

Discover God's Plan for You and Your Unborn Child

# Unexpected

Henry Jernigan

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This book is dedicated to my father, William R. Jernigan (1928 - 2002) – the best surgeon who ever lived. His passion for life and love for others in the midst of adversity will always be my example.

Special thanks humbly go out to...

My God and Creator, who every day authors my incredible journey. Thank You for helping me to believe in what I can't see. I couldn't do it without You.

Elizabeth, my wife, best friend, and dream come true. Not only have you lived this book with me, your encouragement has been its coauthor. You make me want to be a better man, and for you I will always be grateful to God.

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# Introduction

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## Keeping Life in Perspective

One thing I've learned about life is that it's not always easy to keep things in perspective. One moment life is in perspective and the next—whack, life is out of perspective.

Years ago, a friend of mine had a bunch of people over to his house. I was one of those people, and for some reason or another, we all ended up watching *The Little Mermaid*. Now, I'd like to clarify that I didn't go to my friend's house with the sole anticipation of watching *The Little Mermaid*. It wasn't a "Little Mermaid" party. But we watched it, and for that I am not ashamed. During the movie, my friend noticed that every time Ariel (the mermaid) came out of the water, her hair was dry. He would say something like, "Look at her! She just came out of the water and her hair is dry!" Then it would happen again and he'd continue, "Look! There she is again! Out of the water and her hair is dry. That's so unrealistic!" Finally I looked at him and said, "Dude – the fish are talking! If you don't have a problem with the fact that the fish are talking then you shouldn't be bothered by

**...when life's not in perspective, we have a tendency to do things we wouldn't normally do. We make decisions we wouldn't normally make...**

the fact that her hair is dry when she comes out of the water.” My friend needed a little perspective.

Like my friend, I once needed perspective, too. I was on a flight from Nashville to Houston and there was a little boy in front of me who was experiencing an unexpected sugar rush. He began using his seat as a bouncy seat. With annoying precision, he’d propel his seat back and forth, making it extremely difficult to read the enthralling stories found in my airline magazine. As I contemplated how I could slip some Benadryl into his sippy cup, he grabbed his little airline pillow and proceeded to flail it back and forth over his head placing the pillow just inches from my nose over and over with machine-like accuracy.

At this moment in time, my life was not in perspective – and when life is not in perspective, we have a tendency to do things we wouldn’t normally do. We make decisions we normally wouldn’t make, or we try to fix things we consider to be problems. And, that’s exactly what I did in this situation. In one quick moment of crazy impulse, and to the shock of both of us, I reached up and took the little boy’s pillow.

Now, I didn’t get on the plane that day looking to pick a fight with a four-year-old, but I allowed the circumstances in front of me to get life out of perspective, and I wound up doing something I wouldn’t normally do to fix the problem. It didn’t fix the problem, by the way.

Other times, circumstances may work to help us put life back into perspective. An illness, a wreck, the death of a friend or family member – and all of a sudden, the gift of

life and the importance of family, friends, and relationships are replanted in our hearts and minds. Not long ago, I learned that my cholesterol was high. This not only put life into perspective for me, but food, fat, and the need to eat healthy – which is basically all food without taste...except salmon. But, the one thing that has put life in perspective for me more than anything else has been my son, Pierce, who was born in 2009.

In and through his life, I've learned three simple, yet profound truths I'd like to share with you. I believe they'll give meaning to your circumstances. I believe they'll give purpose to your situation. I believe they'll place the life of your unborn baby "in perspective." They'll add focus and clarity to a decision you are about to make that will literally affect the rest of your life.

Truth #1



*God Has a Plan*

## What you see may not be true...

I grew up with three dads. Not three biological dads – that would be silly. I grew up with a biological dad and two brothers who were much older than me. By the time I was six, both brothers had left the house and were well on their way to lengthy productive careers as college students – attending a total of six universities on two continents in twelve years. So, our family dynamic shifted, and I became an only child which was rather schizophrenic – but nothing a little therapy and medication couldn't handle.

Growing up in a house that consisted of three male authority figures fostered with it my personal interest and genuine love for gullibility; for I quickly learned to believe most everything I was told. My oldest brother had fun with this and nurtured my innocence for his own personal amusement by convincing me he had great magical powers and would display his abilities right before my eyes.

A favorite trick of his was to notify me of the exact moment a traffic light would turn green. I would watch in utter amazement as he would give me a 3-2-1 countdown to the exact second our light would change. Of course, my five year old brain had not yet grasped the concept of watching for the other side of the traffic light to turn yellow – a dead giveaway that the light facing us was about to turn green.

Another illusory technique mastered by my brother was the unique ability to foretell what was about to happen

in a TV show or movie. We were fortunate enough to have cable TV back in 1970, which offered up a staggering 13 channels to choose from (including your locals) and quality programs such as *Star Trek*, *The Flying Nun*, and *Petticoat Junction*. Movie themes ranged from “space travel” to normal harmless animals becoming 10 stories tall due to some form of radiation exposure – and boy, were they mad. My brother would say, “You see that girl in the dark alley with the flash light that won’t work?” to which I would respond with an enthusiastic “Yeah?!” He’d continue, “She’s about to be eaten by a giant spider that’s going to come around the corner.” And it would happen. And I’d be like, “Whoa!” Of course, my five year old brain had not yet grasped the concept of the movie being a re-run, or that my brother had already seen the movie twice.

