

Chapter 1

Who Is She?

If you asked people about her, you would get different answers from different people.

Her teachers would tell you that she was a good student. Often the teacher's pet. Always handed in assignments on time. Cooperative, followed rules, listened to authority. Her English teachers would tell you of the creative writing assignments that she handed in. She had a flair for writing. Now German was a different subject....

After meeting with her during her senior year, her guidance counselor said, "You have everything going for you." Great grades that came easily. A part-time job. A scholarship and summer job that would completely cover her first year at college. She had been accepted at the only college she had applied to early in her senior year. She had definite plans for her life. Major in English and communications. After graduating, she planned to get a job in human and public relations with a major corporation. She was actively involved in many activities at school - band, chorus, student council, the track team, Future Business Leaders, Future Medical Careers, Pep Club, German Club. Plus, she was actively involved in her local church youth group.

At the youth group, she participated in everything too. Helping the ladies of the church with missionary breakfasts and Vacation Bible Schools. Listening to other youth talk about their problems with their parents and their dabbling in smoking and drugs. She attended the weekly Bible study for young people called the "Leaders Group." These were young people who had made a commitment to attending the weekly Bible study and were leading out in youth activities, planning, promoting. The adults in the youth group had chosen her to be part of the "Honors Group." This group was chosen from the Leaders Group to be peer leaders and counselors.

Her friends at school would tell you that she was quiet but always willing to help anyone. She laughed and talked with anyone she knew but never really approached new people. She never got in trouble and hung out in the band room during her few study halls. She didn't date but had a number of guys as friends. She worked at the local Howard Johnsons as a waitress and drove a dark blue Chevy. Nothing spectacular. Just your average person.

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Her family, of course, loved her. Her brothers counted on her to smooth the way for them with their parents when they got in trouble. Her parents were proud of her, even if they didn't tell her often. Her father always knew that she would make it as a writer one day. He believed in her but was busy providing for a family with five children and a mess of animals. Her mom was proud of how involved she was in school and that she was going to college. She'd be one of the few from their extended family who did. Her mom had often wished she had. Or that she had been more involved in school. Her cousin said, "She's got her head on straight; you don't have to worry about her."

But she did worry. And now as she stood watching her reflection in the mirror, she let the tears flow. She was tired. Tired of trying to measure up, of trying to be what she thought everyone wanted her to be, of trying to please. Her life felt like it was rushing by too fast, and she was caught up in it, whether she liked it or not.

She was a Christian. She had given her life to the Lord when she was about eight years old. She remembered that summer day in her old neighborhood. The Good News Club had come to a neighbors house and for a week, several teenagers had shared Bible stories and songs. The last afternoon they talked of Jesus and how He loved each one of them just as they were. Just as I am! she had thought, I don't have to compete with my brothers or do everything right. Too shy to go forward when a call was given for those who wanted to accept Jesus as their Saviour, she had run home and up the stairs to her room. Kneeling beside the white bedspread, surrounded by the turquoise and pink flowered walls, she had asked Jesus into her life. It was a decision she had never regretted.

Even now as she stood facing herself in the mirror with a glass of iced tea in one hand and a bottle of pills in the other, she didn't regret her decision. Tears streamed down her face as she swallowed handfuls of the small white pills. She cried out to God in the pain and loneliness of that moment as she attempted to end her life.

"Oh, God, I'm so tired! Please give me rest. Just let me go to sleep and not wake up! I just need to go to sleep," she sobbed. How had it come to this?

No one else knew of the turmoil in her heart. She hadn't told anyone. She didn't want them to think that she wasn't perfect, that she couldn't handle things, that her life was out of her control. Maybe in ending her life she would gain some control.

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Her thoughts raced back over the summer. She had graduated high school - barely missing honors, she reminded herself. If she hadn't graduated with honors, at least she could comfort herself with the fact that she almost had. "If it hadn't been for that German class and algebra!"

She had graduated on Friday. On Monday, she started work at a factory in the cookie department. She had worked long, hot days on those cookie belts. Often, they would call her to work at night too. She'd been told that you weren't supposed to turn them down. So she had worked whatever hours they asked her to. She hadn't really fit in with the ladies there. They didn't like the summer college help anyway. After work, they'd go to a local bar for drinks. She'd head home.

This summer she had had a boyfriend too. In her heart, she knew that he wasn't someone God wanted her with. He was involved in things that he shouldn't have been. He was pushing her to move their relationship into a physically intimate one. She kept saying No, but this past weekend, when he threatened to break up with her again, he'd said that next weekend they'd...

She knew that she needed out of the relationship, but she felt trapped. When she was home and didn't go along with him, he'd threaten to break up with her. While she was at school, she received notes from him, telling her that if she didn't come home each weekend or ever broke up with him, that they'd be burying his body in "a white, pine box." She wanted to end it, but how? Besides, at least she had a boyfriend, she reasoned.

