Salvation

By Grace, Through Faith

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Table of Contents

Salvation
Introduction: The 3 A.M. Question
Chapter 1: The Question Under Everything
Chapter 2: Sin, Honestly
Chapter 3: Loved While We Were Sinners
Chapter 4: The Cross
Chapter 5: The Empty Tomb
Chapter 6: Grace Is Not a Paycheck
Chapter 7: Faith That Takes Hold
Chapter 8: Receiving Christ
Chapter 9: The Turn — Repentance and New Life
Chapter 10: How You Can Know
Chapter 11: Living It When It's Hard
Chapter 12: Tell Somebody
A PERSONAL INVITATION: GIVE YOUR LIFE TO JESUS CHRIST
MORE FROM KIMANI UPSHUR, M.Ed.
About the Author

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The stories and examples in this book are illustrative. Any resemblance to actual persons is coincidental.

Salvation

By Grace, Through Faith

Teen Edition — For Teenagers Ages 13–18

Kimani Upshur, M.Ed.

Rescued. Redeemed. Restored.

Introduction: The 3 A.M. Question

It's 3 a.m. Your phone is face-down on the mattress, finally quiet. The group chat has gone dark, the feed has stopped moving, and there's nobody left to perform for. And in that rare, unfiltered silence, the question shows up — the one that doesn't trend, doesn't get posted, and doesn't go away:

If I died tonight, do I actually know where I'd spend eternity?

Maybe you grew up in church and you've heard the word *salvation* ten thousand times — so many times it stopped meaning anything. Maybe you didn't grow up in church at all, and the word sounds like it belongs to somebody else's life. Maybe you're somewhere in between: you believe in God, sort of, on your good days — and on your bad days you wonder if He's seen your search history, your thoughts, the version of you nobody follows.

This book was written for that 3 a.m. version of you.

It is not a curriculum. It won't talk down to you, and it won't dress the gospel up in slang to trick you into liking it. It's going to tell you the truth in plain words: why you need saving, why you can't save yourself, what Jesus actually did, and how a person — a real person, with a real past, in a real world of pressure and image and doubt — receives what God has already done.

Here's the anchor verse for everything ahead:

> "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8, KJV).

Grace. Faith. Gift. By the end of this book you'll know exactly what each of those words means, why they demolish the question "Am I good enough?", and how you can *know* — not hope, not guess, *know* — that you are saved.

No guilt trips about your past; your past is the reason Jesus came. No earning, no performing, no pretending. Just the most important question you'll ever answer, answered straight from God's Word.

Let's start where every honest conversation about salvation has to start: with the problem nobody wants to name.

Chapter 1: The Question Under Everything



Chapter 1

Jordan sat at the bus stop with his phone in his hand, not looking at it.

That was new. Usually the phone was the whole point of the bus stop — the scroll that made the wait disappear. But that morning his thumb had stopped halfway through a feed full of people being funnier, richer, calmer, and more certain than he felt, and a thought had walked into his head uninvited, the way thoughts do at 6:40 in the morning:

Everybody looks like they know what they're doing. What if I don't even know the one thing that matters?

He wasn't in trouble. His grades were fine. Nobody was mad at him. The thought wasn't panic — it was quieter than panic, and somehow heavier. Because underneath the grades and the group chats and the highlight reels, underneath the question of who he was and whether he was enough, there was a deeper question he had been successfully not-asking for sixteen years:

Am I right with God?

You have your own version of that bus stop. Maybe it's the ceiling over your bed. Maybe it's the passenger seat on a long drive, watching fields go by, when somebody's gospel song comes on and the car gets quiet. The setting changes. The question doesn't. It is the question under everything: *If my life ended, where would I be — and how sure am I, really?*

Here's what most people do with that question. They bury it under noise. Another episode, another scroll, another season, another semester. Or they answer it with a shrug built out of half-remembered phrases: *I'm a good person. God knows my heart. It'll work out.* Or they avoid it because the one time they asked it out loud, a well-meaning adult gave them an answer so shallow it insulted the question.

God does not insult the question. The Bible treats it as the most serious question a human being can ask — and, wonderfully, as a question with an *answer*. Not a mystery you're meant to die wondering about. An answer you can know, test, and stand on.

The answer has a name: **salvation**. And the Bible defines it with a precision that cuts through all the fog:

> "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8, KJV).

Look at what that one sentence does. *Saved* — rescued. Salvation is not self-improvement; it's a rescue. *By grace* — because of God's undeserved kindness, not your résumé. *Through faith* — received by trusting, the way you receive anything you can't buy. *Not of yourselves* — you didn't produce it and you can't. *It is the gift of God* — a gift: given, not earned; offered, not sold.

Over the next eleven chapters, we're going to unpack every word of that. Why a rescue is needed at all. What it cost. Why your good days don't purchase it and your worst days don't disqualify you. How to receive it — actually receive it, not just know about it. And how to live on the other side of it, in a world that will test it.

