season. I was the smallest kid at five-foot-eight, 125 pounds, almost a dangerous size for this level of football.

My size was put on full display in the playoffs during my sophomore year when we were matched up against one of Florida's powerhouse schools: Belle Glade Glades Day High School. Their starting fullback was over 230 pounds, and at one point, he broke into the secondary with a full head of steam. I was playing safety, and there was nothing between him and the goal line but me. I lowered my shoulder and tried to lay a hit on him but ended up flat on my back. He ran right through me, but a fortuitous and bizarre occurrence prevented him from scoring. When the back of my head bounced off of the ground, his cleat caught my facemask. It's not the safest way to bring down a ball

carrier, but at the time, I was grateful. And luckily, my face didn't have to pay the price.

I was determined to make some major changes to my body before my junior year and finagled my class schedule so I could take weights [class] first and last periods. I started lifting twice a day, eating like a madman, and doing everything I could to develop my athletic ability. I carried MET-Rx protein shakes in my mini cooler lunch box. And I signed up for any and every speed clinic, football camp, and agility camp I could find.

My favorite Scriptures from middle school and my first couple years of high school continued to provide solace for my dreams that seemed far-fetched to others but not to me, including Psalm 37:4:

*Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

As a teenager, I believed in what God said about me. However, perhaps like many young Christians, I applied His Word to the life I wanted, rather than putting my trust in the future that He had for me. I composed a narrative where my big football dreams originated from a God whom I delighted in, and therefore, He would turn my dreams into reality. It was my version of the prosperity gospel. I took Psalm 37:4 straight out of the Bible, with no context to define its truth.

My relentless hope also came from my parents, particularly my dad, who encouraged me by sharing that he was a late bloomer too. Genetics would follow. I would grow, but for now, I just had to work hard.

True to my dad's promise and through my workouts, by the start of my junior year, I had put on almost fifty pounds and now weighed in at 175 pounds. Our Lake Highland team went undefeated that year. It was the first regular season with no losses in the school's history, and I was proud to be a part of it.

I regularly played on defense, specifically the corner position, but I was also the second-string quarterback. That was my goal—to be *the* quarterback. To have the game on the line and the ball in my hands. Our starting quarterback, Brian Hoffman—a guy who stood just under six feet, three inches tall and had a cannon for an arm—was a year ahead of me, and was admittedly better. He had already secured a scholarship to the University of Connecticut.

During the course of that undefeated season, Brian was injured during a couple of games, and I filled in at the QB position in the third or fourth quarter, with the responsibility of finishing those games ahead and keeping our undefeated season alive. It was every back-up quarterback's dream, to carry that weight on his shoulders and come out on top. In those games, I handed the ball off a lot, but I threw a few passes here and there too. And I accomplished the goal—two more *W*s to maintain our undefeated season. I had not only proven myself to myself but to countless others too: teammates, coaches, and those who watched the games.

I relished in the belief that my senior year was going to be *my time*, my opportunity to lead the team. This was why I had transferred to Lake Highland. This was why I had endured that first summer camp. This was why I had worked out twice a day in weight training classes. I believed it was my turn to earn those scholarships and realize my long-awaited dreams. In preparation, I attended Florida State's—my dream school—speed camp, as well as training camps at William and Mary and Auburn to grow and improve my skills. I had a laser focus and believed God was fulfilling my dreams because of all of my hard work and my intent to live out those Scriptures I kept reading.

A month before my senior season started, Lake Highland's offensive coordinator, Chris Rock—not the comedic actor but a coach I had become very close with after earning his confidence regarding my talent—called me into his office.

“Josh, I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?”

“Um, I don’t know. What do you have to tell me?”

“Josh, I’m leaving. I got the head coaching job at St. Edward’s.” St. Edward’s High School was one of our rivals. My insides experienced the sensations you get when news guts you. Warmth. Heaviness. A rapid heartbeat. “I care about you, Josh, and I’m sorry I can’t coach you for your senior season.”

I felt sad and hated to see him go. I hugged him and walked out the door. It was good news for Coach Rock but not necessarily good news for me. A tiny seed of anxiety lodged itself in my stomach. I didn’t know who they’d hire or what that would mean for me, but I would soon find out.

