

CHAPTER 1

AN UNEXPECTED SPRING OF WATER

MAY 21, 2023

Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

John 4:13-14 (NASB)

MY DAUGHTER CHRISTINA STARTED to awake, feeling groggy and disoriented. She became aware that she was in an unfamiliar place. As the fog of deep sleep gradually began to lift, a strange and rhythmic clicking came into focus. Still tired, she refused to open her eyes and began to fall back asleep. The clicking morphed into the sound of dripping water from a leaky bathroom

faucet. In her dream, Christina considered this and rejected it. The noise in the room was much more mechanical than the sound of dripping water.

“What could it be?” she wondered.

Like the ebb and flow of the ocean’s tide, she drifted in and out of sleep.

She was partially curious to determine the source of the clicking, which pulled at her like a tugboat. But giving in to that curiosity meant she would have to fully awaken, and it felt so good just to rest.

She had developed an appreciation for rest, recognizing it as a luxury she rarely allowed herself to enjoy but also realizing that her well-being depended on it. She contemplated this and decided she had rested enough. Begrudgingly, she opened her eyes.

She was in a bedroom with light-colored furniture. Daylight peeked in through the window blinds. She turned her head and saw Brandon, her husband, breathing slowly and deeply, sound asleep. Birds chirped cheerfully outside. She had never awoken in this room, but as the sleep cleared, she remembered being in a small town outside of Durham, North Carolina.

She and Brandon had traveled from their home in Wichita, Kansas, the day before. They were staying with John and Anna, Brandon’s father and stepmother. They were excited to visit family, but the main reason for their travel was to attend an event at a nearby ministry, which involved praying for miracles and healing.

What was that clicking?

Christina looked up at the ceiling and saw the ceiling fan spinning. It was out of balance, causing one of the chains to knock against the light fixture.

She thought to herself, “Ah, okay, nothing to worry about.” With a sigh of relief, she allowed her thoughts and breathing to ease. There was nothing to be concerned with at all.

Christina was no stranger to concern. Wanting nothing more than to be a mother, she was on her third pregnancy, currently 26 weeks along and only 14 to go. Several weeks before, she had endured a major scare involving both her health and the baby's. God had granted her and her family's prayer requests for Christina. All involved were continuously praying for the health of the baby, named Kayla Marie. God had given her first name, and Christina decided on her middle name.

Ironically, she felt comforted by the rhythmic clicking of the ceiling fan chain. It felt so good to lay in bed. Given the challenges life had assaulted Brandon and her with, she had come to adore those sparse moments when she could relax and clear her mind, focusing on God.

Tuning out the noise from the fan, she began to pray.

Thank You, Father, for giving me good sleep, for waking me up, and for giving me breath today. Thank you for another day to experience You. I know that Your work in and through me is not yet complete.

Thank You for safe travels yesterday, and thank You for allowing us to come to this place in anticipation of that huge prayer meeting later this week. I know that You answer when we pray in private, but I ask You to give us the miracle of healing for baby Kayla at that meeting so that all present can be aware of and partake in this miracle.

Thank You for keeping me in good health and allowing me to reach twenty-six weeks in my pregnancy.

I pray that You will use this experience to strength-

en my faith, Brandon's, and all those involved: family, friends, and medical staff.

And I boldly pray that You will use this to show people Your love for us, Your strength, mercy, and grace. Please, I ask You to open the eyes of the non-believers around us to see Jesus. Let them see our faith and trust in You, and let us be an example of the comfort that Your perfect peace brings.

I surrender Kayla to You. She is in Your hands, and I trust You to work Your will.

In Jesus' name, amen.

After her prayer was completed, satisfying her spiritual need to fellowship with God, she turned her attention to her physical needs. Christina had to pee.

She got out of bed, walked past their suitcases by the bedroom closet, and headed down the long hallway. She smiled at some photos hanging on the wall, pictures of Brandon and his younger brother as children. As she approached the bathroom, she turned to enter, closing the door behind her.

Sitting on the toilet, feeling the pleasure of the first urination of the day, Christina thought about what the day might have in store. It was Sunday, so of course, they would attend church service. Brandon's dad was a pastor, and his house was next to the church campus. Thinking back to the sunlight peeking in through the window in the bedroom and the sound of the birds chirping outside, she imagined the walk from the house to the church would be beautiful—the striking colors of the spring-time flowers, the majesty of the surrounding trees, and hopefully the satisfying and almost *delicious* smell of light overnight rain.

