



Season 1, Episode 1: “Falling in Love With Jesus”

Hey there friends and come on in for another episode of Life-on-Life. In this first season of the podcast we are going to focus on walking out our faith in everyday life, practically speaking, just what that looks like and then also doing the hard stuff of following Jesus well and getting our lives in stride and in tune with the true truth of God. So I'm really glad you're here today because we're going to start off with something that you and I already have, something that is one of the most effective spiritual tools and weapons that you and I possess and that is - *our story*.

The other night I was teaching Bible study and one of the gals brought up something that I had shared years ago as a part of my story that had really impacted her and it just reminded me again the power of our stories. *People remember stories*. They really do impact us and we've probably all got a story or two that really left an indelible mark on our lives in some way. And likewise our very own real-life stories of faith in Jesus, our own everyday encounters with him and the battles, the screw ups, the messes, the nitty gritty, and even the victories of life, they all tell others what Jesus is like. And you've probably heard it said before that sometimes we are the first Bible that somebody ever reads. So yeah, we all have a story to tell and it doesn't matter where the story begins or how many twists and turns it takes because God is writing that story and it is actually part of his grand story. And one of the two most powerful weapons that he's given us is *our faith and our story*.

It says in the Bible in Revelation 12:10 and 11 that the saints, the brothers and sisters in Christ overcame Satan in two ways. It says they defeated him by the blood of the lamb and by their testimony. The blood of the lamb being what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us on the cross, and then by their testimony - that's the word of God in their life, the activity of the Holy spirit in and through them what Jesus has done personally in their lives to bring about victory.

Y'all, this is one of the most powerful and effective ways that we walk out our faith together. It's by sharing our stories of faith. This is how we encourage one another to keep on going at it as we tell others how Jesus has made a difference in our life. Our stories bring Jesus to life for other people and then they get to see what Jesus looks like in the life of a real woman as you and I tell them, “I know he's real and I know he works because this is how he has worked in my life!”

“This is how he worked in my life... when I went through a divorce or when my husband left me for a younger woman or when my kid got busted for dealing drugs or when I lost my job, my financial status, or lost my reputation or when I had cancer.”

We all have a story to tell. And with Jesus, it is a beautiful and a powerful story. And so most often when I meet with a woman the very first thing she'll ask me is, “So what's your story?” So today I'm going to share a little bit of my story with you and then my buddy Michelle is going to join in on the conversation in just a few minutes. But do you remember last week I shared that question with you that John asked me on our first date and what my response was? He asked me what I was most passionate about and I said, “The only thing I'm passionate about is Jesus. And if I could do anything I wanted to do, I would teach women what it means to know God and to fall in love with Jesus and to live the kind of life that he has dreamed for them to live.” And that's the question I get asked a lot. “How did you come to really fall in love with Jesus?” So that is what I'm going to talk about today on the podcast

It was out of sheer desperation that I fell in love with Jesus. My relationship with Jesus took a really deep dive when I became desperate for what he had desired to give me all along, which was himself. But before I get into that, let me give you a little bit of context. I can never remember a time when I didn't believe in God and didn't believe in Jesus. Even as a very young little girl, I had this awareness of God and I would pray, I would talk to God and we talked to Jesus. But it wasn't until I was in high school, my junior year through YoungLife that I made a profession of my faith in Christ. And he became Lord and savior of my life. And at that time I was *sold out*. I was fired up and I made all kinds of promises to God.

And two years after I graduated from high school, I was in college. And by that time I had broken every single promise I had made to him. My particular thing was I craved human love. I craved the love of a man. All I wanted to do desperately was to fall in love and get married and live happily ever after. And maybe that was the influence of a lot of Disney fairy tales I grew up on. And maybe that was soap operas I watched, I don't know. But it was such a craving. And man, we, we all crave something. We are wired to crave God, to need God. And we then turn and try to fill our lives up and satisfy that God-shaped craving, that God-shaped void in our life with anything and everything but him. And so I pursued love for all the wrong reasons and in all the wrong ways and made really foolish choices.

And you know, craving human love makes you do things you never thought you would do. It makes you give yourself in an exchange for somebody else's feelings that are so fleeting at best. But I want to say this and I know somebody out there needs to hear this: I made that profession of my faith in Christ in high school. And at that point I was saved. I had given my life to Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior, and I believe him, and I believe his word that at that point I was sealed. I was marked as Christ's own. My name was recorded in the Lamb's book of life for eternity. But at that point I was not pursuing God and I strayed off in a different direction. I pursued the love of man I got my heart broken time and time again.

But I want you to hear this - the greatest sins of my life... and I know that God doesn't put any weight on sins - He doesn't rank them - they're just sin that separates us from God... but I made the biggest mistakes, the most foolish choices, and was in a lifestyle of habitual sin *after* I said yes to Jesus Christ.