Perhaps my anxiety was more of a premonition, a foreboding of what was to come. Lake Highland had hired their new coach

Coach Trask, the tormentor from my freshman year, ended up being our new offensive coordinator. He had been the head JV coach, so I had not interacted with him much during my sophomore and junior years. When I heard his name, my stomach dropped and then nausea set in. Nonetheless, I was confident in my ability to leave the past behind us and move forward. Chin up, I resolved to be the best player I could be and earn those scholarships.

There was a quarterback two years behind me that had started for Coach Trask as a freshman, and this QB would be moving up to varsity. Coach Trask liked this quarterback, *his* quarterback. So we battled it out in camp—this sophomore and I, now a senior. Grateful I had become a bigger and stronger player, I took the majority of the first-team (starting) reps during the summer and in the early fall camp practices, all the way until the week of our first game.

A few minutes before that first game, I was warming up, tossing the ball, when Coach Trask approached me. “What are you doing? You’re not starting tonight. Go take your seat on the bench.”

And that’s how he informed me that I wasn’t going to be the starting quarterback for my senior year of high school.

I sat on the bench, my dreams crushed. I was demoralized, despondent. I thought, *If I can’t start on my high school team, how am I going to win a scholarship, let alone play for any legacy football school?* In my mind’s eye, I watched my dreams slip away. Tears threatened while I stood on the sidelines of that game, but I only allowed them to be released when I got home that night, when I crawled into bed and wept.

I went through at least three of the stages of grief that night. First, denial, that this was my reality. *How could it be? How could all of the work and effort I’d put in lead to this?* Second, anger at my circumstances and specifically at Coach Trask. *How could he do this to me—and this way? I had proven to be the better quarterback, at least in my mind. I had won the job!* The injustice of it tortured me. Third, bargaining. *How can I change this? Can I go talk to the head coach and ask for a fair shot?*

The next morning, a new resolve surfaced. I had been taught to never give up, so in my head, I started to work out alternative plans. *I can transfer.* There were other private high schools in the area. But the season had already started, and I knew there were rules about those kinds of things. I considered it anyway. *Perhaps, I will have to sit out a few games, but I can still practice and win a starting spot,* I reasoned.

My parents were unbelievably supportive. Just prior to the start of my senior year, my dad had taken a four-month unpaid leave of absence from his job at Joe Gibbs Racing to be at every one of my practices and games. His career had him routinely on the road, driving a truck for Joe Gibbs Racing’s show car program. My mom ran the program, and my dad drove the show vehicles for Home Depot or Interstate Battery cars.

Funny enough, I had my first driving lesson on the streets in our neighborhood in an Interstate Battery #18 Bobby Labonte Chevy Lumina race car that had been used in the movie *Days of Thunder*. It had been repainted, of course, but when we fired that thing up in our neighborhood, the sound made walls shake and heads turn. I don't think I ever got it out of second gear. It's a wonder I didn't blow out the clutch as my dad shifted for me from the passenger seat!

So my dad took this sabbatical from his job to be there to walk me through my whole senior experience, neither of us knowing I'd be benched on day one by this new coach. I was my parents' last child, last son, and I was the only son who followed in our dad's football footsteps. My brother, Conard, had played and had a lot of talent, but it hadn't worked out for scholarships or college ball.

I think a small part of my dad wanted to relive the football journey himself. My parents were hurt because I was suffering and felt my agony as they witnessed what I was going through with Coach Trask. When you're a parent and your child hurts, you hurt.

The Saturday night after I got benched, my dad drove off into the night. I don't know where he went, but my mom and I sat alone at the house. Though I still wondered what had happened to him, I finally went to bed.

The next day, when I came down for breakfast, he was back. He said, "Son, I heard the voice of God." Now, I have never heard the audible voice of God. He has spoken to me through different ways: open and closed doors, others speaking His truth into me, reading Bible verses, hearing repetitive messages and knowing it's God, and other ways. My parents raised me to be very careful about saying, "I heard the voice of God," or "God told me . . ." because we don't want to give any impression that we *are* the voice of God or have some special connection to God that other believers aren't privy to.