Looking back though there was something in me that desperately wanted to believe that he could do these things – that he could foresee what was going to happen. Maybe I thought that if he could look into the future, then everything would be okay – then maybe I could rest and feel secure that everything was taken care of. But, what I could see with my own eyes was not true. How odd is that?

## **What you can't see may be true...**

On the flipside is the fact that some things you can't see *are* true. For instance, you can't see your baby right now (unless you've had an ultrasound), but his or her life is truth. It's a truth that may be staring you in the face right

now. It's a truth you may not know how to handle. But, how you handle this truth will depend on your perception of it.

**The truth is God doesn't perceive your pregnancy to be a problem. God doesn't perceive your baby to be a problem.**

For example, if you perceive your pregnancy to be a problem, then you may consider terminating your pregnancy in order to fix the problem. Maybe your pregnancy wasn't planned. Possibly, it happened against your will. Perhaps,

you've learned that your baby is going to be born with Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, or some other "issue" – and you're worried about its "quality of life." You're worried about your quality of life. Whatever the reason, you're scared and afraid of the future – what you can't see. I know. I've been there.

Now, before I continue, I want you to know I'm not writing this book to scare you out of an abortion – though I think abortion is a very scary thing. I'm writing it so that you'll take a moment to consider a simple, yet very powerful truth. A truth you can't see. A truth that has the power to replace the worry, doubt, and fear that's in your heart – so don't overlook it. Are you ready? Here it is.

***God has a plan and purpose for you and your baby – regardless of your circumstances.***

The truth is God doesn't perceive your pregnancy to be a problem. God doesn't perceive your *baby* to be a problem. To God, there is no problem. And, if there's

no problem – then there’s nothing to fix.

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I set you apart...  
(Jeremiah 1:5)*

If you choose to terminate your pregnancy, then you’re trying to fix a problem based on what *you see*.

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for  
and certain of what we do not see.  
Hebrews 11:1*

I’m asking you to reach down into your heart and believe in what you can’t see – that there is no problem, and that God truly has plans for your baby even though you can’t see that right now.

*For I know the plans I have for you, plans to  
prosper you and not to harm you, plans to  
give you hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11*

It wasn’t that long ago that I chose to reach down into my own heart and believe in what I couldn’t see. It was a choice. It wasn’t easy. It didn’t really make sense. But, I did it. I chose to believe that God had a plan for my son, regardless of his circumstances...

*When you go through deep waters [and great trouble], I will be  
with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not  
drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you  
will not be burned up – the flames will not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God, your God, the Holy One of  
Israel, your Savior.  
(Isaiah 43:2-3, NLT, my words added for emphasis)*

## You can believe...

Elizabeth and I sat in a waiting room just outside our doctor's office. An ultrasound had confirmed the doctor's concern that something was wrong with our unborn baby. We were waiting to find out how "wrong" things were. It had only been two days since we'd been in the same office for a seemingly innocent test – a test that would forever change the course of our lives. But looking back on it, it wasn't the "test" that changed our lives. Our lives had changed months before. We were just now learning the truth.

**...the one issue that jumped out at me above all the others was when our doctor looked at me in the eye and said, "You know, your son will probably never walk."**

As Elizabeth and I waited to hear from our doctor, I had already conjured up many possible scenarios, and none of them were appealing. Give my brain something to worry about and some caffeine, and it can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. Thoughts like –

*"I'm scared. What's going to happen? I don't know if I can do this? What could be so wrong this early? Is my baby going to live or die? Why is this happening to me? Who invented foamy soap, and why?"*

Finally, our doctor came out of his office and said, "Well, you're going to have a boy."

"Okay," I responded. So far so good. "And...?"

"And I'm sorry, but your boy has Spina Bifida."

"Spina what?" I asked. I didn't know what it meant, but I knew it didn't sound good either.

He continued, and for the next several minutes his words painted a painful picture of reality, confusion, and unknowns. It was like staring close up at an impressionistic painting, except it hurt real deep – and it wasn't going away.

Basically, our baby's spine failed to close before we knew we were pregnant. His spinal cord would be exposed the duration of the pregnancy greatly affecting its development. And since the spinal cord is the neurological control center for the entire body, it is associated with most all bodily function, including breathing, sleeping, swallowing, kidneys, bladder, going to the bathroom, and so much more. But, the one issue that jumped out at me above all the others was when our doctor looked me in the eyes and said, "You know, your son will probably never walk." I had no response. I mean, how do you process that?

"But, there is an option," he continued.

"*Really?!?*" I exclaimed silently to myself. A ray of hope! My heart leaped. An out. Something to fix the problem? He chose his words carefully.

"If it's something you wish to consider, there is the option of terminating your pregnancy. I'm not advocating you do that, but we can have it arranged should you wish to pursue it." Silence.

Over the course of the next several months, I looked long and hard at the impressionistic painting that had been given to me. I didn't ask for it. I didn't deserve it. But, there it was. It was there when I woke up in the morning and there when I went to bed at night. It was in my dreams. And no matter how much I prayed, questioned, or analyzed, it wouldn't come into focus. It

**Every day held with it a choice I could make. I could throw away the painting that was given me and be done with it (theoretically), or I could choose to keep my painting...**

wouldn't go away.