She had been born and raised in Southern California, but Christina knew how it often rained in the South, sometimes a little, and sometimes much more. Sometimes the rain was a surprise, unexpectedly coming out of nowhere.

Christina was almost done, her stream a trickle, when she heard an ominous rumbling. It sounded like distant thunder. This surprised her because earlier, in the bedroom, she had seen sunlight. Throughout the Bible, God's voice was compared to thunder when He spoke. But at this moment, she didn't find that thought comforting. The bathroom had no windows, but she felt the light grow dimmer as if storm clouds had just blocked the light from the sun.

The bathroom walls seemed to close in, and the next sound she heard wasn't thunder but a loud and echoing gush. Horrified, Christina realized although she had just finished her second trimester, her water had broken.

CHAPTER 2

A NEW ADDITION

MARCH, 1997

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

James 1:17 (NASB)

CHRISTINA IS MY FIRSTBORN child. Her birth was a planned C-section, and I was present in the operating room with my wife, Lupe. It was a typical Southern California day, sunny and warm, but we would neither see its light nor enjoy its warmth. We had arrived at the hospital in the darkness of early morning, and the events of that day would keep us focused on things inside the hospital's walls, without much care for anything outside.

At the risk of seeming self-centered, I should convey that it was a frightening experience for me. An unimaginable number of doctors and nurses were present in the operating room, all

focused on their own tasks. Some tended to Lupe, and others prepared to receive Christina. My perception might have been exaggerated, but I remember rivers of blood pouring from the operating table and the doctors sloshing around in it.

After what seemed like hours but was surely minutes, Christina was pulled from Lupe's incision, and she was handed off to her pediatrician and a group of nurses who were ready to clean her up and take her to the hospital nursery. My head spinning, and my face white as a sheet, I was told to follow them.

In the nursery, with Christina lying in her infant-sized bed, I was finally able to turn my attention to her. I noticed that she had a small amount of hair on her head. She was active, moving her arms and legs, and she seemed energized by the introduction to a huge new world.

Moving past the larger details, I marveled at her little fingernails and at the veins in her tiny eyeballs. At that moment, I thought, "Christina is going to do something amazing. She may even change people's lives."

Does every parent think this about their child? Was this just a normal and inconsequential "proud new dad" thought? *Was this my own thought, or did God give it to me?*

Time would either reveal this thought to be true or it wouldn't. If true, then that thought was from God. If not, then I was being a dad with high hopes for his daughter.

Later that day, when Lupe was able to receive visitors, I took her daughter, Maritza, to visit. Maritza, my stepdaughter, was four years old at the time. She was the product of a teenage pregnancy and was a spirited and loving child with a great sense of empathy.

When Maritza entered that room, she discerned that something was wrong with her mother.

I explained to her that her mother had undergone surgery, that Lupe's belly had been cut wide open so that Christina

could be taken out, but that the doctors had sewn her belly back together. My simplistic explanation and my calm voice had the expected effect. Maritza's concern morphed into curiosity.

A nurse brought Christina from the nursery, and we introduced Maritza to her new baby sister. She wanted to hold Christina, which we allowed with a close eye and even closer hands. Maritza's instant love for her sister was apparent, and that love has continued throughout the years, never waning, always growing.

Nine months before Christina was born, Maritza was the flower girl in our wedding. But I had been in Maritza's life for much longer since she was a toddler. Her biological father was largely absent from her life, and I was happy, humbled, and honored to fill that role. Marrying Lupe meant that we had an instant family. And now, with Christina's birth, we were excited to have our latest addition.



A COUPLE OF YEARS after Christina was born, on a Sunday evening, Lupe and I went to bed, but we weren't quite ready for our weekend to be over. Going to sleep meant waking up and going to work, so we decided to make our weekend last a bit longer. Cuddling with each other, we talked, and the conversation turned to what we were most excited about at the time: Lupe's current pregnancy. Lupe was pregnant with our third daughter, Abigail Marie.

As that conversation concluded, Lupe changed the subject with a shocking revelation. When she was in the hospital, recovering from the previous C-section, a profound thought came to her that Christina was going to do something amazing.