So when my dad admitted this, my heart stuttered. "Son, this has never happened to me before. This has never happened in my life! I was

out last night, weeping and wondering what God was doing, trying to find some direction. ‘Don’t let my son hurt,’ I begged Him. ‘Please God, bless his dream and give him a chance.’”

Then my dad shared with me that he believed he heard God respond. *If he’s faithful, I will bless him.*

“Son, whatever you want to do—if you want to transfer or do something else—I’ll support you, but I believe God gave me this message. So I had to share it.”

I spent the next couple of days praying about it and thinking through everything. I believed my dad, that he had heard God. *Okay*, I thought, *I’ll stay at Lake Highland Prep.* I quietly decided to wait and see what God would do with it all.

GIS  
SAMPLE

## ***RED ZONE CHECK***



1. Have you ever had the “rug ripped out” from you? Perhaps one of your dreams was shattered or a sudden realization changed your perspective or life. How did you feel, emotionally and physically? How did you work through the surprise and the other emotions you had? Did you turn to God during this process? (Proverbs 13:12)
2. If you’ve felt or heard God speak to you, how does He communicate with you? Is it through nature? Others? His Word? Feelings of peace? Circumstances? Timing? Or some other way? Have you ever heard the audible voice of God, either in your ears or in your spirit? How would you describe it? If not, how do you feel about people saying they’ve heard the voice of God? Are you envious? Suspicious? Concerned? Explain. (John 16:13)

SAMPLE

## A CALL TO ACTION

**T**his has been *My Time*. Now, it's *Your Time*. Using your answers to the Red Zone questions at the end of each chapter, craft *your* God story—your personal testimony to God's faithfulness as He pursues *all* of you. You don't have to write a full book, but I encourage you to write something. Start a blog, write a devotion, or simply write a journal entry (or several). Then, share your testimony, speaking truth about what God has done in your life, with others. We are mandated by God to share the gospel with the world and the truth of the testimony God has written through our lives with others. It is through sharing these truths that hearts are led to faith in Jesus and the lies of the enemy are overcome. No one else has your testimony; it is unique to you and your life. Your story matters! You have no idea how God will use you or who He will impact through your life. So be bold. Start with some trusted friends or family members; then branch out, as the Spirit leads, and share your testimony with those who either don't know God yet or who are working through their own tough journeys. If you consider yourself a seeker, perhaps curious but not sold out for Christ, I pray my story and these questions have revealed God working in your life and awakened your interest in pursuing Jesus, to find out what knowing Him could mean for you. I promise, it's worth it.

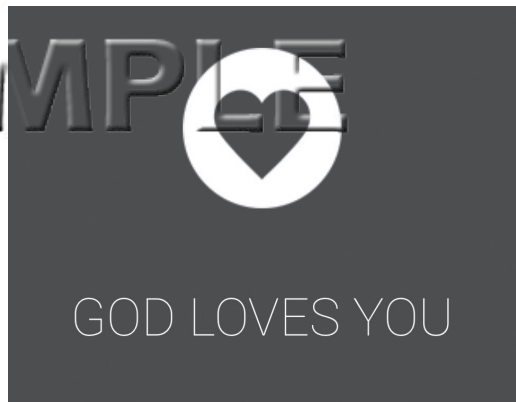
## THE RESCUE

I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to take the words that have been written in these pages and change hearts. By His grace, your eternal future does not depend on me or any talent that I may or may not have to recount my testimony or reveal the truth of the gospel. But your future in eternity requires a response. I would be remiss, with all of the discussion of the gospel in this book, if I didn't actually present it in such a way that you can receive the precious gift of salvation. Since I have been blessed to serve Jesus through FCA, I think it makes sense to utilize the simple but wonderful tool they borrowed from Manuel Leiser, with Campus Crusade for Christ, called The Four to communicate the gospel.