Life for me was not in perspective, and every day held with it an opportunity to take care of my circumstances. Every day held with it a choice I could make. I could throw away the painting that was given me and be done with it (theoretically), or I could

choose to keep my painting and believe it was a work of art with purpose and meaning – even if I didn't totally understand it.

Elizabeth and I made our choice early on in the doctor's office. We chose to keep the painting. We chose to believe that the life inside of her was not a mistake. We chose to believe that God had a plan and purpose for our little boy. We chose to believe in what we couldn't see – that God was able to do things beyond our comprehension. As with my brother when I was five years old, I wanted to believe God could foresee what was going to happen, that "in Him" all things were possible, and in Him everything would be okay.

In the movie *The Polar Express*, a young boy goes to sleep on Christmas Eve having doubts about Santa Claus. He no longer knows whether or not to believe. All of a sudden, he's awakened by a train that pulls up and stops right in front of his house. He runs outside to inspect the commotion and learns it's headed for the North Pole. Reluctantly, he gets on board and discovers lots of other children along for the ride. The journey

contains lots of peaks, valleys, and adventures, but they finally arrive at the North Pole. The children soon congregate with thousands of elves at the center of the city to celebrate Christmas and witness Santa's Christmas Eve departure. As the reindeer are pulled together and harnessed to Santa's sleigh, their sleigh bells ring out loud, but the young boy can't hear them. Soon, Santa makes his grand entrance, but the young boy can't see him because the crowd is blocking his view. All of a sudden, a sleigh bell breaks from the sleigh and rolls to the boy's feet. He picks it up and shakes it, but hears nothing. It doesn't make a sound. Suddenly, he realizes that only those who truly believe can hear the bells. Only those who truly believe can experience the joy and spirit of Christmas. Finally the little boy's heart agrees with everything he's seen and he whispers, "I believe." At that very moment, he begins to hear the bells. At that moment, everything is clear. Do you believe? You can.

## Focusing on the truth...

Pierce was born on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and he looked just like me. I apologized to Elizabeth.

He had two immediate surgeries, one to repair the hole in his back, and the other to place a shunt in his head to drain his spinal fluid – something his body can't do on its own. The initial days of Pierce's life were spent in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in Nashville. After two weeks, we were able to go home.

Arriving at home was kind of a starting point for me. I had about five months to get ready for Pierce's arrival. Five months to laugh, cry, question, argue, mourn, and celebrate. I was kind of schizophrenic. But I had resolved in my heart that God had a plan in all of this and, for me, coming home was the beginning of finding out what it was.

**Your dad's been diagnosed with lung cancer. It's very aggressive and we need to make some decisions.**

Finding yourself at home with an infant for the very first time is kind of like your first day in school – without a teacher. We put Pierce on our bed and just kind of looked at him. We looked at each other, and then we looked at him. This went on for several minutes till the phone rang. It was my mom. My mom and dad had been to Nashville for Pierce's birth, but had since gone home. I answered and said, "Hey, I was about to call you. We're home! They let us out of the hospital today."

"That's great," my mom replied, "but I need to tell you something."

"Okay," I said. She continued, "Your dad's been diagnosed with lung cancer. It's very aggressive and we need to make some decisions." Silence.

Over the course of the next several months, Pierce had two more surgeries. In between surgeries, and whenever possible, we made the trip up to my parent's home in Kentucky to visit. And two months to the day we brought Pierce home from the hospital – my dad died.

Sometime in the middle all of that—in between the cancer, Spina Bifida, and baby poop—Elizabeth and I found ourselves one day in our kitchen hugging, crying, and just kind of holding onto each other for emotional support. I said, “You know that part in the Bible where God says that He won’t give you more than you can handle – you know that part?” And she said, “Yes.” I continued, “I wonder if we’re close to that ‘more than you can handle’ because it really feels like it.”

Maybe, you feel like that right now. Maybe you feel like I did that day in the kitchen with my wife. Overwhelmed. It’s there when you wake up in the morning and it’s there when you go to bed at night. It’s scary and unclear and a voice keeps whispering in your ear that “you can fix the problem.” It may whisper, “I’m too young to be a mommy,” “I don’t deserve this,” or “I can’t do this on my own.”

Don’t listen to that voice. It’s telling you lies. Let me give you the truth.

Lie: “You can fix the problem.”

Truth: Again, there is no problem. God has a plan and purpose for your child.

Lie: “I’m too young to be a mommy.”

Truth: No, you’re not. If you were too young, there would not be a baby inside of you. You can be a remarkable parent, but that’s another choice for you to make.

Lie: “I don’t deserve this.”

Truth: Actually, that statement is true. You don’t deserve

it. Life is a gift from God and it's not reserved for those who "deserve" it. Don't throw away the gift God's given you.

Lie: "I can't do this on my own."

Truth: Another true statement. You can't. But, there's a God in heaven who can help you and He's placed you among a group of people in the form of a "Pregnancy Center" or church who desperately want to help. Let them. They will hold your hand through the process.

I sometimes think God created pregnancies to last nine months just to give us some of the time we need to figure things out—as opposed to ten days which would freak everyone out.

Focusing on the truth puts life in perspective. Focusing on the truth will place the life of your baby in perspective. Simply focus on the truth and your circumstances will begin to lose their significance. Before Pierce was born, my biggest concern was the thought of him not being able to walk. Your biggest concern may simply be that you're pregnant. Two years after he was born, his life and the whole "walking" thing was put into complete perspective for me through an experience that is still emotional for me to even think about.

