



# **TRACTION**

## **FALL 2014**



**National  
Community  
Church**

We WANT TO HELP YOU FIND TRACTION  
IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, AND GAIN MOMENTUM IN  
BECOMING THE PERSON GOD CALLED YOU TO BE.

We ARE ALL HARD-WIRED FOR BELONGING.

TRACTION IS DESIGNED TO  
TELL STORIES OF LIFE CHANGE  
PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED  
BECAUSE OF RELATIONSHIPS  
THEY'VE FOUND AND HIGHLIGHT AT NCC,  
TO CONNECT TO OPPORTUNITIES  
THOSE OF US WHO COMMUNITY FOR  
STILL NEED IT.



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# A LETTER FROM THE SMALL GROUPS PASTOR



- WILL JOHNSTON

**POW-ER : NOUN \ 'PAÜ(Ê)R \ :**  
Ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something.

We are thrilled to unveil the theme **'Power'** for this issue of Traction.

Marissa Meyer has power at Yahoo. LeBron James has power on the basketball court. DC is a city of power. When we think of power, it's easy to think of political power, influence,

and the success of those who seem to have it all together. But that's not the kind of power we're talking about.

2000 years ago, ultimate power—the power to defy death—was on display when Jesus was raised to life, and Romans 8 tells us that the very power that brought Jesus back from the grave is alive within us!

So how do we access a power beyond anything we can comprehend, much less create?

In this issue, you'll find stories of God's power at work in the lives of His people: a fresh look at the power of the Gospel to raise us from spiritual death and a demonstration of divine power in the midst of our weakness and fear.

Still, God's plan has never been that we would experience or exercise the power He gives us on our own. In John 17:23, Jesus prays,

**“MAY THEY EXPERIENCE SUCH PERFECT UNITY THAT THE WORLD WILL KNOW THAT YOU SENT ME AND THAT YOU LOVE THEM AS MUCH AS YOU LOVE ME.”**

Christ's final prayer was that we would discover the part of God's power that is only displayed when we're together. It's so powerful; it extends beyond meeting our needs. It is an irrepressible proclamation that Jesus is alive and can empower others, too!

Our prayer is that Traction would provide practical tools for your own personal spiritual growth—such as a Bible reading plan—that will help God's power take root in you daily, and serve as a roadmap to finding community at National Community Church. You'll find a handful of small groups mentioned throughout the magazine, and the complete list is online at [theaterchurch.com/groups](http://theaterchurch.com/groups).

We hope you'll join a group this fall and discover the power of authentic community.

**- WILL JOHNSTON**



# HOW & WHY WE DO GROUPS

Small groups are gatherings that meet regularly (usually weekly) and are designed to provide an opportunity to connect, grow, and serve.

## CONNECT

We were meant to do life together and we believe that community happens best around shared interests and passions, so we have a variety of groups - from Bible studies and sports groups to service groups and book studies.

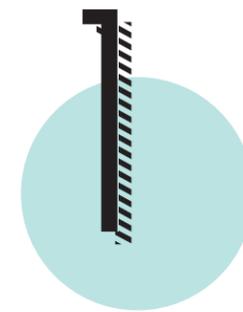
## GROW

Regardless of the type of group, the purpose of each one is to create a place where we can grow to become more like Jesus and model His character, ways, and mission to the world.

## SERVE

Jesus came with a mission to reconcile the world to God and restore creation to its intended state, and He charged his followers with continuing that mission! Small groups aren't meant to be insular communities but rather units of the Church on mission with God, bringing the light and love of Christ to those around them.

## HOW DO I JOIN A GROUP?



VISIT [THEATERCHURCH.COM/ GROUPS](https://theaterchurch.com/groups) TO FIND A GROUP THAT INTERESTS YOU.



EMAIL THE GROUP LEADER FOR FURTHER DETAILS.



SHOW UP.

