



January 2014

***Happy New Year! Many blessings to you and your family! The New Year is a wonderful time of reflection on the year that ended and to look ahead to the blank slate of the year to come. As human beings, we were born into a life of sin. We all make mistakes and bad choices. A huge testimony to one's character is how we handle those mistakes and what we do with the lessons we learned.***

***The life of a pastor's daughter is not an easy one. We are born into that role. Navigating our way through growing up in the church under a huge spot light of expectations and judgments can lead to us straying off the path on more than one occasion. Our Heavenly Father, as well as our earthly father and mother, watch, pray, and wait patiently as we work to find our way back.***

***I have had the privilege and honor to enter into the life of a beautiful teenage pastor's daughter in the past few months and learn of her amazing story. These are her words:***

### **Keep Your Head Up and Your Heart Strong**

"My Dad is a pastor. I know you'd expect the pastor's daughter to be perfect. You'd expect she would have a perfect life. But a lot of people don't really see what happens beyond church on Sundays. They have high expectations for a girl who is just like everyone else. Being a pastor's daughter is not as amazing as what most people think. When your Dad is a pastor you're going to have a lot of rules and discipline. It made me feel like I was locked in a cage. Every time I had a little bit of freedom I'd become a wild party animal because I finally got out of my little cage or box. I made mistakes, I became hurt, I needed help, and this is where my story begins.

Eighth grade is where my life started going from perfect to miserable. This was the year I started to get bullied. I was called the worst names you could imagine. Rumors were spread about me that I slept with lots of guys and had many STD's. I was physically bullied as well. A girl in my gym class would squeeze my sides to the point I had bruises every day.

This was the year I started to really fall for guys. I didn't know what I was missing, but I felt empty if I didn't have a boyfriend. I ended up dating a different guy every week.

This year was the year where depression became the only feeling I knew.

I started dressing Emo, listening to songs about suicide and cutting, and before I knew it I was slitting my wrists every night and sometimes at school. Not to the point where it would bleed non-stop but enough to call it a cut. I wanted to die, I felt so low of myself, that I didn't even know who I was anymore.

It became Ninth grade. I was hoping this year would be the best year ever. I was wrong. I still was constantly dating a different guy. The bullying got worse to the point where it got physical. One day I was walking in the hallway and a girl pushed me down on the ground and into a door. It broke my arm and dislocated my shoulder. I had to go to physical therapy for 8 weeks. Along with the bullying, I was sexually harassed every day. People told me to kill myself and that I was worthless. I never believed any compliments that were given to me. My self-esteem level was so low. The school office wouldn't do anything about any of these issues. They didn't even believe me or my parents.

I ended up transferring to a new school. I didn't know anyone but I soon had lots of friends. Nothing really bad happened there so it was a good break for me. It was a great way for me to recover from my depression and the thoughts from the past.

August 2, 2013 is a day I will NEVER forget. That day I gave my life, my heart, and my purity to a guy I hardly even knew. I planned on waiting until marriage but this guy comes along and ruins it. It was the summer before my sophomore year. I met him in downtown Grand Rapids at Swing. We hung out every week and I thought he was perfect, but I hardly even knew him. I guess I fell for his looks and his popularity. My parents went out of town one weekend and my brother stayed over to watch me. My brother said he would be there the whole time and I counted on him, but he ended up leaving. My boyfriend made me, or convinced me to sleep with him. I never wanted to but I couldn't fight him. I said no but just didn't fight enough. It was the worst mistake I have ever made in my life.

I wanted to keep it a secret from my parents. I knew I would be dead if they knew. I went to church the next Sunday with what happened on my mind. The whole sermon was on giving your life and purity away and making big mistakes at a young age. This was a main sign that told me I needed to tell my parents. I could have been pregnant or had an STD for all I knew. I told my dad with another pastor by my side. I was so scared I would get yelled at but surprisingly, my dad was calm. He was hurt but he was calm. I was surprised at his reaction because he usually never solved problems calmly. He was always angry and proud and thought since he is a pastor he knew everything.

I knew that God was really by my side during all of what I went through in 8th-10th grade. There were times that I had lost all hope in God and even stopped believing He was real. Those were the times it was really rough. When I had God on my side everything became better and my life was a lot easier. I stopped cutting and haven't cut in about a year. I haven't been bullied or sexually harassed and it's so much easier to talk to my parents now. They will stop and listen.

I can't just keep looking back at my past and let it bring me down. Sure I've made mistakes but I'm a human being, it's what we do. I have to look at my past as something positive in my life. It shaped who I am today and only made me stronger. I look at my past now as a way I can help others. So as a pastor's daughter, you can pretty much tell I have made mistakes, I've been hurt, I've been judged, but you just have to be yourself. Don't worry what other people think of you because you are beautiful no matter what anyone else thinks. You are perfect in God's eyes. You don't go to church as a pastor's daughter to be judged by the people of the church or to get criticized by the way you act or look or dress — because all that stuff doesn't matter to God as long as you are beautiful on the inside and as long as you are being you."

***What a beautiful testimony of grace and redemption in this courageous pastor's daughters life! What a message that God can make out of the mess Satan tried to make of her life! Her journey is not over yet, but God has filled her with the strength to withstand the storms of life as a teenage pastor's daughter and given her the courage to speak out in order to make a difference in the lives of girls around her.***

Blessings to you!  
Sincerely,

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