## The quality of life...

I was up early with Pierce one Saturday morning so Elizabeth could get some sleep. I was going through the

“normal” routine of changing his diaper, doing therapy, and getting breakfast ready when all of a sudden Pierce’s demeanor began to change. It was subtle at first, but his behavior went from happy to irritable to very fussy in a few short minutes. I’m certainly not above such mood swings myself, so initially I didn’t give it much thought. Soon after, however, I could just tell something wasn’t quite right and it was getting worse, so I knew we needed to get him to the hospital. I woke Elizabeth up and told her to get ready, that we were headed to the Emergency Room. As she quickly dressed, Pierce’s demeanor continued to change. He had become lethargic and almost unresponsive. I had no idea what was going on. One moment, life is in perspective, and the next...

**For the next two minutes I thought he was dying in my arms.**

About ten minutes had passed from the point of “I need to do something” to the point of putting him in his car seat for our trip to the hospital. As I began to place him in his seat, Pierce closed his eyes, his head slumped over, and his body went limp. For the next two minutes I thought he was dying in my arms. Unless you’ve been through a similar experience, I can’t describe what that felt like.

I began to pray. I prayed hard and out loud. And, though I don’t remember exactly what I said, it went something like, “Oh God, don’t take him! Please don’t take him! Don’t take him, don’t take him, don’t take him! Let him live! Please, let him live! Let him live!”

Pierce was still unconscious when we arrived at the

emergency room. A medical team met us at the entrance and quickly took him in. By the time I got inside, Pierce was hooked up to all of the medical equipment that whistles and beeps as the team of 12 doctors and nurses (I know because I counted) ran tests and tried to diagnose the problem. I continued to pray. “God, let him live. Let Pierce live!” We soon learned that Pierce was in a “low blood sugar” coma due to circumstances related to his Spina Bifida. Once diagnosed, the doctors began to pump glucose into his IV and I watched with tears in my eyes as my son slowly came back to life. “Thank you, God. Thank you, God. Thank you, God!” was all I could pray.

The next four nights for us were spent at Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital. It was not our first overnight stay at Vanderbilt (which we affectionately refer to as our time-share), nor would it be our last. But, it was a pivotal moment for me as I continued to search and pray for God’s plan and purpose for Pierce. It was during this time that I started gaining perspective about Pierce’s life. It was during this time my abstract painting began to come into focus.

As I continued to replay the video in my head of that day’s events – of Pierce collapsing in my arms, it occurred to me that the one thing I was not praying for at that moment was for him to walk. At the moment I believed he was dying, walking meant nothing to me. I could have cared less. The only thing I was praying for was for him to live.

That experience had such a profound impact on me that I began to pray every day for Pierce to live. I began to

pray for his life to have joy and purpose. I began to pray for his life to be fulfilling, meaningful, and full of passion. Every day I pray for Pierce to live – and sometimes... sometimes I pray for him to walk.

**...there's a life inside of you right now and it's going to die someday. The question is how and why?**

In the movie Braveheart, William Wallace (played by Mel Gibson) is quoted as saying, "We all end up dead. The question is how and why. Every man dies, not every man really lives." Malcolm Wallace adds, "Your heart is free. Have you the courage to follow it?"

The truth is, there's a life inside of you right now and it's going to die someday. The question is how and why? The question is will the life inside of you truly live? Will it have a shot at discovering the incredible plan and purpose God has for it?

Your heart is free. Have you the courage to follow it?

Truth #2



*You Can Trust Him*

## Negotiating the unknown...

I was flying home one day from a speaking engagement in Texas. A pregnancy center outside of Houston had asked me to speak at their banquet and to share my experiences about Pierce and his life. As the plane made a sharp banking turn into its final approach before landing, a little turbulence created some unexpected bumps and dips in the flight. Seated in front of me was a pilot (thankfully, not *the* pilot) who flew for the airline. I leaned forward and asked if he ever critiqued other pilots while he was seated in the back. I'll never forget his response. He said, "Nah. It's hard to tell what's really going on from back here."

That's the way I feel as a parent sometimes. I can't always tell what's going on. Before Pierce was born, a friend who had two children gave me some advice. "If your baby's crying," she said, "it's either hungry, wet, or hurting."

"That's comforting," I thought. "At least I have a one in three shot of getting things right."

Other times, I've found myself completely winging it – like the time I picked Pierce up from his school down by Vanderbilt. Pierce was two at the time (did I mention he was smart?), and we were headed home on our daily commute which lasted on average about 35 minutes. Not two blocks from the school, I heard a familiar noise that came from his car seat. It was the noise that most always preceded him throwing up. Once the noise is heard, I have exactly 1½ seconds to react, grab a towel,

**Such instances have seasoned our Tahoe with the unique scent that reminds me of a Southwest Airlines jet—the smell of leather with a hint of coffee and about twenty other smells I can’t readily identify.**

a bucket, or carpet cleaner (I recommend “Resolve” for its fresh scent). Anyway, since I was driving, all I could do was brace myself for what I knew was about to happen. And, it did happen. Again. Again. And again. As Pierce

blanketed the back of the driver’s seat four times with the unrelenting pressure of a fire hose, all I could do was hunker down and wait for him to run out of ammo. Finally, it stopped and I immediately pulled into a parking lot to assess the damage. (Such instances have seasoned our Tahoe with the unique scent that reminds me of a Southwest Airlines jet – the smell of leather with a hint of coffee and about twenty other smells I can’t readily identify.) Pierce looked at me and with a soft timid voice said, “I threw up.”

