


What happens when we honestly face our mess and seek God? Can beauty, love, or hope follow? Failure and regret can deepen our character. Those who seem permanently wrecked can experience joy, freedom, and a newfound dream. Rappazini takes us beyond despair to biblically based forgiveness and a faithful future.

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# HOW DID IT GET TO THIS?

*How did it get to this?*

*Could it possibly get any worse?*

*What do I do now?*

*How long will this take?*

**H**ave these questions above ever crossed your mind? Maybe you asked them after finalizing a divorce or being let go from your job. Perhaps you whispered them under your breath in an empty hospital room or an overcrowded jail cell. Maybe these questions came as you realized your overspending has caught up with you and your debt is overwhelming. Perhaps someone asked you similar questions in your church's small group or even during group time at a rehabilitation center. Or maybe, like me, it was after a phone call with a loved one who seemingly had just hit rock bottom. Well, if you never read another page of this book, at least walk away knowing this: you are not alone in asking these questions . . . although, at times, it can certainly feel that way.

Millions of people, just like you, have scratched their heads, wondering, "How did things spiral out of control?" Sometimes it happens gradually, like a slow-moving hurricane waiting to make landfall.

Other times, the storms of life come like a flash flood or deadly tornado with no warning, and you are left trying to keep your head above water or diving for shelter. Regardless of how you or your loved one got there, the reality is, you know something must change.

Easier said than done.

Everybody loves a redemption story. Whether it is in sports or on the movie screen, we crave people who get a second chance after they have fallen. But why does it always seem to work out for everyone else? It would be amazing if we could wake up one morning and our relationships with our parents or kids were restored. Or that addiction miraculously disappeared. Or the consequences of those poor decisions had magically vanished. Unfortunately, life is not written with sidewalk chalk, it is written with a permanent marker. But that doesn't mean the future has to look the same as the past and our mess can't turn into a powerful message.

Did you know that the Bible is essentially a book about people who fail? They failed in their relationships, marriages, careers, walk with God, and much more. But the Bible is also a book about moving forward after messing up. So, if you have ever felt like a failure or need a second chance, if you have neglected vital relationships, need to move on after a nasty divorce, start a new career path, get a handle on your finances, beat an addiction, overcome depression or anxiety, or—fill in the blank—then keep reading. Explore with me as we look at stories from Scripture as well as modern-day stories of those whose past helped them propel their future.

This isn't a book about sitting back and watching God do His thing—I want to assure you there is more to it than that. You have an active role to play. Whether you are going through a challenging season or watching and waiting for a loved one to snap out of it, there is action to be taken. I want to help you rethink what it means that

God gives multiple chances, what steps you should take, and what land mines to avoid.

## MEET MY BROTHER

When I was pastoring, our church loved celebrating the success stories about people being healed of cancer or overcoming an addiction, testimonies of restored marriages, and prodigals coming home. But for every redemptive victory, there were scores of others that were a mixture of losses and grief. Walking alongside someone during their darkest days is heartbreaking. You see the hurt. You feel the pain. And those days turn into months and then into years. What makes it even harder is when that person is part of your own family.

When our ninety-four-year-old grandmother died, it was my responsibility to notify my older brother Nick of her passing. I don't know if it was my task because I was his brother, the so-called spiritual leader of the family, or if it was because I was the only one still on speaking terms with him. Although "speaking terms" is a stretch as I only had talked to him a handful of times over the past several years.

Nick was notorious for being difficult to reach. He was homeless and didn't always have a working cellphone. I tried reaching the one friend of his I knew, and she said that she hadn't talked to him in weeks. However, after several attempts over multiple days with no successful contact, my mind started to go to dark places of where he could be, what could have happened to him, or what he could have done to himself. I was actually relieved when Nick's friend sent me a screenshot of his name on the local police department's website of people who were recently arrested.

After calling the sheriff's department and informing the desk worker about the nature of my call, I was able to speak to Nick for

fifteen minutes. There was so much I wanted to say in those fifteen minutes. So many questions to ask. But I found myself just trying to listen to him explain his side of the story. After our phone call was over, I ended up asking myself those questions:

*How did it get to this?*

*Could it possibly get any worse?*

*What do I do now?*

*How long will this take?*

Along with examining the nature of God, delving into second chances, and exploring the redemptive narratives in the Bible, throughout this book I want to share with you the story of how my family and I have been walking alongside my brother during his ups and downs and battles with alcohol, drugs, and mental health issues. But spoiler alert, Nick is not where he ultimately wants to be, even if he is in a much better place than where he was. We are still walking this journey with him, as I imagine you are still walking this journey yourself, or maybe alongside your brother, sister, child, grandchild, spouse, partner, or friend. This is not a book about how things worked out flawlessly for me and so I'm telling you how you can get there too. Instead, I want to travel the journey with you. Because this book is not about my brother and me. This book is ultimately about you, your loved ones, and God.

I know that life can be challenging, and it's easy to feel lost or disconnected. But even in those moments, God is at work in your life, with a perfect plan designed to bring you joy and fulfillment. You might feel that you've strayed too far from Him, or that you do not deserve His love. But the truth is, God's love is endless, and His mercy knows no bounds. No matter what you've done, you're never beyond His reach and healing touch.

## GOD IS STANDING ON THE SHORELINE OF YOUR LIFE

Fishermen are some of the hardest-working people I know. Growing up in a small fishing village in Florida, I got to know several. They were up before the sun, getting ready for the day and setting out to sea regardless of the weather. The funny thing is, they couldn't imagine doing anything else. Fishermen love to fish.

