

In 2015, I was about to graduate college and attend Officer Candidate School for the United States Marine Corps, when my parents called me and told me that my father had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer. I put my plans on hold so I could be present for him while he battled his sickness. However, shortly after his diagnosis, he took a turn and passed away in September of the same year.

At this point I canceled any future plans I had. Being a young man, not necessarily strong in my relationship with the Lord, I spent the next year and half bouncing from job to job, numbing the pain in any way I could, as I waited and looked for my next step in life. During this time, I was on and off with developing and growing my faith and relationship with the Lord.

In 2017, I was in a good enough head space to start making decisions about my future and ended up enlisting, rather than commissioning into the Marine Corps. I wasn't sure if this was the "correct" direction in life, but knew it was something I'd always wanted to do. I also knew it was my ticket out of the Midwest, + after leaving I told myself I would never be coming back as long as I live. During my enlistment, I continued to bounce back and forth with my relationship with the Lord, until 2019 when I stepped away from it all together because it felt like the Lord was not present. I was on the tail end of my first contract and going up for reenlistment when the woman I was involved with told me it was either "her or the Marine Corps." I denied reenlistment and found myself moving back out to the Midwest, not far from where I had lived before, leaving for the Marines. Still confused and unsure if it was the best move, I got a day job and started grad school. During this time, after avoiding him as long as possible, I met Jason Shaw, a former pastor at Ransom Church, who continually + without fail, invited me to come to his church for a gathering just to check it out. I came up with excuse after excuse to not attend Ransom, but built a relationship with him and his family through the years I worked my job at the gym. Years later after a series of progressively bad choices, life fell apart and I found myself driving through Rock Rapids, Iowa, saw a sign for Ransom Church and attended my first gathering there the next day. From there I slowly built my faith, making plenty of mistakes along the way, but did not stray away or reject him. Things did not get easier for a long time, but eventually, everything, even the bad, turned okay.

In October of 2024, I felt that my relationship with the Lord had progressed far enough to where I felt it would be appropriate to be baptized at Ransom Church in Sioux Falls. I took my dip and haven't looked back at my old life since. Pastor Shaw, the man who led me back to my faith was the individual to baptize me on that day. He continues to mentor me as I continue my walk with the Lord.

My experience made me realize that having a relationship with the Lord and working on that relationship is the best thing I can do in my life. The Lord loved me and kept me safe when I wanted nothing to do with Him. If you're currently facing any similar challenges, lean into Him and His teachings +listen to what He is trying to tell you. God is always there for you and will give you exactly what you need. It might not look like what you want or make sense in the moment, but the Lord will always give you what you need.

**grief +
depression.**