“Really?” I responded. “I didn’t notice.”

No book or training prepares you for moments like this. You just have to hop on the bike and start pedaling. So I reached for the little container of baby wipes we keep in the Tahoe for such emergencies. It contained a wipe. One wipe. So, I took off my shirt (I had two on), wiped down his arms, and tucked it in and around the puddle he was sitting in. Then I took my solitary wipe and used it on his face and hands and we began our long journey home. Once home, I took Pierce into our bathroom and started the water in the bathtub. I laid him down on the bathroom floor and began to peel the toxic waste, dis-

guised as clothes, from his body. I placed them on top of other dirty clothes on the floor and resolved to deal with it later. Ironically, Pierce's diaper was the only clean thing he had on. After taking it off, I picked Pierce up and began to place him in the tub. About two feet shy of the water, Pierce began to pee. "This isn't happening," I thought. There was no time to react and the potty was too far away, so I did the only thing I knew to do. I placed him over the already contaminated pile on the floor and let him do his business in the clothes. Now I have an even more tainted heap of clothes to deal with. Pierce looked at me and grinned. I was beginning to think he had plotted the whole thing. After he finished, I began the trek back to the tub. We had gotten as far as the two foot line again, when Pierce now began to poop. Without hesitating, I knew exactly what to do. I headed back to the pile of clothes. After he finished, again, I cleaned him up and we headed back to the tub. This time we made it! As Pierce played in the tub, I stared at the soiled mound on the floor. Every substance from every bodily exit was on those clothes. But, it was contained, and clean-up efforts could soon begin.

Sometimes life is like that. It throws you curves. Things happen that you don't plan. Circumstances change, and no matter how quickly you attempt to adapt or adjust, it just keeps coming. The world is throwing up on you and all you have is a baby wipe.

## Do you trust Me?

When Pierce was just 2 ½ years old, we had the exhilarating

rating experience of taking him to the hospital in an ambulance – a sixteen mile ride that was the beginning of a six-week stay at Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital in Nashville. That, folks, can be categorized as “something not planned.”

Now, I’m not getting into all of the details of our lengthy stay, but will suffice to say that Pierce was a sick little boy with numerous issues involving his breathing, some of which were potentially neurological. Others, our doctors at Vanderbilt simply couldn’t figure out.

About halfway through our stay at Vanderbilt (a top 10 children’s hospital in the country, I might add), Pierce’s condition was getting worse, his doctors could not diagnose the problem, and it was becoming painfully obvious that he might not be with us for long. This created within me the desire to ask God some questions – most of which were focused on wanting to know “why this was happening.” Again, whether or not Pierce walked meant nothing to me at this moment. I wanted him to live, and if he didn’t, I wanted to know why.

**This created in me the desire to ask God some questions - most of which were focused on wanting to know why this was happening.**

In the midst of my questioning just outside our hospital room, it all of a sudden occurred to me that God knew what was wrong with Pierce. The doctors at Vanderbilt didn’t know, but God did.

At that moment, I believe God asked me a question (not

audibly, mind you, for that would have awakened most of those sleeping in the hospital – but, undeniably in my heart). What he asked was, “Henry, who would you rather know what’s wrong with Pierce, me or Vanderbilt?”

**“Well, it sounds like a squirrel to me, but I’m going to say Jesus!”**

Now, if someone asked me that question in church, I would immediately say “God” – because that’s what you do when you’re in church. You give a church answer.

Kind of like the class of 5-year-olds when asked by their Sunday School teacher to name an animal that has a big bushy tail and stores nuts in the winter. At first, no one raises their hand. The teacher presses, “Oh, come now. You’re a smart class. What’s a little furry animal with a big bushy tail and stores nuts in the winter?” Finally, a little boy in the back of the room raises his hand. The teacher says, “Yes, Johnny?” and Johnny says, “Well, it sounds like a squirrel to me, but I’m going to say Jesus!”

That is a church answer. I couldn’t give God a “church answer.” And, I couldn’t honestly tell God at that moment that I preferred Him over the doctors at Vanderbilt. That took several days of contemplation. Finally, after three or four days (I didn’t write it down) I told God as best I could with all of my heart that I’d rather He know what was wrong with Pierce. Though I still wanted something physical to diagnose and fix Pierce, I would rather He know.

At that very moment, I believe God asked me something else (which was kind of scary because this was almost

turning into a conversation). He said, “Henry, I hold Pierce in the palm of my hand. Do you trust me?” My response was, “Yes.” Again, that was a “churchy” answer, but I felt pretty confident in saying it.

I then visualized God lowering His hand with Pierce in it. The lowering of God’s hand was symbolic of Pierce’s physical health. The lower God allowed Pierce to go, the sicker he became...even to the point of dying. “Do you trust me now?” God lowered His hand again. “How about now?” Lower. “What if Pierce dies Henry?” Lower. “What if I take Pierce home to be with me?” Lower. “Do you trust me?” “Do you trust Me?”

You know what? More than I did.