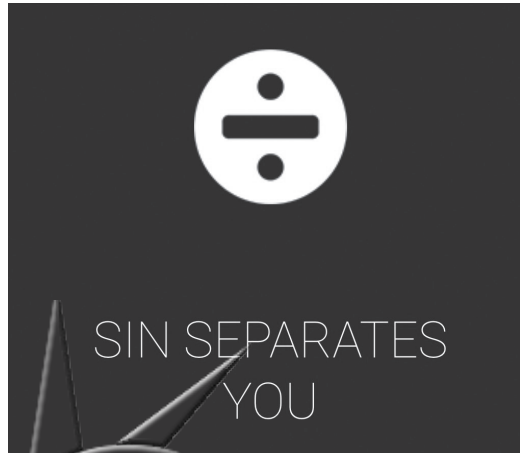
### 1. God Loves You

God loves you more than you can ever fully imagine or comprehend. He knit you together in your mother's womb, gave you life, has a great plan for your life, and desperately wants a relationship with you.



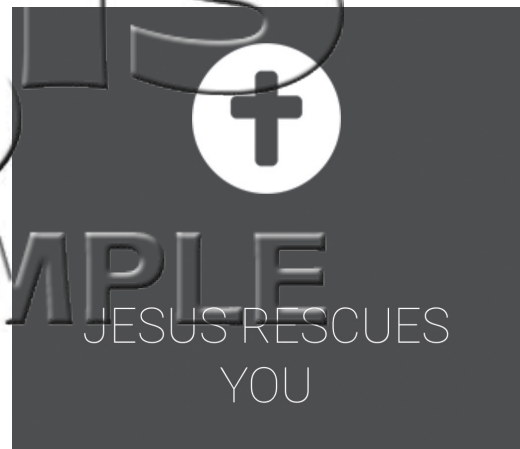
## 2. Sin Separates You

Our sinful rebellion against God—doing things our way rather than His or thinking we know better—drives a wedge between us and God. He is holy and righteous and cannot be in fellowship with sin. Our sin deserves a just punishment, which is our death—not just physically, but spiritually. However, God loves us so much that He wants to reconcile us to Himself.



## 3. Jesus Rescues You

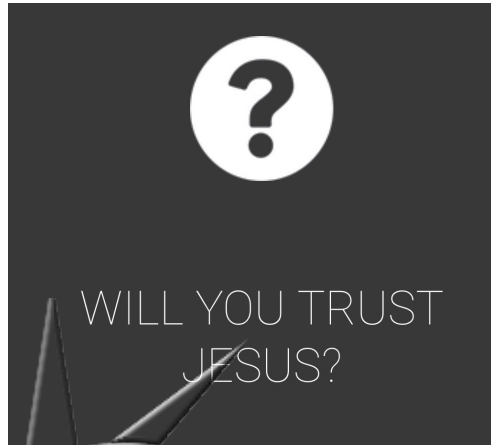
God Himself, Jesus Christ, came to earth, born of a virgin, to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice that we could never be. Jesus drank the full cup of the righteous wrath of God as He hung on the cross and



gave up His Spirit unto death so that we may be made alive in Him. He rose again on the third day, not only proving He was God, but also defeating death and Satan and breaking us free from the chains of sin.

#### 4. Will You Trust Jesus

To receive this amazing, incomprehensible sacrificial gift that Jesus offers us, we must respond. John the Baptist came before Jesus as a precursor to prepare the way. He baptized for repentance of sin. It is imperative to grasp the gravity of what Jesus did on the cross, that we recognize that we should be up there instead. That is the penalty we truly deserve. Yet, He loved you enough to endure it for you. We must repent of our sin and turn from it. That pivot is from self-reliance to total trust and faith in Jesus Christ.



“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” (Romans 10:9–10).

That declaration is not just an acknowledgement that we know who Jesus is. The demons and Satan all know who He is, but they refuse to submit to Him and will not make Him their Lord. Confessing “Jesus is Lord” is an outward expression of a submitted heart position where you put Jesus Christ back on the throne of your life, where He belongs.

If you want to receive the gift of salvation and make Jesus the Lord of your life, I encourage you to pray this simple prayer:

“Jesus, I believe you are the son of God, took on flesh, lived a sinless life and took the punishment that I rightly deserve. That you rose from the grave on the third day, conquered sin and death, and will come

again. I want to repent of my sin and turn from it. I need you. I need you to change me from the inside out. You are the Lord of my life. I love you. Help me serve you and bring you glory all of my days.”