# HAVE ABOUT GROUPS?

## MEET YOUR SMALL GROUP DIRECTORS



### GAINESVILLE

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ROB.ASHLEY@THEATERCHURCH.COM

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## FIND YOUR GROUP



-  QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY
-  NEW TO DC
-  WRESTLING WITH HURTS, HABITS OR HANG-UPS
-  DIG INTO THE BIBLE
-  FIND COMMUNITY
-  SERVE
-  DISCUSS THE WEEKEND MESSAGE
-  CHRISTIAN IN THE WORKPLACE



THEATERCHURCH.COM / GROUPS



**New to DC?**  
Learn how to navigate life,  
faith, & work in the District

# FRESHMEN OF THE CITY

[theaterchurch.com/freshmen](http://theaterchurch.com/freshmen)  
Tuesdays, 7 PM  
Barracks Row Theater  
Beginning September 9

**Alpha**

**YOUR QUESTIONS.  
YOUR DOUBTS.  
YOUR APPETITE.**

**WHAT WILL  
YOU BRING TO  
THE TABLE?**

Alpha explores the basics of the Christian faith. Whether you're investigating who Jesus is, revisiting your faith, or looking for answers to life's questions, Alpha is for you.

To RSVP for a kickoff dinner near you, visit [theaterchurch.com/alpha](http://theaterchurch.com/alpha) or email [alpha@theaterchurch.com](mailto:alpha@theaterchurch.com)

# THE HEROICS OF WEAKNESS



During a recent trip in Michigan, my mother, brother, and I had a discussion about earliest memories. I recalled an experience in an oxygen tent with a teddy bear and my grandmother; I was only a year and a half old. I'd had difficulty breathing, due to very premature birth, and was staying in a Florida hospital as my lungs struggled to do something that's so natural it's normally automatic. It's a powerful memory, I think, because it's drenched in weakness.

## “WEAKNESS ISN'T SOMETHING OUR CULTURE CELEBRATES.”

Society encourages the emulation of people who possess power: politicians, athletes, authors, musicians, Wall Street whiz kids, and movie and television stars. We recognize we aren't them, that they have a level of temporal success we do not have but wish we did, and many of us secretly wish we were them; these are our culture's "heroes." Conversely, culture ignores the weak, saying—at best—they should be helped because they cannot live, achieve, or contribute on their own.

In **2 Corinthians 12:9**, the Apostle Paul writes, "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness.'" Paul is discussing the "thorn in the flesh" that was given to him to reinforce humility and dependency on God. This verse became deeply engrained during my college experience as I grappled with the unexpected effects of cerebral palsy—a lifelong disability related to premature birth involving damage to the motor control centers of the brain. The palsy affects balance, dexterity, and my ability to walk; my legs operate in a weakened state, accompanied by joint pain and muscle fatigue. As I prayed and pleaded for permanent relief, often in the dead of night, the Great Physician provided Paul's prescription instead, showing

that perseverance is the unexpected—and greater—miracle.

Growing up, I gravitated toward unexpected heroes. My first hero was a farm boy living on a backwater desert planet far from the bright center of the universe. I developed a lifelong love for Star Wars and wanted to be Luke Skywalker, the farm boy who saved "a galaxy far, far away."

That love of Star Wars led me to another hero, one I call the "Foolish Muppet." In Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back, Luke Skywalker travels to Dagobah to learn from Yoda, the great Jedi Master who had instructed Luke's late teacher, Obi-Wan Kenobi. Crashing his ship, Luke comes across a small, goblin-like creature that hobbles around with a cane and has syntax issues, a character Luke thinks is foolish. The creature claims to know Yoda and where he lives, so Luke follows him. Soon after, Luke experiences a revelation—aided by the voice of Obi-Wan—that becomes stunned fascination: this aged creature, shrouded in weakness, is Yoda, a Jedi Master filled with power and wisdom.

My love for "foolish" heroes isn't confined to Jedi, but includes a strong affinity for comic book hero Charles Xavier, the wheelchair-bound professor who teaches his students—the community known as the X-Men—how to use their abilities for good and heroic ends. He leads his students as Professor X and is perceived by outsiders as weak and incapable, but this weakness shrouds both incredible telepathic power and a deep understanding of the human condition and the need for hope (as shown in the recent summer blockbuster X-Men: Days of Future Past). Xavier speaks to power in weakness in a way that deeply resonates with me because his telepathic abilities are linked to his mobility; as his mental powers function, his legs do not. Conversely, if Xavier possessed full mobility, his telepathy and understanding of the world



he imparts to his students—influenced by his disability—would diminish. Charles's life in the latest film is an example of the progression the Apostle Paul talks of in Romans 5: from suffering, to perseverance, to character, to hope.

Not only that, but community is what drives Professor X. He takes those who are viewed as less, different, and weak and shows them—through instruction and example—that they can do more than just fit into the molds culture promulgates. This is something that National Community Church (NCC) does well, reaching out to the DC Metro area (especially the un-churched and de-churched) without apology and modeling both who Jesus is and who we are as individuals created and imprinted with the image of the Creator. It does so through community and in a way that connects with the individual sitting in the theater seat.