**What I do know is that God is bigger than any of your circumstances, and you can trust Him with your unborn baby. Believe that! It’s truth.**

You know what else? There is a life inside of you right now, and I can’t even begin to tell you how things will turn out. I can’t promise anything. I don’t know how much money you make. I don’t

know what kind of insurance you have – or don’t have. I don’t know how old you are, what kind of family you come from, if you’re married or unmarried, that your baby is going to be born with or without something, or blah, blah, blah.

What I *do* know is that God is bigger than any of your circumstances, and you can trust Him with your unborn baby. Believe that! It’s truth.

## Oh, the pressure of a name...

One day not too long ago – when I was four – I was picked up at the local preschool by my mom, who was the designated carpool driver for the week. She did not pick us up in a minivan. Minivans had not yet been invented, but her Buick could seat twelve of us comfortably. That’s because we were not required to sit in a physical seat of any kind. Floorboards, transmission humps, and the platform up under the rear windshield all did just fine. As a matter of fact, the only reason parents of more than one need a minivan nowadays is that children have to sit in their car seats, and this requires a physical seat. Standing in your parent’s lap with both hands on the steering wheel is no longer acceptable. Well, I was in the front seat – a bench seat that measured ten feet across and was crafted from the finest vinyl available. It was also black and could be used to fry eggs in the afternoon for the two months following the fourth of July.

My grandparents (Lala and Daddy Lem) were coming to visit and I had a keen interest in whether or not they had arrived. Calling my grandmother “Lala” was a peculiar ritual that began with my oldest brother when he was just learning to talk. Everyone would gather round and try to get my brother to say “grandma.” But, instead, he would defiantly say “Lala.” This seemed cute at the time, so the name stuck for generations to come and was completely normal to me. So, when I asked my mom if “Lala and Daddy Lem” had arrived – I was certainly not prepared for the ridicule and scorn I was about to receive from Ginny, a sanguine little friend of mine who was right

full of conversation. Ginny looked at me with a mocking grin and said, “Lala? You call your grandmother Lala? Why, that is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard in my entire life!” Actually, I don’t remember if she used the word “ridiculous” at age five, but you get the idea. She continued. “How silly to call your grandma Lala. Nobody calls their grandma Lala. That’s just plain silly!” I was silent and devastated. It was perhaps the first time I had ever been humiliated in public, much less at the expense of my “Lala.” I didn’t know what to do. My repertoire of comeback lines was somewhat limited at age five. So, I did the only thing I knew how. I returned the question and asked, “Well, what do you call your grandmother?” To which she responded, “Well, I call my grandmother GEBU!”

Before Pierce was born, Elizabeth and I had to undergo the process of picking a name. We considered popular names, biblical names, and family names – Gebu. We even considered “name blending” – a curious tradition practiced by relatives on my mother’s side whereby two parents combine their names to get the name of their child. For instance, my grandmother’s name was “Wilmyr” – the byproduct of her parents, William and Myrtle. Likewise, my Uncle Phil and Aunt Donna begot my cousin “Phonna” – and so on. Had we chosen “name blending,” Pierce would have been called “Henebeth” or “Elizenry” – neither of which would have promoted healthy self-esteem.

Elizabeth and I finally decided upon “William Pierce” for a name because both “William” and “Pierce” were unblended names in our families. However, we didn’t learn of the “true” meaning behind Pierce’s name till a minister friend e-mailed us the following info (from a book he

had) one month before Pierce was born.

### WILLIAM

Inherent Meaning: Resolute Protector

Spiritual Connotation: Noble Spirit

Supporting Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:33

“**Ye shall walk** in all the ways which the Lord God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.”

### PIERCE

Inherent Meaning: Rock or Stone

Spiritual Connotation: Strong in Spirit

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 18:32-33

“It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. **He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet**, and setteth me upon my high places.”

The fact that each scripture attached to Pierce’s first and middle name referred to “walking” just blew me away. From that moment, I began to believe God was bigger than my circumstances. From that moment I

began to believe, not just in my head, but also in my heart, I could trust Him. From that moment, as in *The Polar Express*, I began to hear the bells.

**The very God who has a plan and purpose for your baby has a plan and purpose for you, too.**

Will Pierce ever walk? I hope so, but the truth is I don’t know. But do you know what I *do* know? I can trust God...and you can too. You can trust Him with your baby. You can trust God with your circumstances. And

you can trust Him with your heart. The very God who has a plan and purpose for your baby has a plan and purpose for you, too. You're part of the story in all of this, which leads me to the third truth I want you to consider.

Truth #3



*God Loves You*

## Free will...

Of all the truths I've mentioned thus far, this is the big one. And, I've saved it for last because I want to give it emphasis. I want to give it importance because actually, it's the foundation of the other two. If you don't know that God loves you, it will be hard to believe that He has a plan for you. If you don't know that God loves you, you're not going to buy into the fact that you can trust Him. But, it's true. The God of the Universe that keeps the planets in line and makes your heart beat – He loves you. Not just your unborn baby. You.

**He loves you  
so much that  
He took the  
incredible risk  
of giving you  
free will...**

And here's the kicker. He loves you so much that He took the incredible risk of giving you free will – that is, the freedom and ability to make your own decisions in life. Now, obviously, there are factors that influence your decisions, but at the bare minimum all of us at least have the freedom to choose how we act, think, and feel.