But it starts with honesty. You can't receive a rescue you don't think you need.

So before the gift, the diagnosis. Before the answer, the problem — stated plainly, the way God states it.

Your move this week: Don't run from the question. Ask it once, out loud, honestly: *If I died tonight, do I know where I'd spend eternity?* Then keep reading. This book exists to settle it.

Chapter 2: Sin, Honestly



Chapter 2

The crack ran diagonally across Jordan's phone screen, right through his own reflection.

He'd dropped it on the gym floor in October and never fixed it — partly the money, partly because a cracked screen had become, in his mind, an accurate piece of technology. Everything he saw came through it slightly fractured. Including himself.

Sin is like that crack. Not the drop — the *fracture*. And this chapter is about looking at it honestly, because the gospel makes no sense until you do.

When most teenagers hear the word *sin*, they picture a list: the big, obvious, headline offenses. And since their personal list looks shorter than somebody else's, they conclude they're basically fine. But the Bible's diagnosis is deeper and more uncomfortable than a list:

> "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, KJV).

All. Not the worst kids in school. Not the kids in the comments. All — the starter and the benchwarmer, the honor student and the one copying her homework, the church kid and the kid who'd never set foot in one. And notice what sin is measured against: not each other — *the glory of God*. God's standard isn't "better than average." It's His own perfect holiness. Against that standard, everybody falls short, the way every high jumper on earth falls short of the moon. It isn't close, and comparing your jump to someone else's doesn't change the distance.

And sin isn't only what you *do*. It's the bent underneath the doing — the selfishness that runs the factory. You know it from the inside: the envy that spoils a friend's good news before you're even aware it's envy. The lie that comes out of your mouth already fully formed. The cruelty you type and delete — or don't delete. The way you can be thinking about yourself in the middle of somebody else's worst day. Jesus located sin in the heart before it ever reaches the hands: hatred and lust and contempt are sins in seed form, and everybody's heart grows them.

Why does it matter this much? Because sin has a consequence built into it, the way gravity has falling built into it:

> "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23, KJV).

Wages — what a job pays you. What sin pays, in the end, is death: not just the physical death every body faces, but spiritual death — separation from God, who is life itself. This is not God being petty over a cracked screen. It's the holiness of God being what it is. A God who could shrug at evil wouldn't be good; a judge who waved every case through wouldn't be just. Sin separates because God is holy and sin is, by definition, the rejection of Him.

Hold both halves of that verse, though, because the second half is where this book is heading: *but the gift of God is eternal life.* The diagnosis always arrives with the cure attached. God exposes the crack not to shame you, but to save you — the way a doctor shows you the X-ray because there's a surgery scheduled.

One more thing, and it's the thing nobody tells you: your personal sin list is not the deepest problem, and fixing your behavior is not the deepest solution. You don't just need better habits. You need a new heart and a rescue you cannot perform on yourself — which is why the next chapter matters so much.

Because before God ever showed you the crack, He loved the person holding the phone.

Your move this week: Get honest in private. Name your actual sins before God — specifically, not in PR language. Confession isn't God finding out; it's you stopping the spin. That's the doorway everything else walks through.

Chapter 3: Loved While We Were Sinners



Chapter 3

The church steps were still damp from the night rain when Jordan sat down on them, early, before anyone arrived.

He'd walked there without deciding to — six blocks in the blue morning light, hood up, no destination he'd admitted to. He sat with his back to the door and thought about the one fact that kept rearranging everything else: *God knew.* Not the curated version. Not the church version. God knew the whole unedited life — the thoughts, the searches, the two-faced moments, the things he'd never say out loud in any room.

And the claim of the gospel — the outrageous, almost offensive claim — is that God loved him *then*. Not after the cleanup. Not in the improved future tense. Then.

> "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, KJV).

Read the hinge word again: *while*. While we were yet sinners. God did not wait at the top of a staircase for humanity to climb its way into lovability. He demonstrated — *commendeth* means He proved, put on display — His love by sending Christ to die for people who were, at that very moment, sinners. Love first.

Rescue first. Your repentance, your faith, your new life — all of it comes *after*, as a response. Salvation doesn't start with your reaching up. It starts with God's reaching down.

That's what sits inside the most famous verse in the Bible. You've seen it on posters and eye-black and the bottom of fast-food cups, which is a shame, because familiarity can sand the edge off a sentence that should stop your heart:

> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV).

So loved — loved like *this*, to this degree, in this way: by *giving*. God's love is not a mood. It's an action with a price tag He paid Himself. And *whosoever* — sit with that word. It is deliberately, almost defiantly, unqualified. Not whosoever cleaned up first. Not whosoever comes from the right family, the right church, the right side of the tracks. Whosoever believeth. The word was built wide enough to fit the kid on the church steps at dawn, wondering if the door behind him could possibly be open to someone with his history.