My own decision to remain at NCC traces back to a sermon Pastor Heather Zempel preached nine years ago involving Star Wars; no one had ever done that before, and it tracked with my own growing understanding of using heroic stories to point to Truth. Add involvement in small groups like "For Such A Time" (a Congressional, Executive, and political staffers community) and "Inklings" (a literary group focused on C.S. Lewis) and the effect members of these groups have had on my life (and one another) for nearly the last decade, and you begin to see the critical role that community plays in who we are becoming as people who claim Christ as Savior and Lord; these people have become my "X-Men."

Throughout life, I have strongly identified with the Jedi Master and Professor X and talk of them often. There is more to the "Foolish Muppet" and Xavier than first impressions

indicate. Yoda has no problem being perceived as syntax-challenged and feeble because he knows who he is. Charles accepts living life from a chair if it means his abilities enable him to do good and build community. My life is similar, as I have no problem being the handicapped fanboy of fictional heroes who drives a custom scooter that looks like something out of Star Wars and Tron because these things frame a deeper understanding of the world I live in, the how and why of life, and a greater appreciation of the heroic characters Jesus wired me to love and enjoy all the more when His Truth seeps into their stories and shines through them.

In **Colossians 1:27**, the Apostle Paul speaks of foolishness when he writes that "God made the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak and despised things to confound the strong." Yoda, Xavier, and I are "foolish things" in the eyes of many—including doctors who didn't expect me to live past day one on planet Earth—and we often confound. These heroes are good company.

In the pages of Scripture, God took real people that the world thought little of—weak in some way or another—and displayed His fantastic and incredible power through them. Moses was a murderer with a speech problem who led a nation to freedom and promise. David was a teenage shepherd boy who brandished a sling and felled a giant, the symbol of a tyrannical empire (a story echoed in Luke Skywalker's role in the destruction of the Death Star).

God loves to do the unexpected and, through it, displays Himself to His creation. The pages of His Story are full of the unexpected, climaxing in the fulfillment of an age-old prophecy: God would become a man and defeat the ancient enemy of the souls of men at the Hill of Skulls not through power or force, but by weakness, sacrifice, and dying. Only then would He show power in defeating not only the Enemy of Souls, but also Thanatos (Greek for "death") in the resurrection. How

## “IT MAY BE THE WEAKNESSES THAT ARE THE EASIEST TO HIDE ARE THE HARDEST TO BEAR.”

odd, mystifying, unexpected, and even "foolish" it must have seemed to the residents of Heaven to see Jesus do this, and certainly to the fallen angels and their "father below." Nevertheless, Christ's finished work is the heart of Christianity—what J.R.R. Tolkien called the "One True Myth" and C.S. Lewis embraced as "the myth that actually happened."

Truthfully, we're all weak; in some cases those weaknesses are more obvious than others. Even so, the truth of Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 12:9** isn't diminished but rather becomes a greater opportunity to confound the surrounding world. Professor X never overcame his weakness in solitude, but through community with his X-Men.

In life it's dangerous to go alone; we must take friends, especially in a transitory place like Washington, DC. NCC is a place where community is intentionally part of the culture. As human beings, we're created to live in community because the Father, Son, and Spirit, the Three-yet-One who created us in their image, live in community themselves. In a city where it is often a struggle to put down roots, living intentionally in community is counter-cultural. Decide to be "foolish"—to counter your environment by being intentional about investing in lives around you. The Professor does it, the Jedi Master did it, and Jesus modeled it with 12 men; that's heroic company.

# POWER IN COMMUNITY



**- JEREMY STEFFENS**



**B**e honest. In the last week have you posted a selfie (or two) or maybe even spammed your friends with Candy Crush invites? If so, you're one of us -- the 1.4 billion member-strong network of Zuckerberg -- spending an average 30 minutes a day on Facebook, viewing and posting more than 70 billion pieces of new content every month. That's a lot of engagement photos and Kid President reposts.

But I wonder if while riding this wave of social engagement, we've inadvertently traded the power found in true relationships for quick, effortless touchpoints in an effort to keep up in our uber-busy society. Perhaps some of us, driven by our smartphone connectivity, have become more focused on the breadth of our network than on the depth of our community?