Fortunately, most decisions we make in life leave room for error. God gives us opportunities to make decisions every day and if we mess up there are no major consequences and no one gets hurt. For example, if Elizabeth asks me if I want peas or corn with dinner, I get to make that decision without the fear of regret. If I choose corn and Elizabeth really wants peas – okay, peas. No one got hurt. Other entry level decisions may include:

- Manicure or pedicure?

- Will I change the oil in my car at 3,000 miles or 5,000 miles?
- White or Dark chocolate?

Other decisions that take things up a notch or two can be a bit more challenging and have even more potential to affect our lives. For example, what we eat and how we exercise may not only affect how we feel on a daily basis, but will more than likely determine how long we live. When I was growing up, my family had a little miniature Schnauzer named Wendy, who over a period of time became not so miniature. My mom was the mastermind behind our dog's weight issue feeding her a consistent diet of popcorn and ice cream. Dad and I suggested to mom on many occasions that such a diet would lead to Wendy's early demise, to which my mom would respond, "Well, at least she'll die happy." Wendy lived 14 years (that's 98 in doggy years), and my mom was right. She died happy.

Finally, we enter into the arena of choices that may have a great impact and even change the trajectory of our lives. Who I date, who I marry? Sexual choices before and after marriage. Career choices. Choices that can have long-term effects regarding our time, money, family, and relationships. And, in certain extreme cases, our decisions may even decide whether or not we live or die – like the man who showed up at the emergency room one night with severe abdominal pain. This is a true story. I know because my dad was the doctor who was called in at 3am to figure out what this man's problem was. As my dad examined the man, he began to ask routine questions like "what time did the pain happen?" The man replied, "About 12:00 last night." My dad

asked, “Was the pain sudden or gradual?” The man said, “Sudden...happened just like that.” As my dad continued to examine the patient, he noticed what appeared to be a cigarette burn right where the pain was. But, as he got closer to the wound with an examining light and magnifying glass, he discovered that it wasn’t a cigarette burn, but rather a bullet hole. The man had been shot – which would explain “SUDDEN” pain. Stub your toe – gradual pain. Bullet – SUDDEN! My dad looked up at his

**From birth, we are not only given the freedom to choose how we act, think, and feel, but also the liberty to screw it all up with wrong choices.**

patient and asked, “Sir, have you been shot?” He replied, “Yes.” My dad asked, “When were you shot?” The man said, “About 12:00 last night.” My dad responded, “Why didn’t you tell me that you’d been shot?” The man retorted, “You didn’t ask.”

This extreme case of idiocy illustrates a man who was not making decisions in favor of preserving his life. However, the truth is every one of us is capable of making dumb decisions on any given day, no matter how smart we are or think we are. From birth, we are not only given the freedom to choose how we act, think, and feel, but also the liberty to screw it all up with wrong choices. How warped is that? How *scary* is that?

## Dumb as sheep...

It’s not just about education either. Some of the smartest, most educated people in the world are inherently

dumb. As my grandfather used to say, “They may have book learning, but they don’t have much sense.” Take politicians for example. In my former state of Tennessee, it is against the law to use a lasso to catch a fish; it is illegal to gather and consume road kill; it is illegal to drive while you are asleep; and it’s against the law to shoot any game other than whales from a moving vehicle. Dude – there are no whales in the state of Tennessee! Mr. Senator who voted for this legislation – you scare me.

Now, the Bible is somewhat tactful when it refers to man’s ability to make wrong choices in life. Rather than come right out and call us dumb or stupid, it chooses to illustrate the point by providing story after story of people in history who “blew it” along with the detailed illustrations of their consequences. The Bible also refers to us a lot as sheep, and sheep are inherently dumb. It says, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).”* It also says, *“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place (Jeremiah 50:6).”*

Seems to me that when you read about sheep in the Bible, they are usually lost or astray. And this reaches outside the realm of the Bible, for I’ve noticed other lost sheep in literary history, as well. Just ask Little Bo Peep.

Now, I’m not a sheep farmer. I’ve not spent a whole lot of time around them so I’m not privy to their ways. But it is my understanding that “getting lost” is something

sheep are good at. It has also occurred to me that once a sheep is lost – it doesn't know it. A sheep doesn't wander over a hill and suddenly realize it's lost. No. What probably happens is a sheep looks up and sees a neighboring pasture with greener grass. He says something like, "Ooh, pretty!" and begins to meander in that direction. As he continues, another sheep looks up from his lunch and asks, "I wonder where Bob is going?" He then begins to follow Bob, others do the same, and before you know it – the whole herd is lost. At this point, every sheep is in danger because, according to the food chain, sheep are like ice cream. Everything eats sheep. Hummingbirds eat sheep.

## Life comes at you fast...

My favorite sheep story "ever" is about a guy named David who, ironically, tended sheep when he was young. If you've ever heard of the story of David and Goliath – that's the guy I'm talking about. He was a poet, musician, and mighty warrior who eventually be-

**This was a baby that was unplanned, unwanted, and was potentially going to create major problems for both consenting parties.**

came King over the nation of Israel – not a small task. He was popular, brave, passionate, strong, handsome – and very close to God. He was also married, and in a short period of time, made several dumb "sheep" decisions that rocked his world and forever changed the trajectory of his life.