It is. That's the point of this chapter, and you may need to hear it more than once before it gets past your defenses: **you are not trying to get God to love you.** That question is already settled — settled at the maximum possible cost, before you were born. The question salvation asks you is not "Can you make yourself lovable?" It's "Will you receive the love that already moved?"

Notice, too, what the Father gave. Not an angel. Not a prophet. Not a resource He could replace. His *only begotten Son* — heaven's best, given for earth's worst, given for *you* at your worst. When people say "God understands, it's fine, sin isn't a big deal," they've understood neither the love nor the sin. If sin weren't deadly, the cross wouldn't have been necessary. The size of the gift is the measure of both.

Jordan sat on those steps until the light changed. He didn't have words for it yet. But something in the order of things had flipped: he wasn't a defendant trying to soften a judge. He was a person being loved by a Father who had already paid to bring him home.

What did that payment actually look like? What happened on the cross — and why did it have to happen that way?

Next chapter. The center of everything.

Your move this week: Personalize John 3:16. Put your name where it says “the world”: *For God so loved [your name], that he gave his only begotten Son…* Read it out loud once a day. Let the order sink in: loved first.

Chapter 4: The Cross



Chapter 4

From the bottom of the hill, the cross was just a shape against the sky.

Jordan stood in the field below the church's Easter-weekend display — two beams of rough timber on the rise behind the property — and found he couldn't make it small in his mind no matter how ordinary the scene around it was. Cars passed. A dog barked somewhere. And the shape stood there saying the most violent and most tender thing in the world at the same time.

Here's what the cross actually is, stripped of jewelry and stained glass: the place where God's love and God's justice met — and neither one backed down.

God is just. That means sin cannot simply be overlooked, the way a tired teacher overlooks a wrong answer. If God waved sin through, He would be endorsing it — and heaven would be built on a shrug. But God is love. That means He does not stand back and let sinners take the full weight of what sin earns. So at the cross, God did the thing only God could do: He punished sin fully — *in Jesus*, who took the sinner's place — so that He could forgive sinners fully, justly, without pretending anything.

The prophet Isaiah saw it seven centuries early:

> "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, KJV).

For our transgressions. For our iniquities. Jesus was not a victim of circumstances, and He was not dying for anything He had done — He had done nothing; He is the one sinless person who ever lived. The punishment that purchased our *peace* — peace with God — landed on Him. Theologians call it substitution. You can call it what it is: He took your place. Every sin in your unedited history, and every one still in your future — charged to His account on that cross.

Paul states the exchange in one staggering sentence:

> "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21, KJV).

Your sin for His righteousness. That is the trade the cross offers — the worst bargain heaven ever made and the best one you'll ever be offered. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had lived your life, so that God can receive you as if you had lived His.

And the cross was *finished* there. Jesus' final word was not a groan of defeat; it was a declaration — "It is finished" (John 19:30, KJV), the cry of a debt marked *paid in full*. Not almost paid. Not paid pending your contribution. Finished. There is no remainder for you to work off, no balance for your good behavior to chip at. Whatever you bring to God now, you do not bring a payment. Someone else already paid, in full, in blood.

Why blood? Because God built the world with moral weight in it, and life-for-life is the price His own justice set: without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22, KJV). The cross wasn't God being dramatic. It was God being *just* and *merciful* in the same act — the only way both could be true at once.

Stand at the bottom of that hill a minute before you move on. The cross is the proof of two things you will need for the rest of your life: how serious sin is — look what it cost to deal with it — and how loved you are — look Who volunteered to pay.

But don't stay at the hill. The story refuses to end in a graveyard.

Your move this week: Thank Jesus specifically. Not a vague prayer — a specific one: *Lord Jesus, thank You for bearing my sins in Your body on the cross. Your work is finished, and I receive it.* Say it like you mean it, because He did.

Chapter 5: The Empty Tomb



Chapter 5

Every other religious founder in history has a tomb you can visit.

Jesus has one too. It's empty.

That single fact is the load-bearing wall of Christianity. Remove it, and the cross is just a tragedy — a good man executed, a movement scattered, a book of nice teachings left behind. With it, everything changes: the payment was accepted, death was defeated, and the Savior is not a memory but a living Person.

Paul, writing within living memory of the events, defines the gospel itself by what happened after the crucifixion:

> "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV).

Died. Buried. Rose again. Of *first importance*, Paul says — this is not decoration on the gospel; it *is* the gospel. And the first witnesses heard it announced at the tomb itself:

> “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:6, KJV).