Jesus drew crowds of thousands - engaging peasants, prostitutes and politicians. He was, and still is, the ultimate people-person. But all throughout Scripture, we see that Christ chose authentic relationship beyond random social interaction. It's why He chose to do life with a rag tag band of misfits, forming the first church-sanctioned small group. It was that group of 12 that raised the dead, fed the poor and built a worldwide Church that is still growing, more than 2,000 years after it first met.

So what did they do that made them a community of power, and not merely a circle of loosely affiliated people who worshipped together once a week? What held this group together when many of them were crucified, beheaded and thrown into prison? I'd like to suggest that they knew the difference between a few things:

## **1** NEWSFEED KNOWLEDGE VS. INTENTIONAL DISCOVERY

Too often we assume that because we know what's going on in someone's life, we know them. Social networks can allow us to hide behind carefully manicured facades of life

events and witty statements, but it's only those who make faithful deposits into our lives that truly know what's behind our curtain and how best to meet our needs. We serve a Savior who walked, talked, and cooked breakfast on the beach with his circle. There's no short cut to that level of rapport.

If social media crashed, how much would you know about the people in your sphere of influence? Do you know their pains and joys? Who is regularly investing the time to learn what makes you tick? Have you settled for a network of information or are you reaping the reward of an authentic community?

## **2** DRIVE-BY COMMENTS VS. LEGACY INVESTMENTS

Social networks provide quick, low-risk forums, making it easy to communicate care without ever having to lift a finger or bend an ear. But the foundation of true community is always a consistent collection of tangible actions that far outlive any superficial comment. In a society drowning in a sea of meaningless words, acts of personal service leave a lasting impact.

When was the last time you called someone or met someone for coffee to see how they were doing instead of sending a 20-word text? When was the last time someone checked in on you...in person?

## **3** CONSUMER-FOCUSED COMPLAINTS VS. PROACTIVE COMMUNITY BUILDING

We've all felt not included or reached out to at some point. It's human nature; but it's also a lie. If we come to Church with a consumer mentality, waiting for someone to invest in us, we'll always be disappointed. If you're feeling like your relational needs aren't being met, perhaps you're on the wrong side of the trough. People are drawn to "givers" but feel obligated by "takers."

The accountability time continued. I half expected him to turn around and walk right back out the door, thinking this pseudo-confessional would scare the heck out of me! As I was about to give him the opportunity to “pass,” he put it all out there. He shared his intense struggle with substance abuse and how his life had come to a dramatic and dangerous fork in the road. He told the story of how his missionary mother had pleaded with him to find a church that Sunday and how he promised her that if she found him one, he would go. He came to Lincoln and was invited to our small group. Now he was sitting on a couch in a crowded living room with twenty other guys telling his story and sharing his critical need.

I’ve experienced this power and depth of community in our Act Like Jesus men’s group. What started with four guys unknown to each other 3 years ago has grown into a tight-knit group of a couple dozen guys who have seen truly amazing personal transformation in the past 18 months.

At the end of every small group, we all share one prayer request and answer one accountability question. This question is meant to “shine a light into a secret area that we don’t want anyone to know about.” These range from struggles with sexual temptation to financial stewardship to attitude adjustment on the job to marital issues. It can get real messy – by design.

We went around the circle one such night as usual – sharing with transparency, confessing and asking for prayer. While this was going on, a guy who had visited NCC that previous Sunday for the first time, walked into the group.

The accountability time continued. I half expected him to turn around and walk right back out the door, thinking this pseudo-confessional would scare the heck out of

me! As I was about to give him the opportunity to “pass,” he put it all out there. He shared his intense struggle with substance abuse and how his life had come to a dramatic and dangerous fork in the road. He told the story of how his missionary mother had pleaded with him to find a church that Sunday and how he’d promised her that if she found him one, he’d go. He came to Lincoln and was invited to our small group. Now he was sitting on a couch in a crowded living room with twenty other guys telling his story and sharing his critical need.

**“THE ACCOUNTABILITY DIDN'T SCARE HIM OFF; IT INVITED HIM IN - INTO REAL COMMUNITY.”**

It allowed – even empowered – him to be honest and vulnerable. That’s when God showed up.

That night ended with twenty plus guys huddled around him, praying for breakthrough, encouragement and a new power from heaven to consume him. God answered, and the work that the Lord has done and is continuing to do in him is amazing. He broke free from substance abuse, rededicated his life to Christ, rebuilt relationships with his family, and even became the head of a citywide foster-care ministry. He is now one of the most influential voices in our men’s group. It all started with a moment of community, shrouded in power.