These are not magic words. The prayer of salvation can be prayed a lot of different ways and that’s really not the point. God knows your heart and if you’ve actually chosen to give your life to Him or not. If you just prayed this prayer, Hallelujah! This is the best and most important decision you will ever make in your life. Angels in heaven are literally celebrating right now and singing in praise because when you depart this life, you will live in eternal fellowship with God.

But it doesn’t end here. You are going to need help to walk this walk. We were never meant to do it alone. That is why God created the Church. I encourage you to find a Bible teaching, Christ following church near you and get plugged in. You need to be discipled by other, more mature believers. You also need to read the word of God for yourself. If you truly love Him, you will want to know Him and you will desire to follow His ways. Getting connected to the Body of Christ, reading His word, and talking to Him daily in prayer are essential parts of life in Christ. God bless you on your journey. I’m praying for you.

## GET CONNECTED

If you want to go deeper in your faith or find tools to help you take those initial steps down the path that will lead you closer to Christ, I encourage you connect with me (or my team at Faith Forge). Go to [faithforge.org](http://faithforge.org) and find discipleship materials, instructional videos, blogs, podcasts, and more. Faith Forge is a forum, a platform where Christian men and women provide content for other believers to sharpen their faith. Our goal is to help you forge inner strength and courageous character through the refining fire of the Holy Spirit and to equip you through Jesus Christ for spiritual battle. We are in a fight, and the enemy has come to steal, kill, and destroy. Arm yourself for battle and don’t wage the war alone.

Feel free to reach out to me directly with a prayer request or even a theological question at [josh@faithforge.org](mailto:josh@faithforge.org). Stay plugged in through whatever social media outlet best suits your needs:

Website: [faithforge.org](http://faithforge.org)

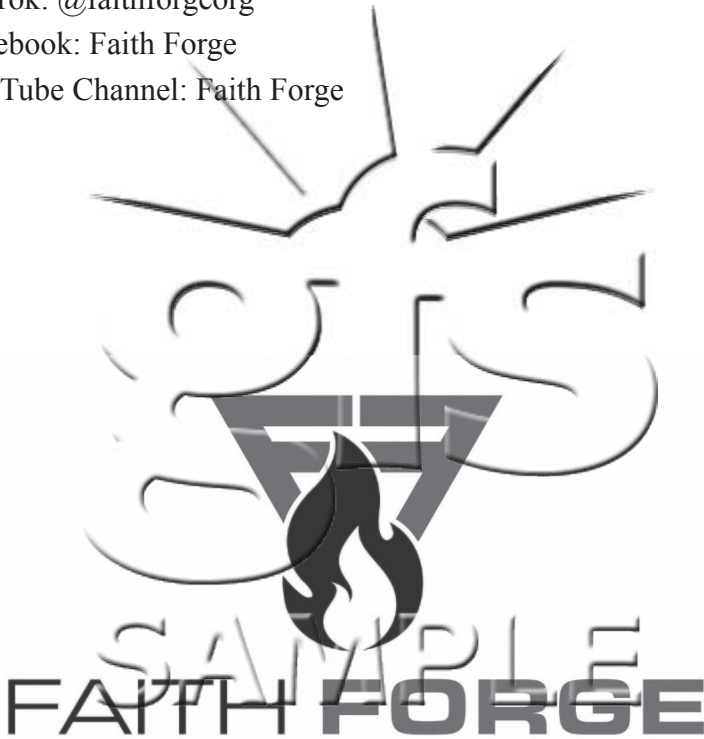
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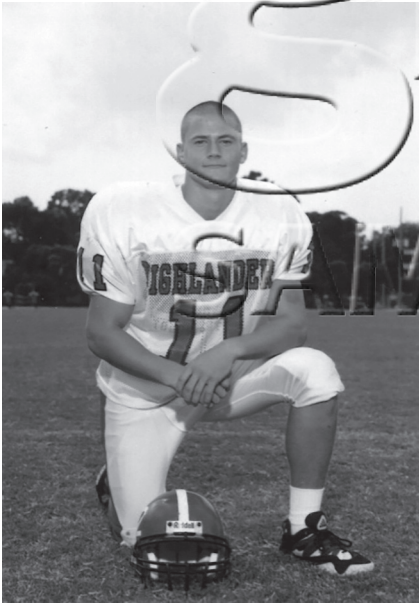
# PHOTO GALLERY