“He is risen, *as he said*.” Jesus had predicted it. Then He did it — walked out under His own power, appeared to Mary, to the disciples, to skeptics like Thomas, to more than five hundred people at once, most of them still alive when Paul wrote and able to be cross-examined. The resurrection is not a legend that drifted in centuries later. It was proclaimed immediately, in the city where the tomb sat checkable, by people who were beaten and killed rather than take it back. People die for what they believe is true. They do not die, to a man, for what they *know* they invented.

Now make it personal, because the resurrection is not just proof — it’s power and promise for you:

Because Jesus rose, His death actually counts. A savior who stays dead validates nothing. The empty tomb is God’s receipt stamped over the cross: *accepted — paid in full.*

Because Jesus rose, death does not get the last word over anyone who belongs to Him. The wages of sin is death — and Jesus took the wage, then broke its power from the inside. Everyone in Christ will live, because the Head of the family already walked out of the grave and the body follows the Head.

And because Jesus rose, He is alive *now*. Not a portrait. Not a principle. Alive — hearing prayer, interceding for His people, building His church, keeping His promises in real time. The emphasis matters, and it’s the emphasis of this whole book’s family: **the empty tomb is the headline. Jesus is alive.**

Think of Jordan at the bus stop with his 3 a.m. question. The question “where would I spend eternity?” can’t be answered by a dead man’s teachings. It can only be answered by a living Savior who defeated the very thing that made the question terrifying. That’s who’s on offer in this book.

The payment is made. The receipt is signed. The Savior lives.

So how does what He did become *yours*? The next two chapters separate the two answers the world confuses most: earning and receiving. Grace — and the faith that takes hold of it.

Your move this week: Read Matthew 28 and John 20 slowly, start to finish. Watch what the risen Jesus does first: He comes to the people who failed Him, and His first word to them is *peace*. That’s who you’re being invited to trust.

Chapter 6: Grace Is Not a Paycheck



Chapter 6

Jordan knew the difference between a paycheck and a gift, because he'd stood at a closing-time counter holding both.

The envelope was wages: two weeks of mopped floors, stocked shelves, and "yes ma'am"s, converted into numbers on a stub. Nobody gave it to him. He *earned* it, and if his hours had been short, the envelope would have been light. That's how wages work — they measure the worker.

The small wrapped box sitting next to it — a late birthday gift from his grandmother, who owed him nothing and had timed nothing — measured something else entirely: the giver. A gift says nothing about what you've done and everything about the heart of the one handing it over.

Salvation comes in the box, not the envelope. Say it as sharply as Scripture does:

> "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9, KJV).

Not of works. This is where Christianity splits from every other system on earth. Every other path to God is a wage system: do enough, pray enough, give enough, be enough — and maybe the envelope will be heavy enough at the end. The gospel says the opposite: what God offers cannot be earned at all, by anyone, ever. Grace is God's favor poured out on people who deserve the opposite. The moment you add even one drop of "because I earned it," you've changed grace into wages — and wages, for sinners, pay out in death (Romans 6:23). Paul is blunt about it elsewhere: if it's by grace, it's no longer by works, or grace stops being grace (Romans 11:6). Oil and water.

Now watch how this detonates the sentence that runs teenage life: *"Am I good enough?"*

Good enough for the team, the school, the follow-back, the table, the family group photo. Your whole world runs on a scoreboard — stats, grades, likes, streaks — and your soul quietly assumes God runs one too. He doesn't. The cross is what God's scoreboard looks like: your record, fully counted — and Jesus standing in your place under it. In Christ, God's verdict over you is not based on your performance trend. It's based on Jesus' finished work. You are received the way a gift-receiver is received: not measured, *welcomed*.

This cuts in two directions, and both of them free you.

It cuts the achiever. The church kid with the clean record who secretly trusts it: your record is not what's saving you, and the day it cracks — it will crack — you'll need to know grace was the ground all along. And it cuts the kid keeping score from the bottom — the one who thinks his history has overdrawn the account: there is no account. That's what *gift* means. Romans 5:8 again: while we were yet sinners. The offer was made to you at your most unpresentable, and it has not been revised since.

One clarification, because it's the most common misunderstanding: grace does not make obedience pointless. It reorders it. You don't obey to *become* God's child; you obey *because you are* — the way you don't pay your grandmother for the gift, but you'd never treat her carelessly after receiving it. Works are gratitude, not currency. Root and fruit. We'll walk that out in chapters 9, 11, and 12.

So the gift sits there — given, wrapped in a cross and an empty tomb, with your name effectively on it.

But a gift unopened changes nothing. Somebody has to take hold of it.

That's faith. Next chapter — and it's more muscular than you've been told.

Your move this week: Audit your scoreboard. Write down the things you've been trusting — even a little — to make you acceptable to God: your record, your church attendance, your "better than" comparisons. Then pray Ephesians 2:8–9 over the list: *Not of works. Gift. Mine to receive.*

Chapter 7: Faith That Takes Hold



Chapter 7

There's a moment in every climb when the rope stops being equipment and becomes the whole argument.