Power doesn’t show up where we put up walls, facades, and white picket fences. It comes when we intentionally get to know one another, when we invest in others, and when we proactively seek out honest relationships. When we do that, His power comes and the impact is far greater than that of any social network a 30 year-old billionaire could ever dream of.

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*If you'd like to join a community of men seeking to replicate the character, ways, and mission of Jesus, visit [ncc.gd/jesus](http://ncc.gd/jesus).*



# SPIRITUAL POWER THROUGH SEEKING GOD



For most of us, our spiritual lives are up and down. Sometimes we soar to extreme highs, and other times the snooze button wins the battle. We all want God to move powerfully in our lives, but are we doing the work to posture ourselves in His presence?

Loren Cunningham, the founder of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) who is now in his 90s, recently said,

“GOD KEEPS GIVING ME NEW VISION - DOESN'T HE KNOW HOW OLD I AM?”

God entrusts His plans and power to those who seek Him. Period. Loren keeps getting new revelation from God because he continues to pursue God! Disciplines don't always feel exciting - or powerful. But they anchor our soul. When we spend time in God's presence every day, that's exactly what we get: God's presence every day! What could be better than that? Pastor Mark recently said that a day that passes without spending time in the Lord's presence is a wasted day. Let's leave spiritual instability behind and not waste any more days!

We've created a reading and meditation plan to help us get started this fall semester. The plan alone is powerless - it is our waiting and seeking that invites the presence of a powerful God. There's no better place to start than His word.

On the next page you'll find the plan for August and September. Each week has scripture to read, and a passage to meditate on. Jewish tradition holds that each scripture has 70 meanings. A quick read through may leave one of those in our mind, but meditation helps us focus more deeply.

To meditate, let the words linger in your mind as you read and throughout the day. It is helpful to keep the scripture you are meditating on visible, on a notecard or in your phone. As you

think about the text, ask yourself questions like these:

- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there a sin to confess?
- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a new truth to carry with me?

For October and November, we will show you how to make your own plan.



“THE BIBLE IS ALIVE, IT SPEAKS TO ME; IT HAS FEET, IT RUNS AFTER ME; IT HAS HANDS, IT LAYS HOLD OF ME.”

- MARTIN LUTHER



# AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

## AUGUST 24 – 30

READ: **JOHN 1**

MEDITATE ON: **JOHN 1:14**

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

## AUG 31 – SEP 6

READ: **JOHN 2-6**

MEDITATE ON: **JOHN 3:5-8**

*Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."*

## SEP 7 – 13

READ: **JOHN 7-12**

MEDITATE ON: **JOHN 8:28-29**

*So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him."*

## SEP 14 – 20

READ: **JOHN 13-15**

MEDITATE ON: **JOHN 15:5**

*"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."*

## SEP 21 – 27

READ: **JOHN 16-21**

MEDITATE ON: **JOHN 17:20-24**

*"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!"*

# OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

## YOU'LL NEED:

- A Bible
- A Journal
- A Pre-Decided Time & A Distraction-Free Spot:  
*This should be a consistent time when you can be mentally present.*

## 1 BIBLE READING

### Decide what to read

*Is there a book of the Bible you are particularly interested in learning about?*

Maybe there is a theme or character quality you need to develop - like integrity or faith. When in doubt, the YouVersion app has several Bible reading plans categorized both by theme and book of the Bible. Prayerfully consider what to read, but also know that the Bible is all God's word and it is the Holy Spirit who brings it alive.

### Meditate on Scripture

*Read the Bible for quality, not quantity.*

## 2 PRAYER & REFLECTION

*Prayer is a back and forth conversation with God.*

This is where you'll need your journal. As NCCer and psychologist Mary DeRaedt says, *"be on speaking terms with yourself."* Reflecting allows us to slow down, examine our lives, and listen to what God is saying to us.

As we mature, we learn that God doesn't speak to us all like we're Gideon. He wants us to know what His voice sounds like. Not the booming circumstances. Not the inner critic. Not the wide open door (or the one that appears to be slammed shut). Not the fleece. He wants us to hear and obey Him. (John 10:27)

### Record what God says to you

*Write down what the Holy Spirit says and what you're going to do about it.*

## 3 OBEDIENCE

Obedience is the fuel for transformation. It is the critical link between your understanding and God bringing about change in your life. Obedience releases the power of God. When God tells you to do something He has a purpose! It might feel uncomfortable. It may not make sense. But faith isn't being certain you are right, it's trusting that Christ is the good shepherd and that He will either confirm or re-direct your path.