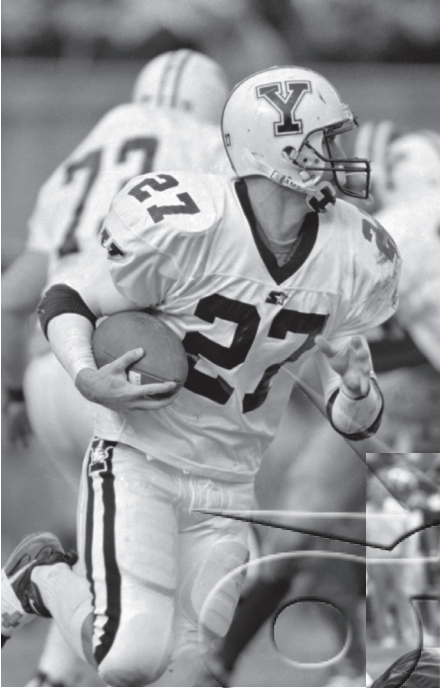
Mud Bowl MVP and Little League Champion  
at 11 years old.



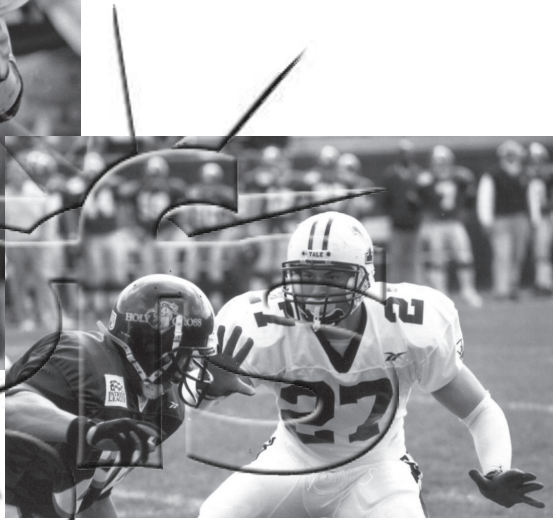
The Baby of a weird but wonderful family.



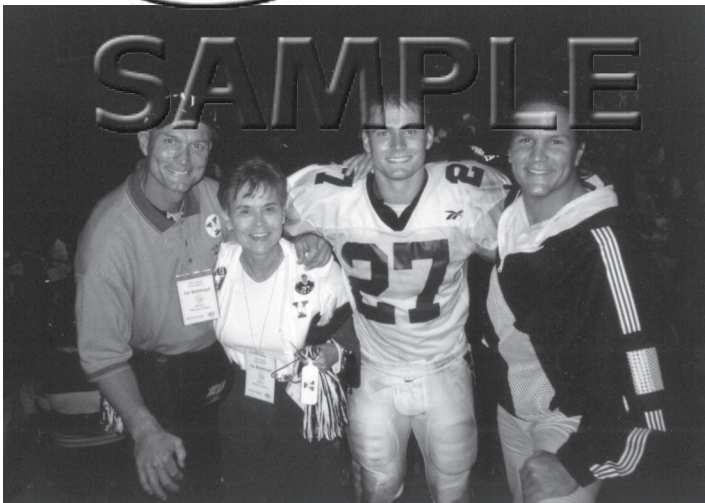
Senior year at Lake Highland Prep.  
shaving my head was a BAD choice.



Carrying the rock for the Yale Bulldogs at RB, Sophomore year 1998.



Press coverage at Corner for Yale vs Holy Cross.



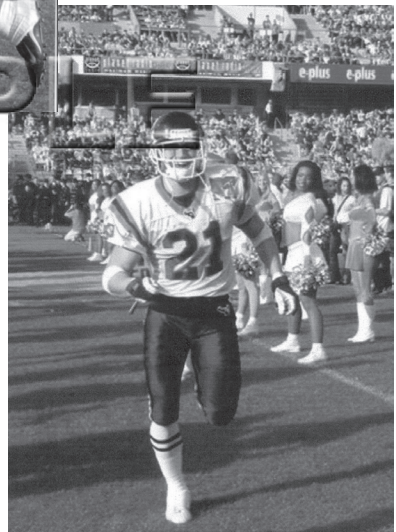
Dad (Jerry), Mom (Judy), me and my brother (Conard) at University of San Diego.