Jordan felt it the first time he leaned back off the wall at the climbing gym — harness on, rope through the belay, his full weight committing to a line no thicker than his thumb. His head had already agreed the rope would hold. His body had to decide whether his head was telling the truth. Faith, he learned in that lean, lives in the committing — not in the agreeing.

The Bible's word *faith* means what happened in that lean: **trust that acts**. Not a vibe. Not optimism. Not merely believing facts about Jesus the way you believe facts about Jupiter. Demons manage that much — they believe God exists, and it only makes them tremble. Saving faith is trust placed personally in Jesus Christ: His death counted for your sins, His resurrection counted as your life, His lordship accepted over your future. It's the difference between admiring a parachute and jumping with it on.

Romans 10 shows faith doing its two signature moves:

> "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9, KJV).

Move one: *believe in your heart.* The heart, in Scripture, is not the feelings department — it's the control center: mind, will, and affections together. Heart-belief means the whole control center reorients around one conviction: God raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus is therefore Lord of everything, including me. It's not "I feel saved." Feelings are weather. It's "I am staking everything on this Person." You can do that on a day when you feel nothing at all — climbers lean on gray days too.

Move two: *confess with your mouth.* What the heart trusts, the mouth eventually says. "Jesus is Lord" is the oldest Christian confession there is, and *Lord* is its weight-bearing word — not mascot, not life coach, not emergency contact. Lord: the One with the right to direct your life. Confession is faith going public, starting with God in prayer and extending, in time, to people. Hidden, silent, never-spoken "faith" that never once confesses Christ should examine itself honestly; the rope you trust, you talk about.

Now clear away the confusion that keeps people stuck: **believing and confessing do not earn salvation.** They are the hands, not the price. Think of Jordan leaning

back: the rope did 100 percent of the holding; his lean did 0 percent of it — and without the lean, the rope saves him from nothing. Faith is not your contribution to a joint project. It's your reception of a completed one. That's why Ephesians can say salvation is "through faith" and "not of yourselves" in the same breath without contradicting itself: even the hands are a gift's way of being received, not a wage's way of being paid.

Small faith, strong Savior: if your trust feels thin, hear this — the power is in the object, not the intensity. A trembling hand on a strong rope is safer than a confident grip on a frayed one. Bring Jesus whatever trust you honestly have, and ask Him for more. He has never turned away that prayer.

So: the rope is real, and it holds. The next question is the most personal one in the book — what does it look like, step by step, to actually receive Him? Not in theory. Tonight, if you wanted to.

That's chapter 8. Don't skip it.

Your move this week: Say the confession out loud, alone, and mean it: "Jesus is Lord." Then notice what in your life quietly argues with that sentence. That's your honest starting line for the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Receiving Christ



Chapter 8

The street outside Jordan's window had two directions, and he'd walked both.

One way ran toward the old gravity: the version of life where he managed his image, carried his guilt in private, and hoped God was grading on a curve. The other way ran uphill, into the light — the direction of the church steps, the hill with the cross, everything this book has been saying. Standing at that corner, he finally understood the simplest and hardest fact about salvation: *nobody drifts into it.* At some point, a person turns, and receives.

Here's how the Bible lays out that receiving. It's not a formula to recite; it's a reality to step into — four movements, all of them in Scripture, all of them available to you today.

Face it. Everything starts with honest confession: you are a sinner who needs saving (chapter 2). Not a good person with a few bugs. A sinner, by nature and by choice, separated from a holy God. Salvation never begins with rebranding. It begins with the truth, told to God without spin.

Trust Him. Believe in your heart that Jesus is God's Son, that He died for your sins, and that God raised Him from the dead (chapter 7). Faith — the lean. Not trusting

your record, your church, your family's religion, your future intentions. Trusting a Person and His finished work.

Receive Him. The Bible's word is almost startlingly warm:

> "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12, KJV).

Received him. You open the door of your life to a Person. And the result is not a membership — it's a *birth into a family*: sons and daughters of God, by God's own act. You don't climb into God's family. You're received into it, the moment you receive His Son.

Call on Him. Scripture's invitation is the widest sentence ever written:

> "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, KJV).

Whosoever. The addict and the altar kid. The one with the past and the one with the record. You — specifically you, with your specific history — are inside that word if you will call. Calling is faith with its mouth open: *Lord Jesus, save me.* God has promised, in writing, how He answers that call. He saves.

Where does the Sinner's Prayer fit? At the end of this book you'll find the canonical invitation and the prayer — words that help you say these four movements out loud to God. Pray them from the heart and they are a beautiful way to receive Christ. But keep the order straight, because this book's family never blurs it: **the prayer does not save you; Jesus does.** Salvation is God's gift of grace, received through genuine faith. The prayer is the sound faith makes when it speaks.