As the story goes, David was up late one night walking around the roof of his palace, when he saw a beautiful girl bathing whose name was Bathsheba. (Can it not get any more ironic that the **bathing** girl's name was **Bathsheba**?) Anyway, David was the King, which carries with it a fair amount of influence. In other words, he could pretty much have anything he wanted and in this case he wanted Bathsheba. Did I mention he was married? As it turned out, Bathsheba was married, too – to a guy named Uriah, who happened to be out fighting a war on behalf of David and Israel. This information, however, didn't hinder David's desire for Bathsheba, and he sent for her. Long story short – she came to him, they slept together, and then she got pregnant.

This presented a problem. This was a baby that was unplanned, unwanted, and was potentially going to create major problems for both consenting parties. King or not, David was in a bind and he wanted to fix it. He wanted to fix the problem.

The first thing David tried was actually pretty clever. He allowed for Uriah to come home from the war, take a breather, and spend some time with Bathsheba. If they slept together (as David assumed they would), then the baby would appear to be Uriah's – at least in theory. The problem was Uriah didn't go home and sleep with Bathsheba. He didn't feel right doing that while the rest of his army buddies were fighting and sleeping in tents. So David got Uriah drunk, but this didn't work either. Uriah refused to go home and be with his wife. Finally, in a last ditch effort to fix things, David did a horrific thing. He resorted to murder to take care of his problem. He sent Uriah back into battle and had his commanding offi-

cer place him on the front line where he would easily be killed – and he was, but this didn't fix the problem either.

After Bathsheba had mourned Uriah's death, she moved up to the palace, became David's wife (I bet *that* was awkward), and they had a son. But, the Bible says, "...*the thing David had done displeased the Lord* (*2 Sam. 11:27*), and the consequences in David's life were quick and harsh. God forgave David and spared his life, but the baby that David and Bathsheba conceived together died.

**A few  
wrong...decisions  
produced an adulterous affair, an  
unwelcomed pregnancy...  
and murder.**

I believe this would qualify as a low point in David's life. Here is a man who had it all – a close relationship with God, not to mention power, wealth, and fame. Yet a few wrong "sheep-like" decisions produced an adulterous affair, an unwelcomed pregnancy...and murder. Whoa.

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...*

Can you relate to David right now? A few "sheep-like" decisions in a short period of time and the trajectory of your life has changed. You're at a low point, if not the lowest point in your life, and you don't know what to do. Your life appears to be a mess. Your life isn't in perspective. It's like the impressionistic painting I mentioned earlier without focus. Well, let me remind you that things aren't always what they appear. Sometimes, what you

*can see* is not true, and what you *can't see* is true.

## You can handle the truth...

If the story of David and Bathsheba had ended there, it would have been a tragedy – a big pile of frustration, pain, and death. But God had other plans. Plans that weren't visible in the midst of their chaos. Plans neither of them could see nor imagine. Plans that would not only redeem the mistakes they had made, but every mistake ever made by mankind.

Not long after their baby died, David and Bathsheba had another son whom they named Solomon. Solomon grew up and had a son, and so on and so forth – and some 26 generations later, a guy named Joseph knelt beside his wife, Mary, as she gave birth to Jesus, the One who would redeem us all.

Did you know that God's salvation that is offered to the world and all mankind came from the lineage of an affair? How...cool...is...that?

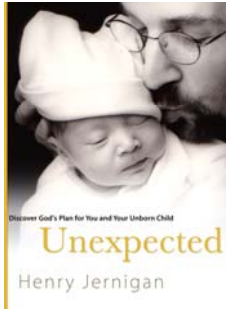
God loves you so much that He took the incredible risk of giving you free will, including the freedom to reject Him – every day. He loves you so much that He doesn't control you. And, He loves you so much that He doesn't walk away from the messes you make. Nothing you could ever do can make Him love you any less. In the midst of your chaos, God is working – He is constantly pursuing you and He has a plan for you. He wants you to believe in what you can't see.

Not long ago, Pierce informed me that he wanted to meet God some day. I told him that I did too. I told him about heaven, that “Daddy Bill” (my dad) was there, not to mention lots of other great relatives he had not yet met. I told him that’s why Jesus came to this earth, so we could live forever with God and that it would be better than he could ever imagine. Pierce thought about what I said, and after a moment of silence replied, “Wow, that’s quite a story!”

It is quite a story. You hear it every Christmas, but it is true for you right now. God came to this earth in the form of a baby, lived among us, and then took away our sins when He died. All you have to do is believe. Do you hear the bells? They’re ringing.

God loves you and your baby. He has plans for both of you, and you can trust Him. My prayer is that you give Him that chance.

My prayer is that you will believe.



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## We make choices in life every day.

Fortunately, most decisions made on a daily basis leave room for error. In other words, if you mess up, there are no major consequences and no one gets hurt. Wear the wrong shoes, choose the wrong nail color and life goes on as you know it.

On the other hand, some choices you make in life are not so trivial. Some decisions carry a lot more weight. What you choose may affect the rest of your life. What you decide may hold the balance of life and death. You feel the weight; it's up to you to choose... What will you do?

Henry Jernigan invites you to discover three simple, yet powerful truths he learned after facing such a decision. Each truth can give purpose to your situation. Each truth can add focus and clarity to a decision you are about to make – a decision that may literally affect the rest of your life.

If you are faced with life-changing decisions at this very moment, know this:

- God loves you
- God has a plan for you
- You can trust Him – regardless of your circumstances.

The choice is yours. But before you decide, consider the words of Jesus: *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32).