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There's this verse in the Bible that says that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind. That's a life verse for me, because I've struggled so much with fear and anxiety. That's not from God. The ability to overcome it is.

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Andrew

My name is Andrew. I grew up in a little place called Phelan, which is up in the mountains, but I've lived in Yucaipa for the last ten years. I'm a father of four children, with one more on the way. My wife and I have been together for eight years. We met when I was fifteen. She was working at Cold Stone and made me ice cream. I was with my mom and when we left I said, "I'm gonna marry that girl." And I did.

I've been a musician for most of my life. I started playing drums when I was five, and picked up guitar when I was twelve. I used to play in hardcore bands. There are really embarrassing videos on YouTube, if you're interested.

These days I write music about what I'm passionate about, and faith is a huge part of my life. Most Christian music sucks. You would never hear a Christian song on secular radio. I don't think it's even the content as much as it's just terrible music. I feel like I will arrive one day if I can make music cool enough that anyone can appreciate it.

I'm a pastor at a local church. That came about

somewhat by accident, but I have felt a calling to ministry since I was four years old. I have just always been drawn to people and hearing their stories. But I believe God has a sense of humor in putting me up in front of thousands of people a week, because doing that is really the antithesis of my character.

When I was younger I was really outgoing. I see that in my oldest son – his personality is so vibrant, and he'll talk to anyone. I remember being like that. My personality started to change when I was six years old. I was molested by a pastor's son, and from that point I started to become more reclusive.

Things only got worse. By the time I was eleven we were attending a very large church, and I had a crush on this girl. When I mentioned it to the pastor he threatened that I'd better stay away from her and showed me the automatic weapons he had in the trunk of his car. For years he'd make odd accusations that I was looking at her or trying to contact her, and on multiple occasions he left bruises on my arms from shaking me.



"There are times that I'm just desperately seeking God and I open up the Bible and there's something that's just so specific to what I'm going through, or a decision I need to make, or something like that ... Or maybe I'll read this verse and I'll feel like he's saying, 'You need to remember this, that I allowed you to read.' And then I'll meet some random person ... and it's exactly what they need."

It came out later that the pastor had been molesting this girl. There were people who didn't believe anything being said about him, including what I said had happened to me. I would leave church and there would be this mob of people with signs yelling at me, "You're a liar!" There were even windows shot out during the children's ministry.

I became even more insecure and shy around people, and by the time we moved to Yucaipa it had turned into a disabling anxiety. Any judging comments just fed into my timidity, and I wouldn't leave the house. It was really terrible.

These experiences maybe should have made me give up on God. But I believe they enable me to love and sympathize as a pastor better than I would be able to had I not gone through them. I know that saying God speaks to me is something that people aren't generally receptive of. The best way to describe it is that my heart just breaks for people, almost like I can feel what they're feeling, and there's this specific insight into what a person is going through.

I do have confidence that God has called me, but I

still sometimes wrestle with the anxiety of whether or not to reach out and speak to people. I'm just a kid, you know? That's at least how some in the church see it. I am also sometimes judged by my appearance. Christians have this idea of what a Christian should look like, and it doesn't really include tattoos and piercings.

A person never really "gets over" traumatic incidences. But, there is still a victory to be had. And, at some point, you have to move forward and be an example of what it's like to overcome. You are a victim, but you don't have to live afraid of what it's like to open yourself up to people. It doesn't have to become your identity.

There's this passage that really helps me get through the seasons. Jesus is talking about our value, our worth, and he says, "Look at the birds. You can buy a sparrow for a few cents, and God still provides for them. You are of so much more value. God is going to take care of you also." I have a tattoo of a sparrow on my hand to remind me that I am valuable, and in moments of anxiety I need only to harness that power from God.