I was astonished. I told Lupe how the same thought had come to me in the hospital nursery.

Excitement swelled within me. I had long wondered whether that thought was from me or from God, but with the knowledge that Lupe had thought the same, it was starting to feel supernatural. This wasn't proof of anything, but it made me wonder how God's hand was guiding Christina's life, and what He might have in store for her.

CHAPTER 3

A Wake-Up Call

2019 – 2021

Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you.

Psalm 55:22a (NASB)

TWENTY-TWO YEARS LATER, AFTER incalculable stress, hard work, and inadequate sleep, Christina graduated from a private university in Southern California with undergraduate degrees in both chemistry and biology.

When people asked about Christina's major, Lupe always replied, "I don't know, it's 'chembiostry' or something like that."

We were so proud of her. At the graduation ceremony, when her name was called, we screamed and cheered so hard that afterwards, our voices were hoarse.

During her time at university, Christina had been under constant spiritual attack, with academia preaching incessantly

that science had disproven God. It seemed that “science,” at least the kind of science taught at modern American institutions, had become almost a religion in and of itself. If students accepted by faith what their all-knowing professors told them, they were in the fold, but if they dared challenge the status quo, especially by bringing God into the discussion, they were academically excommunicated and labeled as science deniers.

Whenever I reflect on that, I remember a verse from the book of Isaiah, which says:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who substitute darkness for light and light for
darkness.

Isaiah 5:20a (NASB)

Despite her Christian upbringing, Christina started to succumb to this anti-Christian onslaught, and she found herself asking questions. If God wasn’t real, if science had truly shown that there was no supreme Creator of the universe, why should she keep believing in some ancient superstitious myth?

We lived five minutes from campus, and Christina continued to live at home, so we saw her every day. She wasn’t shy about expressing her doubts to Lupe and me. We had countless conversations with her, and we were worried about her faith and her salvation.

Thankfully, those conversations and the spiritual seeds that had been planted in her childhood, were fruitful in Christina. She became grateful that academia had caused her to doubt God because the biblical exploration that followed led Christina to a much stronger faith than when she had started at university.

The evil scheme of satan had backfired!

I remember a day when Christina returned home from classes, excited and breathless. She flew into the house, yelling

something about a verse from the book of Romans. Bewildered, I asked her what she was talking about.

She exclaimed, "Daddy, go get your Bible! Look up Romans 1:20."

I read it aloud:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:20 (NASB)

Not understanding her excitement, I read it again silently a few times, and then the phrase jumped out at me: "clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."

My facial expression must have shown some level of enlightenment because Christina started nodding enthusiastically.

"My studies in science *proved* that God exists! His fingerprints are on *everything*!"

She went on, talking about cells and DNA, biology and chemistry. From what I was able to grasp, Christina was citing actual evidence of God within all creation, and that we, the created, can clearly perceive and understand this if we just open our eyes and look.

Lupe and I were so relieved to know that Christina had moved past her doubts. For a Christian parent, it's hard to imagine anything worse than your child not believing in God. But years later, we would find out that, while Christina's faith had been strengthened at this time, she didn't yet have a personal relationship with Jesus.



DURING HER SENIOR YEAR at university, Christina was accepted to PhD programs in chemistry at multiple impressive schools. Ultimately, she decided to attend Duke University in North Carolina.

Lupe and I helped her move. We got her set up in an apartment a couple of miles from the campus. Her first year at Duke was a combination of classes and lab work, but after that year, her required classes were complete, and her education consisted entirely of working in the lab.

With no classes to attend, I assumed her academic life would become easier. I was wrong. She often worked more hours than two full-time jobs together, trying to keep up with the research that was required of her. She grew tired from having worked long and hard, year after year. The quality of her work diminished, requiring even more lab time to counter that, creating a vicious cycle.

Christina started to doubt herself, questioning her self-worth. For a number of years, she had been so sure of her path, and she hadn't considered any alternatives. Chemistry was her life. Besides God and her family, it was all she cared about. But if she wasn't good enough with chemistry, what purpose did she serve?

Self-doubt, worsened by the depression she had suffered from since she was a pre-teen became overwhelming. Coupled with the increasing demand from her professor, it was all too much to bear.