Always the baby of the family but no longer the "little" brother.  
(Left to Right: Jerry, Jay, Conrad, Jacob, Me).



Training at my old high school! LHP no pads, no problem, 2001.



A Joyful Introduction for the Amsterdam Admirals 2002



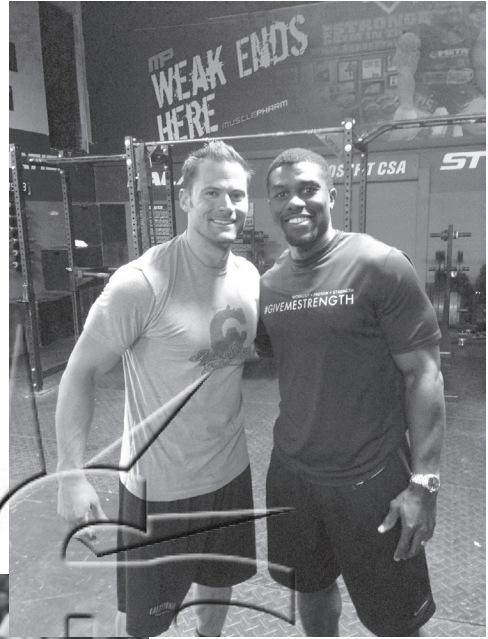
Finally in an NFL Uniform, Texans vs NY Giants in the Hall of Fame Game 2002.



On the set of "We Are Marshall" with actor Arlen Escarpeta, who played QB Reggie Oliver.



My 30th birthday with a crew of amazing friends including Chris Ackerman (far left), Brandon Yarkin (second of the left), Josh Holt (behind me), Chandler (arm on my Dad's shoulder) and Josh Reeves (far right).



With my brother from another mother IG, Ivery Gaskins.



Hitting the Big Snatch at NorCal Crossfit Regional Competition in 2014 with my CSA Teammates.



The Eye of the Tiger with my ultimate Crossfit Teammate and training partner Buddy Hitchcock.



Running down my competition rep by rep doing thrusters in Grid League tryouts 2015.



On the rings where I won my spot of the Grid League, Los Angeles Reign.



Last family shot taken, Thanksgiving 2014. (Left to Right: Jerry, Me, Mom, Dad, Sheryl, Jay, Conard).



Finally finding my calling, leading young people to Christ. Praying on the National Day of Prayer with two of my youth, Nathaniel Anderson and Dani Reyes.



Coaching is a ministry as well. Making in game adjustments as the Defensive Coordinator for the Manatee High Hurricanes in 2022.



Jesus blessed me with an amazingly loving Christian wife, Traci Ruth Phillips, May 28th 2022.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Josh Phillips is a Christ-following, fiercely competitive coach and pastor. He is driven to inspire others to be the men and women God created them to be through finding their identities in Christ and putting their complete trust in Him. Josh is a former NFL football player, multiple-time CrossFit Regional competitor, drafted GRID League Athlete, and USA Weightlifting competitor. He graduated from Yale, where he majored in Psychology, minored in Religious Philosophy, ran track, and played football. He holds two masters' degrees: a Master's in Business Administration from Wagner College and a Master's in Kinesiology Biomechanics from Cal State, Northridge. Josh's research, "Effect of Ankle Joint Contact Angle and Ground Contact Time on Depth Jump Performance," was published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*. He has coached at the University of California Berkeley, University of California Santa Barbara, Wagner College, Los Angeles


Pierce College, the Peak Performance Project (P3), and multiple high schools. He is currently the head football coach at Sarasota High School and assistant coaches weightlifting while teaching in the Physical Education Department. He is also the founder of Faith Forge, a ministry dedicated to leading others to forge inner strength and courageous character through the refining fire of the Holy Spirit, while equipping them in Jesus Christ for spiritual battle. Josh is a speaker and relishes the opportunity to share the testimony of what God has done in his life. He calls sunny Sarasota, Florida, home, where he enjoys working out, bowling, beach escapes, and golden lattes with his beautiful, godly wife, Traci, and their cats.



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