**Use #traction to share your plan with us!**



Email [baptism@theaterchurch.com](mailto:baptism@theaterchurch.com) for more info or to sign up.

## STUDY & PILGRIMAGE TRIP TO THE HOLY LAND

FEBRUARY 13-22, 2015

Imagine reading the story of David and Goliath on the actual battlefield. Or meditating on the Sermon on the Mount on the Sea of Galilee. The Bible jumps off the bookshelf and comes to life when we are immersed in its setting.

This spring, Pastor Heather and Pastor Dave will lead a unique pilgrimage and study experience in the Holy Land. Marc Turnage, a Biblical scholar with expertise in the ancient roots of Christianity, will guide the trip with knowledge and ability to bring the history, culture, and geography of the Bible to life.

\$3275 (flight + program),  
\$2025 (program cost only,  
airfare not included).  
Final payment is due Oct. 31.  
Participation is limited.

Visit [ncc.gd/israel](http://ncc.gd/israel)  
for more details.



SATURDAY 9.6.14 | 9:30AM | BARRACKS ROW



**BRAND NEW: POWER OF CHRIST**

**- AMY DEVISME**

I know firsthand about God's power. It's restoring and hopeful. Though His power is supernatural and inherently "other," I can't separate my community here on earth from God's supernatural work in my life. It's like Christ knew all along that His power and His people would work together. In my life, God has used people to help me receive His power.

I grew up in Arizona with a father who was an alcoholic, a drug addict and mostly absent from my life. My mother worked around the clock to support our family, so I spent most of my childhood at my grandparents' house. My

parents divorced when I was 8 years old.

By the age of 14, I was sexually active, had started drinking, and was experimenting with drugs. I met and became involved with a man named Michael, and I soon became pregnant and had an abortion. During high school, I continued to drink, abuse drugs, and even tried committing suicide several times.

I graduated in 2007 and moved out of my parents' house and in with Michael. A few short months later, I became pregnant again. To make a living and support me, Michael sold

drugs. We were always on the move and there was never any certainty about life. In one year I lived in twelve different homes, bouncing from one couch to another.

In June of 2008 when our daughter Olivia was three months old, we decided to get our lives back on track, so we moved in with Michael's grandparents in Virginia. They were the ones who first introduced me to Jesus Christ!

In 2009, Michael was admitted to rehab. Although he took some steps in the right direction, he didn't want me with him in Virginia, so I moved back to Arizona, and made trips back and forth to Virginia throughout the year. During that time, I was in and out of church and didn't have a substantial relationship with the Lord. I didn't know what I really believed in.

Living in Arizona as a single mother was a struggle which only became more difficult after Michael committed suicide when Olivia was one year old. Thoughts of Michael's death overwhelmed my thoughts and emotions. I questioned why God would leave Olivia and I alone in Arizona. I was angry most of the time and felt abandoned and hopeless. I struggled with anxiety and poor decision-making, and I turned to alcohol, drugs, and men when times got tough. I was in over my head! God seemed to be working in the lives of others around me - why didn't He change my life or answer my prayers? I tried and tried and tried on my own to get traction in life, but nothing worked.

**“ IN HINDSIGHT, I WANTED TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE FOR ME & BE BLESSED WHILE CONTINUING ON MY OWN PATH. ”**

One morning, I gave up. I had no strength left to try to put the pieces of my life back together.

I called Michael's grandfather in Virginia and asked if Olivia and I could come live with him and Michael's grandmother again. We were ready to establish a real relationship with the Lord, but we needed a new environment and supportive relationships. I was overwhelmed when they said, "Yes." The thought of a fresh start made my dead heart start beating again! Their "yes" gave me hope.

On August 16, 2013 we arrived in Virginia. I left all of our belongings behind and made the decision to start a new life. Since August, the Lord has worked incredibly in my heart. I have forgiven Michael for taking his life, I feel at peace, I've gained hope, and I have experienced inner healing because of my heavenly Father's love for me. Most importantly, I have taken off the old self and put on the new self. The Holy Spirit has changed my mind and heart and continues to work in me every second of every day. By God's power, doors have opened that I could never have dreamt of just one year ago!

