

SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT:

Paige's Story

August in North Carolina can be many things: exhausting, exciting, tumultuous, blissful, hectic... just to name a few. The summer is winding down, and yet there is this feeling that it might just go on forever. There are countless days of stifling heat, broken up by misty days with light showers that trick you into believing for just a moment, that things are actually going to cool off.

It is fitting that this particular story started last August, because Paige's story is just like an August day: somewhat of a roller coaster with mountain-top highs, and lows that often catch you by surprise. Still, in the midst of the ups and downs, in the eye of the hurricane, you will find Jesus at the very center of Paige's story. No matter how fast she runs, Jesus is always faster than the roller coaster. He is always one step ahead, ready to catch her when she falls. His arms remain continually outstretched waiting to envelope her in His all-encompassing love.

However, when Paige walked through the doors of our office one sweltering August day last summer, she wanted absolutely nothing to do with Jesus. For her, Christianity had always been about rules; rules that she never seemed to be able to live up to or fulfill. After being exploited numerous times it didn't seem like God existed in her reality. During her intake interview she even said, "The thought of worshipping a God disgusts me."

"We respected her choices. We were never going to force religion on her, but we always tried to point her to Jesus. We were committed to empower her with truth to make healthy decisions. We were not going to give up on her, no matter how many times she pushed us away. I think our unwavering consistency kind of shocked her. In many ways, she expected us to walk away," a Present Age Ministries staff member said.

As our staff journeyed with her through the days and weeks following that memorable interview, it became distinctly clear that in the midst of all the confusion, heart-ache, and hurt, Paige longed for something greater than herself. She was hungry for truth and fulfillment that could only be found in Jesus.

Paige may not have recognized it at the time, but Jesus was by her side every step of the way, longing for her to let Him into her heart. Paige's story is a perfect representation of the relentless pursuit Christ refers to in Luke 15:3-5 when He says:

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders."

"If there is anything I have learned from my experience with Paige it is that Jesus runs faster than I do. I think it's easy for us to talk about how big God is, and how He is the King of the universe, but so often we forget about the fact that God is also a persistent Father. Paige's story is one of the clearest demonstrations of God's relentless love for His children that I have ever seen in this line of work. God recklessly chases after His children at all costs until we begin to grasp His all-consuming love for us. It has nothing to do with us or who we are, it's just the kind of God that He is," a Present Age staff member said.

Although it took time to earn her trust and break down her walls, Paige eventually became receptive and eager to participate in Present Age programming. In fact, only six weeks after she began receiving services from Present Age, she gave her life to Christ and was baptized.

Almost a year later, Paige's life is far from perfect. Her story is not finished. It is not tied up in a pretty package with a bow on top. It is messy and hard, and yet imperfectly beautiful.

"She is slowly learning new ways to deal with her problems. She knows facets of truth but she is still coming to terms with the fact that Jesus is enough and she no longer needs to run to earthly things to numb her pain. Although we can see a clear picture of Jesus' loving pursuit of her, it is still blurry for her. Still, with every run, and every attempt to push Him away, the picture of what God desires for her becomes more clear," a Present Age Ministries staff member said.

The reality is that Paige's story is just getting started. It is reasonable to believe that she may very well still feel like she's on a roller coaster; that things haven't settled down quite yet. However, we will wait with eager expectation for the strong, determined woman God is molding her into. For she was declared victorious long before she took her first breath, and it is clear that greater things have yet to come for this burgeoning young warrior.

* Paige is **NOT** the real name of the survivor in this story, it is a pseudonym.