This summer, she and several of her friends had been baptized at the Baptist church they attended. They'd been going there for years. Now that they were all graduating and heading in different directions, they'd decided to be baptized. She thought of Laurie. Laurie had a peace that filled her eyes. She wanted that peace but just couldn't seem to get it, no matter what she did.

Now here she was at college. She didn't really want to be here, not yet. Not until she figured out what she really wanted to do with her life. Yeah, she had selected a major - a double major. She always had been ambitious. And she had even listed a job goal that she was working for. Human and public relations. It sounded good. And she had heard it paid well. She thought it'd be fun having an office and dressing up, carrying a briefcase and working with people. But in the back of her mind, there was this question:

Is this what God wants for me? What does God want with my life?

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She had never really asked Him. She had asked Him to be her Saviour but never the Lord of her life. And now everything was happening so fast. And people expected so much. And she tried so hard to please people.

If everything could just stop for a minute! Just long enough for me to think. To pray. To figure out what God wants. And how to get that peace.

But life didn't stop. It kept rushing past. Sweeping her up in it.

She wasn't helping it to slow down. She just kept doing more. Already she had joined the orchestra, had become a "soccer header," was working part time and going out for cheerleading. If I can become a cheerleader, then I'll be someone. Maybe then I'll have that peace, she thought.

But nothing helped. So here she stood. Swallowing handfuls of pills in a last ditch attempt to gain some control. Even if it would be the last control she would ever have.

God had other plans. As she lay down to sleep that night, crying, wondering if she would ever wake up again, He was with her.

He protected that young girl through the night and the next day. He cleared her head enough the next afternoon so that she could call Poison Control. They told her that if she was OK by then, she'd be fine and suggested she call Crisis Intervention. That was a long call. She had poured out her heart to the unknown person at the other end of the phone line. They had listened and encouraged her to tell someone what she had done. Feeling better, she washed her face and went to the room of a friend. She told her friend about the pills. Then she went back to bed.

The friend told the floor monitor, who contacted the dorm mom. Together they got her now rag-doll-like body dressed and to the hospital. Her parents were called and came to see her. Her Sunday School teachers called and made plans to come visit. Her boyfriend called. She seemed fine. She'd be headed back to college by the end of the week.

Then her heart almost stopped and the peaceful sleep that she had so desired threatened to take her. "Don't go back to sleep," the nurse kept telling her. But the sleep felt so good. Peaceful. She wouldn't understand for several years how close she had come to dying that afternoon.

But she didn't die. She lived. She didn't go back to college. She went home to sort things out. She'd told her parents that she needed

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time to think. The counselor at the college suggested that she take a year off and come back the following fall. Somehow she knew she wouldn't. But for now, the door was still open. And she had time to think.

And so began my journey in learning to live like His daughter. I was that young girl; trying to please, to measure up, to somehow be good enough. I couldn't see any value in myself. I kept thinking, If only I did this or that, then I'll be somebody. I felt like a nobody. And no matter how other people saw me, I just couldn't see myself as anything but hopeless.

But I was God's daughter. I had asked Him into my heart as a young child, claiming His eternal life and His grace. I had prayed to Him, and in my own feeble attempts had attempted to grow in Him. Finally, about six months after my suicide attempt, I finally surrendered all to Him, asking Him to take over my life. Asking Him to not only be my Saviour but the Lord of my life too. I finally admitted that I just couldn't do it on my own. All my attempts fell through. I was making a mess of things.

I'll never forget that afternoon. Kneeling by a log in the woods. Crying. Praying. Almost yelling. I poured out all my pain - my feelings of helplessness, of worthlessness, of hopelessness. How I longed to be somebody! I cried and sobbed till there was nothing left. I was honest before God, maybe for the first time in my young life. And God was big enough to take it. A peace filled me, and I felt the promise my pastor had shared with me earlier that day, "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me"(Song of Solomon 2:6).

God was holding me in His arms. He loved me. Still. After everything. I sat there in the woods for a while. Peaceful.

A different young woman came out of the woods that day. One who was intent on learning about God. Who was He? What did she believe? What did the Bible say? Where did she belong? What did God want from her?

A new journey began.

Reflection

1. Has there been a time in your life when you've asked Jesus to be your Saviour? If yes, why did you? What brought you to that place in your life? If you haven't, God may be leading you to make that commitment right now. Pray and ask Him in. Heavenly Father, I know that I'm a sinner. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for me. Please

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come into my heart and life and be my Saviour. I claim the gift of eternal life and thank You for loving me. Help me to live like Your daughter. In Jesus' name, amen.

2. Do you allow God to be Lord of your life? Looking to Him for direction? What is the difference between Saviour and Lord?

3. To you, what does it mean to "be somebody"? What do you do to try to "be somebody"? Does it work?

Prayer

O Lord, Adonai, help me to allow You to not only be my Saviour but to be the Lord of my life too. Show me what You want in my life. Help me to see that I am somebody in You - that I'm Your daughter. Show me how to live like Your daughter. In Jesus' name, amen.