When God is at the center of life, He picks up those broken pieces! Every day I live a fulfilled life because Jesus died on the cross for my sins. My life is not easy, but because of God's faithfulness, goodness, and unconditional love for me, I can experience His purpose and will for my life. He even brought hope out of Michael's death; although painful, I know he can use any circumstance for good. No prayer, no problem, no hurt is too big for God.

A few months ago, I discovered **NCC**. It is my new, spiritual family. Olivia is a "**Crosswalk Kid**" and grows in the Lord every day.

I can't imagine if Michael's grandparents had said "no" to Olivia and I living with them, if they hadn't introduced me to Christ, and if I hadn't gotten involved in church. Those relationships were the community that led me to experience the power of Christ working in and through my life.





## “OH, YOU WON'T BE SINGING ANYMORE.”

Those words, spoken almost casually by her doctor, rocked Steph Modder's world.

Steph's life had been colored by music since she began singing at the age of three.

“My world revolved around music and being able to sing,” Steph says. “It was my history, it was my present, it was my hobby, it was my passion, it was my job, it was my ministry, it was my connection to people, it was my diary – it was basically everything.”

Steph had moved to DC to work as a nanny in 2001, was roped into leading worship on her first visit to an NCC small group, and was leading worship for NCC church services by the next year. She joined the staff part-time

when NCC went multi-site with the launch of services at Ballston Common Mall in 2003 and eventually took over as worship coordinator when Lora Batterson shifted to the finance team.

A few years later, in 2006, a lump on the throat. Denial. Procrastinating. Waiting for health insurance to kick in. Then, finally, the diagnosis came – Steph had a tumor wrapped around her vocal nerves.

She consulted four doctors who all told her the same thing – it had to be removed or it would continue to grow, it was impossible to determine if it was malignant or benign... and she would never sing again.

A friend pulled some strings to connect her to the best doctor at GWU Hospital who told her

he'd do his best and that he was confident that operating without damaging her vocal nerves (which are thinner than a strand of hair) was possible.

However, the risk remained great and Steph spent three months shaking her fist at God, blaming Him, questioning what she had done wrong. “Was I such a sinner that I had crossed a line and He needed to teach me a lesson?”

She would ask for prayer but couldn't pray for herself. Her friends' attempts at encouragement just sounded like empty platitudes. Fearing the worst, Steph pushed back her surgery several months.

“I knew that the potential to lose my voice was very high so I decided to go back to Minneapolis to record the songs that I'd talked about recording for ten years,” she says. “I thought if for some reason it goes away I needed something for posterity that this once was something I was able to do.”

In the early stages of working on a new song in Minneapolis, she experienced an epiphany: “You're going to be okay because no matter what happens to you, you have purpose.”

Recalling that “the chief goal of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” Steph came to a greater recognition of God's power and sovereignty.

“My breath was given by God and it was His choice how I would best glorify Him,” she says. “And if He chose for some reason to take away my voice, I still was put on earth to glorify Him, so He would provide a way for me to glorify Him.”

The song she was working on became “*Hope's Got Me*,” which contains the line, “I'm ready to begin again.”

“There really was kind of this resolve that I may have to begin again and I may have to find my true identity in Christ because what I knew to be my expression to Him may change.”

Steph was able to worship again, read her Bible again, and accept people's prayers and encouragement. She returned to DC and led worship at NCC for the next two months leading up to her surgery.

Despite a self-described melancholic nature, she approached her surgery without nervousness and with a confident sense of purpose and resolve, believing that no matter what happened it was going to be okay. “That is Jesus because there's no way my wiring would have allowed for something like that,” she says.

The delicate surgery took over 6 hours and ultimately the tumor, which proved to be benign, was successfully removed.

Two days later, Steph began tentatively trying out her voice, and six weeks later, she was leading worship again at NCC's annual Leadership Retreat.

“In retrospect, I probably should have tried to have somebody else take over, but I think I was so excited that I had my voice,” she says. “I get another chance. I get a chance to -- not to prove that I'm worth the gift, but to say thank you. I didn't have to go through the grieving process in full like I was preparing myself to do.”

Steph continued serving as NCC's Worship Coordinator until she married John Hasler in 2011 and moved with him to Germany to launch Prachtwerk, NCC's café in Berlin. There, her music is serving as an access point and her status as a fellow musician has given her additional credibility when booking shows for the café.

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JOHN 21:25

THE APOSTLE JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE  
AND BROTHER OF THE APOSTLE JAMES