And *repentance* — the turn itself — is woven through all four movements. To face your sin honestly, trust Christ, receive Him, and call on Him *is* to turn: from sin as your direction to Christ as your direction. Next chapter takes that turn apart — what it changes, what God makes new, and why the new life is every bit as miraculous as the rescue.

Jordan stood at his corner a long time. Then he turned uphill.

Your move this week: If you have never received Christ, don't leave it theoretical. Turn to the invitation at the end of this book, read it with an honest heart, and call on Him — out loud, by name, today. Then tell somebody. Faith that receives also confesses.

Chapter 9: The Turn — Repentance and New Life



Chapter 9

A garden doesn't argue with the seed about what it's going to become.

Jordan learned that the morning he knelt in the community garden with dirt under his nails, pushing a seedling into soil that somebody else had prepared. The old jacket he'd worn all winter lay folded on the path — not because the morning demanded it, but because something in him wanted a marker. *That was then. This is now.* He didn't know the theological word for what he was feeling yet.

The word is **repentance** — and chained to it, **the new birth**. They're the inside of the turn Jordan made at his corner, and they're where salvation stops being an idea and becomes a biography.

Repentance first, because it's the most slandered word in the Christian vocabulary. It does not mean groveling. It does not mean a lifetime of paying penance, and it does not mean feeling sufficiently terrible. Jesus' first recorded sermon sentence puts it in its true shape:

> "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15, KJV).

Repent translates a Greek word meaning *a change of mind so deep it changes direction*. Picture it physically: walking one way, you stop, you turn, you walk the other way. In repentance you turn *from* sin — not sin as your hobby, but sin as your heading — and *to* God. The two turns are one motion. You can't face Christ and keep facing sin; turning toward one is turning from the other. That's why repentance and faith arrive together in Jesus' sentence, like inhale and exhale.

Three honest clarifications, because teenagers get lied to about this:

Repentance is not perfection. The prodigal son came home still smelling of the pigpen; the Father ran to him *while he was still far off*. God receives the turning, not the finished product. If you wait to feel fully reformed before you turn, you'll never turn — reform is what happens *after*, on the road home.

Repentance is not just remorse. Judas felt awful — and his story ends in despair, because sorrow that never turns into trust is a dead end. Peter failed just as publicly, wept just as hard — and *came back*. Same tears, different direction. Godly sorrow turns; worldly sorrow only aches. The difference isn't the pain. It's the turn.

And repentance is not a payment. You do not purchase forgiveness with sufficient guilt. It's part of *receiving* — the facing-about that receiving requires — like turning around to accept a gift from someone standing behind you.

Now the miracle that meets the turn. Jesus told a religious leader named Nicodemus — a man with every credential — that what he needed was not more religion but a second birth: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, KJV). Not improved. Not rebranded. *Born* — given life he didn't have, by the Holy Spirit, from the inside out. Paul describes what that birth produces:

> "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV).

A *new creature*. Not the old creature with a coat of paint. In the new birth God gives a new heart — His own Spirit taking up residence — and with it new loves, new convictions, new power over the sin that used to run you. Old things genuinely pass: guilt's authority, sin's ownership, death's claim. New things genuinely come: sonship, the Spirit's witness, an appetite for God's Word, love for God's people. Not instantly mature — newborns aren't — but *alive*, which is the whole difference.

This is why the Christian life can't be reduced to trying harder. Trying harder is the old creature's only tool. The new creature has a new *nature* to live from — growth, not cosmetics; a garden, not a garage makeover.

So the turn is real, and what God plants in it is real. Which raises the question that haunts every honest teenager who's ever turned and then stumbled by Friday: *How can I know it took? How can I be sure I'm actually saved?*

Next chapter answers it — and the answer is stronger than your feelings.

Your move this week: Name the turn concretely. One specific sin you've been walking toward while claiming to face Christ — name it before God, and take one physical step the other way today: delete it, leave it, confess it, return it. Repentance has feet.

Chapter 10: How You Can Know



Chapter 10

The street was still wet from the rain, and the light coming through the broken clouds was the clearest it had been all week.

Jordan noticed his own pace as he walked it: unhurried. A month earlier the question under his skin had kept him scrolling at bus stops to outrun it. Now he walked like a person whose biggest question had an answer he could carry in daylight. Not because his feelings had settled into permanent sunshine — they hadn't, and they wouldn't. Because his confidence didn't live in his feelings anymore.

It lived in writing.

> "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13, KJV).

That ye may know. God intends assurance. Not arrogance, not presumption — *assurance*: the settled knowledge that, having trusted Christ, you have eternal life. If you've believed and you still live in daily terror that you're probably lost, you're not being humble; you're disagreeing with a book God wrote precisely so you

wouldn't have to wonder. Here are the anchors. When doubt talks — and it will — answer it with these, out loud if necessary.

