

FOREWORD

I was baptized when I was about 13 years old, but I didn't truly surrender my life to God until 10 years later, just after I graduated from college. When I made the decision to really hand over my life to God, I thought the most difficult and triumphant part of the journey to Jesus Christ was that long, lonely walk down the church aisle for the altar call. I couldn't believe that I volunteered to travel down that aisle again.

Just before I made the scary decision to stand up, my heart thumped so loudly I could hear nothing else. A strange warmth enveloped my insides as if a furnace was growing hotter within me. Once I finally stood up and took a step out of my seat, I, thankfully, seemed to float down the aisle on pure emotion. As I reached the altar, tears filled my eyes and spilled out on my face as I felt that, yes, Jesus really loved me, and now I wanted to be right with Him as a result.

But I had no idea what would happen after the altar call, so I had a jillion questions. Who was going to help me become this "new person in Jesus Christ?" I couldn't

look to my pastor who is, incidentally, my father. I didn't want him knowing all of my down deep and dirty personal business. I could talk to some of the women in my church, but they might tell my father or my mother. Besides, they weren't my age anyway. More importantly, none of them embodied that "crazy, sexy, cool" thing I wanted to have going on. Now that I've become a Christian, I wondered if I could be "crazy, sexy, cool."

What does it mean to truly surrender your life anyway? Does it mean I can't dig who I want to dig? Will I have to be in church all the time? If I know Jesus Christ, the creator and ruler of the universe, should I expect to have any more problems? What if my "worldly" friends are makin' moves on the career front, and I'm not? Should I smile through my suffering? Is it more Christian to be poor, or is it more Christian to be rich? Do I have to kick my old friends to the curb and find new holy friends? Where do these people hang out anyway? Should I join a megachurch? What if I don't know anyone that is cool and Christian? Should I date non-Christian guys and hope they'll eventually see things my way?

Where is this "abundant life" that I keep hearing about? I hoped it included dancing. But could I still shake my booty at the club? Do I have to start going to Christian

clubs? What if I don't like Christian clubs? What if I don't like Christian music?

These are just a sampling of the many, many questions that scurried through my mind as I struggled to find myself within Jesus Christ. In short, I needed a handbook of some sort, but there weren't any that answered all of my questions. To get answers, I scoured the shelves of Christian bookstores looking for Christian life testimonial books that in any way applied to me. I dared to ask very personal questions of Christian women and men that came into my life, sometimes embarrassing myself and the people I asked questions of in the process. And of course, I desperately prayed for "signs and wonders" from God.

This book is a culmination of what I've learned from books, people, prayers and my life. So many times, I looked for fresh, real and relevant answers to my questions. Sometimes, I got them. Sometimes, I didn't. This fresh, real and relevant book is just the sort that I was searching for all those years ago. If you want to "count the cost," as it is stated in Luke 14:28, before surrendering your life to Jesus Christ, this book is an honest way to start tallying.

Since I began my journey, I've shed many tears, forgotten lessons I thought I learned and plain made a fool

of myself. But all the while, God was showing me how to be the real me within the boundaries of His boundless love. Heartache and humiliation are a part of life, but I hope reading this book will save you some of what I've had to endure. But if it doesn't, at least this book will show you there is progress after the pain, sunshine after the rain or simply in a Biblical phrase "joy in the morning."