

REFLECTIONS ON

*MORE  
THAN  
GOLD*

LIVING IN GLORIOUS FREEDOM

*BRYAN ELLIOTT*



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# Introduction

Bryan Elliott

Before you dive into this journey of the theological foundations and spiritual disciplines that enabled me to walk with God and grow in faith, I want to share my own journey to the cross and the glorious freedom I experienced at the feet of Jesus.

May 23, 2018, started like any other day. It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon, and I was planning on leaving the office early when I received a call from the police. My daughter, Abbe, had been stabbed.

Assuming it was a minor incident, I immediately drove to Abbe's apartment, only to discover the entire street had been closed off. Police cars and ambulances had parked outside, and people rushed back and forth in a chaotic scene. A wave of disbelief washed over me. *What was happening to my family?*

After what seemed like an eternity, someone offered to drive me to the hospital. The drive was a blur.

I remember Abbe's mother calling to tell me she heard on the radio a woman had been stabbed and rushed to Sunnybrook Hospital with life-

threatening injuries. Oddly, this was more than the police had told me on the scene, and I began to grasp the reality of the situation.

Over the next hour in the hospital waiting room, I experienced a host of conflicting feelings. Heaviness, sadness, disbelief, hope... emotions overlapped, started, and stopped at strange intervals. I didn't know what to think or feel. No one would tell our family or me what was going on. There was no follow-up explanation. The only direct information we had was from that first call telling us Abbe had been stabbed.

Family members arrived, one after another, gathering in silence as we waited for someone to tell us what was happening. When that moment finally came, the news was nearly impossible to believe. The doctors pronounced Abbe dead on arrival. The cause? She experienced five slash and stab knife wounds, with a stab wound to the heart as the ultimate cause of her death.

Everyone in the room cried out in sorrow and disbelief as the doctor's news sank in. I looked over and saw my younger daughter, Bryn, unravelling. Abbe was not just Bryn's only sister; she was her best friend. With my eyes locked on Bryn, my body registered severe, deep grief and debilitating disappointment.

*Could this really be happening? If it is, how could God allow it?*

My daughter had been stabbed in the heart. It was unimaginable. A tragic ending for my beautiful baby girl. Only 21 years old. Abbe had tried and tried to get back on her feet from a life marked by intense suffering, tragedy, and ongoing struggles. After giving her life to the Lord and unsuccessfully attempting to heal from years of drug addiction and trauma, *how could it end like this? How could something this terrible happen?*

## The Unexplainable in the Face of the Unspeakable

After hours of crying and trying to absorb what had happened, I went to bed that night, exhausted and numb. There was a void in my soul, the feeling that something precious was ripped from me. My mind raced. Heaviness filled my heart as I thought about my traumatized family and how Abbe was gone forever. Our lives would never be the same.

Yet, unexpectedly, I woke the next morning with an incredible and unexplainable peace I attribute solely to the grace of God. I was overwhelmed by the revelation that Abbe was in heaven with the Lord. She was now safe for all eternity with her Father in heaven, His great mercy revealed in her life.

A true revelation and the experience of His mercy had produced in me a tangible joy, despite the devastating tragedy that had befallen my family. In His sovereignty, God saw the end from the beginning and He allowed me to feel the heavenly reality that Abbe was finally home, safe and sound.

Very few could understand what I was experiencing. In fact, many told me I was in denial, while others accused me of suppressing my pain. I even received a third-party diagnosis that I had disassociated from the trauma of what had happened.

I can see how others may have seen my unexplainable peace and joy as insensitive. We were all mourning the loss of Abbe; many of those dearest to my heart were sinking in the grief of her death. Some even resented and judged me, not understanding how God could possibly give me joy in the midst of such a grievous loss.

My family suffered severe shock and trauma after Abbe's death. Yet, I also knew God was depositing something different in me. It was a feeling of peace so exceptionally significant that it would direct the

next part of my journey in ways I'd never expect. He was doing the unexplainable in the midst of the unspeakable.

## Looking Back

Looking back over my life, I am confident that the profound power and presence of God I experienced in the season of Abbe's loss wasn't an isolated incident. Rather, it was the fruit of what God had been cultivating in my life for several years.

As someone who grew up going to church, my relationship with Jesus had become lukewarm at best. I never questioned the validity of Christianity. I came from generations of Christians and found the evidence surrounding Jesus' deity, death, and resurrection compelling and believed that Jesus was the Messiah... but I didn't know Him personally.

I also experienced a great tragedy when I was just 14 years old when a devastating gun accident left my brother in a vegetative state. In the following years, I watched our family dissolve in resentment, shame, and unprocessed grief. My dad became dependent on alcohol and left my mom after he lost his business. My other brother struggled for years, attempting suicide multiple times.

By the age of 18, I had become disillusioned with the Church. I had built up arguments and offenses that were really just excuses to live life on my own terms. I figured I would become a Christian again one day—after I had had my fun and lived life on my terms. As a result, I left the Church completely for more than a decade but eventually made my way back, inch by inch, until 2016, when I truly made Jesus Lord of my life. Before then, my relationship with Jesus was nominal. I considered myself a good person, but this belief only gave me a thin and false sense of peace and righteousness based on my own merits.