Several of Jesus' followers were fishermen, including Peter. He loved to fish. What is unthinkable is that when he put down his nets to follow Jesus, he also put aside his profession and his lifestyle (Matthew 4:18–22). But even after Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter still wasn't sure if he could live a life apart from fishing. For him, fishing was everything. It was what he would have thought about the moment he woke up and what was on his mind before he shut his eyes at night.

In John 21, we encounter Peter back out on the water, fishing. After his three denials of Christ (Mark 14:66–72), Peter likely felt he had placed himself outside of Jesus' inner circle and, therefore, retreated and went back to his old ways and his first love. That's right—even Jesus' best bud had to learn how to move forward after messing up.

Many times, like Peter, we start off on the right path, but then we find ourselves in a bind and revert to the life we once had. We turn back to our past and our former tendencies. We return to our first loves. God wants you to love Him more than anything else. When Peter went back to fishing, he certainly didn't expect for Jesus to keep pursuing him, let alone talk about those courtyard denials, but that is what Jesus did. Here's the thing—Jesus is pursuing you too, and He wants to talk about your past.

In John 21, Jesus showed up on the shore of Peter's life. "Cast your net on the other side of the boat," shouted a familiar voice from the beach. The miraculous catch that ensued immediately got Peter's attention. He realized whose voice it was, none other than his friend and Savior, Jesus (see John 21:6–7). Peter instantly plunged into the water and swam ashore. Similarly to when they first met, Jesus had surprised him with an unbelievable catch. But this time, it was different. Peter was in need of a second chance.

Jesus wasn't the only thing waiting for Peter on the shore. He had started a charcoal fire with fish on it nearby. What would have seemed like a friendly gesture to most would have reminded Peter of something completely different: his rejection of Christ in the courtyard not too many nights ago. You see, after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was terrified that the authorities might capture and torture him too. So, while hiding in the shadows among the court-

yards, attempting to observe what was happening behind the courthouse walls, Peter had warmed himself by the charcoal fires.

However, people became curious about his presence and questioned him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" Peter emphatically denied any affiliation with Jesus. After his third denial, though, he heard a rooster crow off in the distance. The bird's call reminded him of Jesus' words spoken to

him a few hours earlier, "This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (Matthew 26:34). Now on the beach, several days after Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter and Jesus have some unfinished business to attend to.

***Jesus was giving Peter another chance. He was giving Peter a path to move forward after messing up.***



After their morning fish fry, Jesus takes Peter for a stroll down the beach and memory lane. Then, the Prince of Peace turns directly to Peter, and asks him three times, “Peter, do you love me?” (see John 21: 15–17). Peter quickly answered, “Of course! You know that I love You.”

Let’s be clear: Peter’s declaration of loving the Lord three times did not erase his three denials just days before. However, it did create an avenue for a deeper relationship with Jesus. With each question, Jesus was giving Peter another chance. He was giving Peter a path to move forward after messing up. Peter, the fisherman, would finally retire, and permanently drop his nets, and Peter, the follower of Jesus, would never turn back again.

I want to take a moment to remind you of something truly extraordinary—God wants what is best for you, and He is doing something powerful in your life right now. No matter how many times you have turned away from Him, He never stops loving you. He is always standing on the shore of your life, calling you back to Himself. He may even want to use your past to change someone else’s future.

## LET’S GET STARTED

So why wait? I’m convinced that if you travel this journey with me, you will be one step closer to understanding yourself (or your loved one) and the God of Second Chances better. You will be able to view your past through a new set of lenses. You will be able to have a stronger relationship with God and those around you. And you might be able to find the peace and joy you’ve been desiring. But I can also guarantee it won’t be easy. It will take self-reflection and action. Yes, it won’t be easy, but it will be worth it.

My hope is that in these pages, you will see just how many do-overs God gives people. Perhaps even more importantly, why He

gives so many opportunities instead of turning people away. You will learn how important humility and forgiveness are to moving forward. In addition, you will understand why we keep falling back into our old ways and habits, but also how you can prepare yourself for the future. I will suggest the first steps to take during your journey of second chances, give you some questions to ponder, provide conversation starters with those around you, and hopefully leave you in a better state than you are now.

Let's face it: too much is at stake not to go on this journey together. The cost of waiting is too great. You don't need me to tell you that you wish you would have done something earlier. Don't make the same mistake again. The God of Second Chances wants to give you another chance at your marriage, career, family patterns and use you for great things. He knows that your past can't change but your future most certainly can. He also knows that your past has the potential to change someone else's future too.

So, there is no more time to waste. Let's roll up our sleeves and explore together how to move forward after messing up.

### ***For Personal Reflection:***

1. Have you ever found yourself asking the questions presented at the beginning of the chapter during challenging moments in your life? What other questions have come to your mind?
2. Consider the idea of second chances. When have you personally experienced or witnessed someone going through a challenging situation, and what would a second chance look like for you and those you love?

***For Discussion:***

1. Explore the theme of God standing on the shoreline of one's life, ready to offer second chances. How does this perspective influence our understanding of God's grace and the continuous opportunity for a fresh start?
2. In the early stages of this second chance journey, discuss some obstacles and hurdles standing in your way or in the way of your loved one.
3. At the heart of second chances are relationships. Which of your relationships will benefit the most from seeking the God of Second Chances? Share how you want that renewed relationship to look.

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