She began using alcohol as a coping mechanism to calm her mind at the end of a long and stress-filled day in the lab. Starting with a beer or two each day, she graduated to a daily bottle of wine and sometimes even more.

The strain of her lab work increased, and the alcohol became insufficient to calm her nerves. More output was required of her, although Christina was already at her maximum level. She was already enduring long days, Monday through Saturday, and somewhat shorter days on Sunday.

Continuing this downward spiral, Christina remembered God, and she turned to prayer as a last resort.

One day, while praying, she felt God tell her she needed to stop drinking. She dismissed this, assuming it was her own mind. She asserted, "I'm not an alcoholic. I'm fine."

That evening, after the first few drinks took effect, she saw the word "addiction" each time she closed her eyes: white text on a black background floating around in her head.

"Was this a vision from God?" she wondered. "Nope," she thought, believing she was still in control and could stop drinking whenever she chose.

As her mental well-being deteriorated, so did her physical health. She was working too much, and she only had enough time each night to chug a bottle of wine and sleep for a few hours before melting out of bed for the next day of torture.

This lifestyle had become unsustainable. Something had to change.



AT THIS POINT IN her schooling, most of Christina's associates were anti-Christian academics. They had openly mocked her for her faith, pressuring her to conform, to abandon her beliefs and to accept that science had disproven the existence of God. But Christina knew better. Her faith was solid.

One of her few Christian friends told her she should join a Bible study group.

Hungry for change, Christina heeded this advice. She joined a group at a local church, led by the church's pastor, a Spirit-filled man named John, who was doing God's work. She instantly became addicted to the Word.

This group was studying the Book of Daniel, a historical account written 2,500 years ago. It covers the time when Daniel and his fellow Israelites were held captive in Babylon. The book is ripe with prophecy.

Part of the group's discussion covered the food that Daniel ate while in Babylon. Some of the captives were to be given the same food as the king, which included wine and unclean meat, but Daniel and others refused to defile themselves, and instead, insisted on eating a diet of vegetables and water.

Feeling that her health was in decline from her lifestyle of neglect, malnutrition, and alcohol, this idea of eating like Daniel appealed to Christina, and she started what was popularly known as the "Daniel diet".

While she didn't mind eating so many vegetables, Christina discovered that she was not able to follow the diet perfectly because alcohol was forbidden. She believed she had control over her drinking, and committed to herself that she would stop.

The next night, she broke that commitment. Strengthening her resolve, she promised herself *and* God that she would try even harder. And she did try harder. But the next night, she failed again.

Not only had she broken a promise to herself, she had broken a promise to God.

As the anxiety of desperation gripped her, she wondered if this was what people meant by the phrase "rock bottom." If it wasn't, she knew she'd be there soon if something didn't change. She felt so powerless and trapped, so dejected, and she recognized that the only way to change her trajectory was with God's help.

Christina took a deep breath and closed her eyes, intending to pray, but before she could start, the word “addiction” flashed in her mind again. She remembered how God had given Daniel vivid apocalyptic visions, and she understood she was receiving a vision of her own. She forcibly opened her eyes, knowing it was the only way to avoid that vision.

She cried out loud, “I don’t have a problem! I’m not an alcoholic, God. I don’t know why You keep saying that to me.”

Previously, the vision caused her to feel ashamed. But this time something was different, probably from the realization that the vision was from God. And if it was from God, she knew He was giving it to her in His infinite love, to build her up, not to shame her.

Christina grabbed her Bible from the desk in her living room and opened it to a random page. She glanced at the top of the page and found that she was in the book of Romans. She read the first verse that caught her eye.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those
who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1 (NASB)

She felt the Holy Spirit tugging at her, telling her God wasn’t condemning or shaming her, and that He wanted to help. Tears started to roll down her eyes as she felt *seen* by God.

In that moment, she accepted what God was telling her: she had an addiction. Along with this acknowledgment came a welcomed wave of relief. By allowing herself to *recognize* the problem, she could give the burden to Him. And with His help, she could break this habit.

She fell to her knees on the worn living room carpet, closing her eyes. She lifted her hands in surrender, reaching up like a toddler reaches to her daddy. She prayed the most heartfelt prayer of her life.