In the interim, I married my daughters' mother (my first marriage). She was my university sweetheart, but she had a lot of personal troubles

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that led her to leave me when the girls were still toddlers. I had other relationships with women that were damaging to my daughters after their mother left. I even allowed someone to become close to our family who was, unknown to me, abusive to my girls in the worst possible ways. This would ultimately lead to years of addiction and mental health struggles for both of my girls.

I married again when the girls were in their pre-teens, and for the third time when the girls were teens. My third wife was kind and stable, the kind of woman I thought would help bring a sense of order back to my home. She was not a believer, although she was fine with me being a (lukewarm) believer as I was when we first moved in together in 2012. Ultimately, we had mistakenly rushed our relationship, the damage to my girls was done, and the many years of trauma we experienced took a deep toll on both her and the marriage.

## **Turning Point**

In December 2015, two and a half years before Abbe's death, God connected me to a wonderful group of believers in Saint John, New Brunswick. Little did I know that this connection would become the impetus for me to go after Jesus wholeheartedly for the first time in my life.

It was with this group of passionate Christians that I tasted the glorious freedom that comes from knowing Jesus personally. Everything from that point on changed, and my life would never be the same, nor did I want it to be.

The community I found was incredibly patient with my journey and they even started a weekly prayer group to pray for me and my business. I discovered and began applying biblical priorities to my life, putting God at the top of my list, followed by my family, business, church, and friends. As the months passed and I saw their authentic and passionate love for God and for people, I knew I needed to do

more. Sowing donations into their ministry and paying a full-time intercessor or having a prayer team wasn't enough. God wanted me to do my own praying!

I had always been afraid of praying out loud, especially in front of a group of people. If I did pray out loud, it was only to recite the Lord's Prayer. But as this community led me into deeper encounters with the Word of God, I couldn't help but want to grow in this area.

Up to this point, I had enjoyed the finest things life had to offer without restraint: NBA courtside season tickets, luxurious vacations, expensive nights out, engaged in the foothills of the Andes in a vineyard in Argentina, married on a 900-acre estate in Tuscany, living in a six-million-dollar house, an expensive wine collection, etc.

Even though I had been both successful and generous, I found my security in wealth. What's more, I was very undisciplined and a poor steward of the resources He had given me to manage. My personal finances needed tightening. My business had areas that were not in order. My giving needed discipline. In short, my bucket had holes and was leaking. Essentially, God wanted full disclosure of my accounts, so He could lead me into greater surrender and obedience. I needed His wisdom.

Learning to pray launched something entirely new in my life, family, business, and beyond. I discovered just how much I needed to show up in my own relationship with God. Nobody else could do it for me. If I wanted to know God, *I needed to do it for myself.*

## The Next Layer

Eager to develop my relationship with God, I dove into the Word and the process of inner healing. He set me free from various strongholds that had held me in bondage for years. My views on praying in tongues even changed as my engineer brain began to give way to my heart which was being strengthened in the Holy Spirit daily.

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God was more concerned with my heart than allowing me to continue believing the lies buried deep within me. As such, He began to pull away the things I had leaned on for strength separate from Him. My business began to shake, I lost millions in key investments, and even though we were now praying two times a week for my business, things just kept getting worse. To compound matters, my daughters were continuing to spiral down into addiction, ultimately leading to the tragic loss of my oldest daughter, Abbe.

There is no way I could have mustered up the peace and joy I experienced directly following Abbe's death on my own. It was only by God's grace, stemming from a deep awareness that Abbe was securely resting in her eternal home in heaven. This awareness was the result of the fresh relationship with Jesus I had been cultivating in the secret place since deciding to surrender my life to Him completely, from the inside out. Grounding my trust in the goodness, faithfulness, and mercy of God allowed me to keep my heart soft.

## **By God's Grace Alone**

*Even when Your path takes me through the valley of deepest darkness,  
fear will never conquer me, for You already have!*

*Your authority is my strength and my peace. The comfort of Your love  
takes away my fear. I'll never be lonely, for You are near.*

—Psalm 23:4, TPT

Prior to Abbe's death, I had already planned on hosting our prayer group in my downtown Toronto office for a week of 24/7 prayer over the upcoming elections. The director of the group came early and arrived just days after we lost Abbe (New Brunswick to Ontario is a long trek). He and a few others interceded and held me up for a full week after the funeral.

Bryan Elliott

My family of believers understood the peace and joy God had given me, where many others could not. Even when I became weak, and torment began to overshadow my heart, they gathered and began praying Psalm 23 over me. This immediately restored my sense of peace, and I fell asleep right there in my office.