The promise of God. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, KJV). Did you call? Then the verdict is God's, and God does not edit His promises on your bad days. Weather changes; bedrock doesn't.

The finished work of Christ. Your assurance stands on "It is finished" (John 19:30, KJV) — not on your spiritual performance since. If your standing with God rose and fell with your worst week, no one would stand. It stands on Jesus. It cannot fall.

The word of the Shepherd. Jesus describes what He does with His own:

> "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28, KJV).

Never perish. No man pluck them out. Your grip on God may weaken; God's grip on you is the doctrine here. The One who began your salvation has committed Himself to completing it.

The witness and the fruit. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the believer's spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16) — a quiet internal testimony — and a changed life bears external evidence: new love for God's people, conviction over sin instead of comfort with it, hunger for God's Word, a direction of obedience. Not perfection. Direction. The fact that sin now bothers you is itself evidence of new life; dead hearts don't grieve over it.

One honest boundary, so assurance never gets counterfeited: it belongs to people who have actually turned and trusted. A person living in open, settled, unrepentant rebellion while claiming "once saved, always saved" as a hall pass is using the doctrine as an anesthetic, and Scripture tells such a person to examine himself, not reassure himself. Assurance is the inheritance of believers — including stumbling, struggling, getting-back-up believers. If that's you, doubt has no legal standing. Answer it with the anchors.

And when you fall — not if — there is a verse for the morning after, and it is not a threat:

> "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, KJV).

Confession restores fellowship; it doesn't re-purchase salvation. You don't get re-saved every Friday. You come home every Friday, to a Father whose faithfulness — not yours — is the ground of the whole arrangement.

Your move this week: Memorize 1 John 5:13. Write it where you'll see it on the worst morning, not the best one. The next time doubt interviews you, answer it with the verse — in those words — before you answer it with your feelings.

Chapter 11: Living It When It’s Hard



Chapter 11

Nobody warned Jordan that the hallway would be the real exam.

Not the paper kind. The current kind — the stream of bodies and noise and micro-decisions between classes, where faith either becomes legs or stays a Sunday idea. Where the old group chat lights up with the old invitation. Where nobody’s watching and everything’s available. Where being a new creature (chapter 9) collides with being *sixteen*, in *this* school, with *these* people, on a *Thursday*.

Let’s be honest in a way nobody profits from softening: following Jesus will sometimes cost you socially. There will be rooms where your convictions make the air thinner. There will be invitations whose price is your new direction. The Bible never promises believers a frictionless life; it promises them something better — a kept one:

> “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1, KJV).

No condemnation. That verdict doesn’t waver when the hallway gets hard, when you fail publicly, or when you feel the full weight of being different. But notice the second half — assurance runs alongside a *walk*. The saved life has a gait: not after

the flesh — the old gravity of appetite and image and crowd — but after the Spirit. Here's what that walk looks like on an ordinary school day, gathered from the adult wells of Scripture into five practices:

Feed. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2, KJV). Grown things eat. A chapter a day, honestly read, will do more for your stability than a month of spiritual vibes. Small and daily beats big and occasional.

Breathe. Prayer is the saved life inhaling and exhaling — talking to your Father through Jesus, by the Spirit, about everything: thanks, confession, requests, silence. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV) doesn't mean non-stop monologue; it means an open line — the conversation never fully hangs up.

Gather. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25, KJV). Lone-wolf faith starves. You need a Bible-believing church and actual Christians who know your name and your struggles — and they need you, which is the part teenagers underestimate. You are somebody's encouragement-in-waiting.

Confess fast, return fast. 1 John 1:9 is the hallway protocol: when you sin, don't hide it for a season, don't rename it, don't build a case for it. Confess it to God immediately, receive the cleansing He promises, make it right with people where people were wronged, and get up walking in the same direction. The difference between the old life and the new one is not that the new one never falls. It's which way the fallen person turns — and how quickly.

Walk by the Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, KJV). The Holy Spirit is not a doctrine; He's a Person living in you, nudging, convicting, strengthening. Victory over the flesh usually comes not by wrestling it head-on but by walking full in the other direction — a life filled with the Spirit leaves less and less room for the old appetites to breathe.

Jordan's hallway didn't get easier. *He* got steadier — fed, breathing, gathered, quick to confess, walking a direction. The pressure was real. So was the peace in the middle of it. That's the testimony the hallway can actually see, and it's worth more than a hundred arguments.

One chapter left — because a rescue this good was never meant to be a secret you keep.

Your move this week: Pick one practice and install it like you mean it: a chapter a day, a standing prayer time, or actually showing up — known, not anonymous — at a Bible-believing church this week. One. Installed. Then the next.

Chapter 12: Tell Somebody



Chapter 12

Two cups of coffee, going cold in the best way, on steps that had started to feel like Jordan's own geography of grace.