Jesus, thank You for keeping me alive. I've put my body through so much abuse, and that could have killed me. Thank You for Your Spirit convicting me, convincing me of the truth, that I'm an alcoholic, and that I'm not in control.

I have tried to stop drinking because of this diet, and I have failed. Obviously I need to stop drinking entirely. I can't do this on my own. I'm not strong enough.

I cast my burden on You. Please deliver me, and give me the strength to stay away from alcohol, not just for this diet, but forever.

Thank You for not condemning me but for wanting to help me.

Amen.

Jesus answered that prayer and granted her request immediately. Christina was able to do the Daniel diet successfully, and although she still had the urge to drink, it no longer felt like her will was being overpowered.

There were moments of weakness, but in those moments, she felt the gentle nudging of Holy Spirit, which gave her strength to overcome. She had come to realize the power of surrendering to God. She now had a choice whether to drink, and with His help, she chose not to.

Jesus had completely delivered her.



AS CHRISTINA CONTINUED STUDYING the Bible, she became hungrier, wanting to experience God outside of His Word. Christina realized she was only as close to God as *she* chose to be. Desiring to develop the relationship even further, she prayed regularly and fervently, praising Him, repenting, and stating her requests.

At the end of her prayers, when she was done talking, instead of finishing by saying “Amen,” she waited. She *yielded* to Him, taking time in silence to hear His voice. And she learned that prayer can be a two-way conversation.

God started speaking to Christina, or rather, Christina started listening to Him. It became common, whether at a restaurant, a grocery store, or a gas station, for Christina to hear God telling her to approach a particular person and ask if she could pray for them.

More often than not, the person declined. At first, this bothered her, but Christina realized that they weren’t rejecting her, they were rejecting *Him*.

Christina asked God why He kept sending her to those who weren’t interested. He replied that whether they accepted the offer of prayer, the important thing was that Christina was being obedient. Occasionally, the person responded positively, and Christina prayed for that person right there out loud.

One person she felt called to approach was a man in a wheelchair. He wasn’t paralyzed but had difficulty walking and required a cane. He allowed her to pray for him. On the sidewalk outside of a strip mall in Durham, North Carolina, they held hands and bowed their heads. Christina thanked God for bringing them together and asked for God’s healing power on this man. At the end of the prayer, the man stood from his wheelchair, let go of his cane, and walked effortlessly.

Through tears, with a wavering voice, he proclaimed, “This is a miracle!”

At school, Christina’s work was improving. The experiments that were part of her graduate research started succeeding, and she was able to get more done in less time. She adopted the belief that she wasn’t working for her lab or for a university degree. She was working for God. God led her to this place. He led her to die to herself and to her own needs so that she could live for Him, for His purpose. Never in her life had she felt so close to God, and never had she felt such joy and peace.



ONE SUMMER EVENING, AS Christina approached her second year at Duke, she had a dream of her future husband. She saw him in great detail, a clean-shaven man with well-kept hair wearing a military uniform. They were both preaching the Gospel together. When she woke, she remembered her dream vividly.

The Bible documents cases of God using dreams to speak to people. Some dreams provided direction on where to live. Some served as warnings. Others foretold the future, an indication of plentiful times followed by drought, which enabled people to prepare. In the 6th century BC, Daniel dreamt of the world leaders who would be in power during a time of tribulation before God replaced worldly governments with His own kingdom.

Christina wondered if God was giving her a glimpse of her own future, perhaps offering guidance on whom she would marry.

Grinning, she asked, “Lord, who was that? He was super cute.”

The name “Brandon” flashed in her mind.

At an upcoming Bible study session, still in the book of Daniel, the group discussed the passages where Daniel had

interpreted dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The group started recounting some of their own dreams.

Christina described her recent dream about her future husband named Brandon.

Pastor John, who was leading the study group, tilted his head and looked at her.

“That’s funny, my son’s name is Brandon.”

Christina asked if he lived nearby, and John replied, “No, he’s in the Air Force and is stationed in Wichita.”

Surprised and intrigued, she remembered the man’s military uniform in her dream.

Christina asked John if he had any pictures. When John showed her some photos on his phone, Christina’s heart stopped and her jaw dropped. Without a doubt, this was the man from her dream.

In an instant, Christina received confirmation that her dream had come straight from God.