I had to process Abbe's death. We all did. But I never doubted that God had my daughter. The unwavering sense of peace and joy, knowing Abbe was home, never left me, and it stayed with me as life marched on, applying itself to new trials and moments of pain. At times, I had to be careful how I demonstrated this powerful overflow of the presence of God. Filled with unexplainable joy and gratitude, I remember choosing to walk alone to and from the funeral parlour because I couldn't help but sing the song God had put on my heart at the top of my lungs, over and over:

*“For His name is glorious, glorious, glorious  
Make His praise glorious, glorious, glorious  
Shout His name Glorious, Glorious, Glorious.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Abbe's funeral was held at my local church. I led the 90-minute service, and my pastor delivered a short message. Despite the circumstances, I was determined to continue believing in God's goodness and wanted to give Him glory. It was a powerful, praise-filled celebration of life, one fraught with pain and unspeakable suffering, but not one without a few bright spots.

Family, friends, business leaders, drug dealers, gang members, and pastors, probably more unbelievers than believers, all came to say goodbye to Abbe. We expected a small turnout, but the number of people who showed up overwhelmed us. Over 400 people came to celebrate Abbe's life with us, so many that the crowd even spilled into the church lobby.

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In spite of the great mourning that day, many shared stories of how Abbe had helped friends and even saved lives because of her actions. Over and over, people described her as someone who was there for them in the darkest period of their lives when no one else was.

Everyone who came that day heard the gospel and experienced (maybe for the first time) the incredible hope that we have as Christians.

## **Through Crystal's Eyes**

*Walking into the church, I could feel the depths of despair hovering over the crowded room. Everyone was mourning the loss of their beloved Abbe. While standing at the back of the crowd, I watched Bryn, Abbe's sister, sob her way through her tribute to her beautiful older sister. Abbe's death happened so quickly and was devastating. It was an unexpected blow. Yet, in the midst of so much grief, Bryan stepped on the platform radiating light from within, consistently communicating that Jesus gives all of us hope. All of us.*

*There were many others who spoke after Bryan, encouraging those to anchor their frail hearts to a real Jesus. As a follower of Christ, tears welled up in my eyes watching this beautiful oxymoron of messages unfold. One thing remained: the radiant truth of Jesus' love. It provided hope beyond this temporal life in the midst of such sorrow. God's love for humanity is real and available to all who reach for Him.*

—Crystal Lavallee, family friend

## **A Peace That Surpasses All Understanding**

Since Abbe went home to heaven, I've faced difficult relationship challenges, including life-and-death situations with my only other daughter, Bryn. I've had multi-million dollar business deals go sideways. I've been in lawsuits. I lost my marriage and my house. Abbe's murder trial went on for years. And yet God's abiding peace continues in my life. His love

continues to hold me up and stabilise me through storms past and present.

I'm not the only one who has experienced this incredible peace and joy in the midst of a situation that could easily leave a person physically, mentally, and emotionally devastated.

At a Christian conference in San Jose, California, hosted by *Transform Our World*, I shared my story in front of a room of about a thousand people. To my surprise, many who had experienced unimaginable losses and tragedies came up to me afterwards to share that they, too, had had similar experiences with God in the darkest periods of their lives. It was as though there was a special band of brothers and sisters bound together by the joy of the Lord in their suffering, and I was suddenly a member.

So why am I telling you this? Supernatural empowerment is meant to be the norm for the Body of Christ.

And for those who don't know Jesus, you're invited to be set gloriously free from the chains that bind us on this earth. In the midst of great sadness and pain (and celebration, too!), God wants us to know Him and live in the fullness of all He has for us. His gifts of mercy and love are waiting for us if only we surrender our lives to Him.

My purpose on this earth is to worship God and bring Him glory. He has called me to lead others to the glorious freedom I have experienced through knowing Him, which is how this book came to be. These reflections started as my story of knowing God and being sanctified through the pursuit of His Word resulting in glorious freedom. *More Than Gold* is a testimony that God's love can triumph over any challenge and bring you into a place of stability and victory in Him!

Just a few short years ago, my life looked nothing like Christ's. Failed marriages, ungodly relationships, and an aborted first child filled my history. I had poor boundaries as a parent. I selfishly and quickly moved my girls into new relationships and living arrangements. I was self-

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focused, self-indulgent, and self-serving (and blind to it). Generosity was a value I espoused, however, glorifying God was not my primary motive. I gave more out of fear or trying to earn God's acceptance. I lived exactly the way I wanted to live, and yet, I still called myself a Christian (as many do). I felt empty and wondered if there was something more.

In the midst of that lifestyle, the mercy of God reached down, delivered me, and healed me. He only needed my "all-in," that moment when you finally surrender and make Jesus the Lord of your life. The gospel has the power to transform EVERYTHING when it is embraced fully. I am living proof. Only five years ago, I made the shift. I entered this totally new world full of limitless possibilities! And now, you are holding my story of redemption and the goodness and faithfulness of God!

My prayer for you in your journey ahead is that you would experience God's glory and the fear of the Lord with awe of His holiness, His power, and His presence in wonder and adoration for Him. You are created for such a time as this!<sup>2</sup> You are created to walk in glorious freedom!

## **God is good!**

Blessings,  
Bryan Elliott

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1. Brian Johnson, "To Our God," recorded October 2012, on *For the Sake of the World*, Bethel Music.
  2. Esther 4:14