His friend had asked the question sideways, the way teenagers ask the real ones: "You've been… different. Not weird-different. Just — steadier. What happened?" And Jordan discovered, in the half-second before he answered, that everything this book has said was suddenly very simple and very close: he had a story, the story had a Savior in it, and the person across from him was asking to hear it.

That's where salvation always ends up: **out loud, in somebody else's life.**

Before Jesus ascended, He handed His followers their assignment — teach all nations, baptize, teach them to observe everything He commanded (Matthew 28:19–20) — and it has never been reassigned to professionals only. If you're saved, you're sent: not necessarily across an ocean, but across a lunch table, a group chat, a set of church steps. Your Jerusalem is your actual life — your household, your school, your team, your feed.

Why do teenagers who genuinely believe stay silent? Usually one of three fears, and each one has an answer:

"They'll reject me." Some will; Jesus promised His messengers no softer reception than His own. But rejection of the message is not your failure — silence is the only real failure mode. You're responsible for the delivery, not the outcome. God gives the increase; you plant and water (1 Corinthians 3:6). A mail carrier isn't graded on whether people like their mail.

"I don't know enough." You know enough to tell your story. The man born blind, interrogated by experts, had no theology degree — he had one sentence — "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25, KJV). Nobody can cross-examine your own rescue out of you. Start there: what you were, what Jesus did, what changed. That's a gospel presentation with your name on it.

"I'll mess it up." You cannot ruin the gospel by delivering it sincerely. God's Word doesn't return void; the Holy Spirit does the convicting. You're a witness, not the defense attorney for the universe.

And here's the shape of the message itself, in five movements you already know — the same road this book walked: God loves you (John 3:16). Sin separates (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Jesus died and rose (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Repent and believe (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9). You can receive Him now — "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, KJV). Practice saying it in your own words until it lives in your mouth the way it lives in this book.

Do it the way Peter prescribed: with meekness and respect, ready to give a reason for the hope in you (1 Peter 3:15) — the hope, note, that people can *see* before they ever hear explained. The steadiness in the hallway is the sermon; your words, when the question comes, are the explanation of the sermon. Live so they ask. Speak when they do.

One last horizon, because this is where the whole book lands. Eternal life is not only the thing waiting at the end of your story. Jesus defined it as knowing God — "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3, KJV). It starts the day you're saved and runs unbroken into forever: life with God, begun now, at full strength then. The gift Jordan received at a corner, on some ordinary morning, turns out to be a life that death itself can't interrupt.

So — the 3 a.m. question from the introduction. It has an answer now, and the answer is a Person, and the Person is alive, and the gift is free, and the door is open, and *whosoever* includes you.

If you haven’t received Him yet, the next page is the most important one in this book. Read it slowly. Mean it completely. Call on Him.

And then — tell somebody.

Your move this week: Write down the names of three people in your actual life who don’t know Jesus. Pray for them by name every day. Then watch for the sideways question, and when it comes — on the steps, in the chat, wherever — tell your story. Begin in Jerusalem. Begin this week.

A PERSONAL INVITATION: GIVE YOUR LIFE TO JESUS CHRIST

God loves you.

No matter what you have experienced, what mistakes you have made, or what others have said about you, you can come to Him through Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches us that we have all sinned and need God's forgiveness. But God, in His great love and mercy, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins and rise again so that we may receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him.

What does the Bible say?

Romans 3:23 — All have sinned and fall short of God's glory.

Romans 6:23 — Sin brings death, but God offers the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:9–10 — Salvation involves confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised Him from the dead.

Ephesians 2:8–9 — We are saved by God's grace through faith, not by our own good works.

If you desire to turn from sin and place your faith in Jesus Christ, you can pray:

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come before You today recognizing that I am a sinner and that I need Your forgiveness.

I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son, that He died on the cross for my sins, and that You raised Him from the dead.

Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins and turn to You. Please forgive me, cleanse my heart, and make me new.

I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Help me follow You, trust Your Word, and live according to Your will.

Thank You for Your love, Your mercy, and the gift of eternal life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

If you sincerely placed your faith in Jesus Christ, begin growing in your relationship with Him.

1. Read the Bible. Begin with the Gospel of John to learn more about Jesus Christ.
2. Pray every day. Talk to God honestly about your life, struggles, hopes, and gratitude.
3. Find a Bible-believing church. Grow alongside other Christians who can encourage and teach you.
4. Speak with a trusted Christian mentor or pastor. Ask questions and seek guidance as you grow in faith.
5. Follow Jesus daily. Learn His teachings and seek to live according to His Word.

Remember: The prayer itself does not save you. Salvation is God's gift of grace, received through genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

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About the Author

Kimani Upshur, M.Ed. is an educator, author, and publisher, and the founder of Upshur Unlimited, LLC. He writes short, plain-language books that make big ideas clear for ordinary people — for teenagers, children, and adults alike — about faith, family, and everyday life.

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