But he pursued me relentlessly. He hunted me down. And I will tell you that at that time I was in church, I was going to church, and I was actually serving in church. But I wasn't pursuing God. I was just pursuing these relationships. And so, I'd go to church and kind of go through the motions and I noticed people in my church that I thought really had it going on with Jesus. But I thought that was just kind of... *for them*.

One of my dear friends, Happy Gafford, was one of them, and she was mesmerizing. She would talk about Jesus in a way I hadn't heard anybody else talk about him. Her face would light up, her eyes would light up when she would say his name. And it was like, she was *in love* with him. She really was! She didn't just know *about* him. *She knew him*. Now Happy was also a deacon in our church. And in the Episcopal church where I attended at the time, I thought, well, you know, deacons are people who are kind of professionals in the faith. They've kind of got it going on with Jesus that way. And there was an interim priest in our church, Warren Richardson who also had that same thing. He talked about Jesus in a way and just had this love for Jesus that was like he was in love with him.

And I always thought that was so interesting. I was so captivated by that, but I didn't feel like that was something that I could attain to. And then there was a priest that asked a few of us in the church if we would be lay readers. And what that means is that you would read some of the scripture on Sunday mornings in church. I was asked to be one of those readers and I would read probably once a month on a Sunday. I was intimidated by that at first, but very honored and I took it very seriously that I was asked to read in church. And so I would get my reading, for that Sunday and I would go over it and I started to pray - and this is the craziest thing - I would pray and ask the Lord to help me to understand what his word was saying and to help me to read this in the same way that he intended it to be read by the men who he inspired to write it, and that when I would read it, that the people who would hear it would understand God's word.

Now y'all, I did not have enough spiritual sense to pray a prayer like that! So it had to have been the Holy spirit praying it through me because I really, I really was not pursuing God at this point. I was reading his word in church and that was pretty much it. And so I believe that is when the Lord really started working on my heart. In fact, I came across this quote years later and I have it framed in my office right now and it's a quote by St. Augustine of Hippo and it says, "Oh Lord, thou didst strike my heart with thy word and I did love thee."

I really believe that was the time when God started striking my heart with his word. Eventually it would shatter and he would be able to come in, in a big and full way. But at that point he started little by little... chipping away, pounding at the door of my heart with his word.

And so I went on and continued in this half-in half-out kind-of thing with the Lord and finally had one last relationship that just left me undone. I was at the end of myself, I was just done and tired. I gave up. In fact, one night I was just devastated and heartbroken and I just went face down on the floor in my room and I just said, "Lord, I give up. I give up. If you want to be who you say you want to be to me than come on in and fill me up because I am done trying. I am done. So just come on in and have your way."

I did not have any feelings of taking my own life at all, but I did just want to go to sleep for a long, long time and wake up and have it all be over, have everything be fixed and feel better. But if you know God, like I know God, you know he's not in the business of fixing us. *He's not going to just do a quick fix.* He is in the business of healing us and restoring us and filling us and helping us to live the life that he has dreamed for us to live and called us to live.

So I prayed this prayer and I was still a mess. I didn't feel any different, but I did make that choice in my mind and in my heart that night. And I think that's when the ship started sailing slowly and turning in the other direction.

A dear friend of mine, one of my best friends ever, Judy, who has gone on home to be with the Lord, took one look at me and she knew I was a mess. She said, "Hey, you need to be in a Bible study. I started doing this Bible study and it's really this cool, kind of crazy thing. But you go to this Bible study, you get this workbook and then you come in, you watch this woman teach on this video and she really is quite good. And if you can get over her big hair and her Texas accent, she's got a lot of really great things to say. I think you ought to go." And of course, I'm grinning when I say this because if you have been around Bible study for any length of time, you know, this was Beth Moore. (This was in 1996 and, oh gosh, I hope Beth Moore doesn't hear this and is offended by this.) It was her first Bible study, it had just been released a short time before and it was called "A Woman's Heart - God's Dwelling Place" and it was on the old Testament tabernacle.

I was so devastated in life when Judy asked me to go to this study. But, I was like, "Yeah, sure, whatever. I'll go." And so I went and I was *mesmerized*. I was captivated when I started watching the video. Beth Moore is teaching and y'all, I do not know what she said. I have no recollection of what the lesson was about or can't remember anything profound that impacted me except how she spoke. It wasn't what she said, it was how she said it and how she talked about Jesus. And I thought, here again, here's somebody else that is talking about Jesus not like she just knows him or has studied him, but that she knows him deeply and intimately and is in love with him.

And so I'm watching this and I start crying - like where you try to muffle your cry but it starts eking out and people are looking at you - and there's only eight people in the room. So it's kind of obvious who's crying and so people start passing me Kleenex and I just was praying under my breath, "Lord, what is this? What are you doing?" And when it was over, I ran out to my car, put my head down on the steering wheel and just kept hitting the steering wheel and saying, "Lord, Lord, if that is real, I want that. I want that, I want that with Jesus. I want to fall in love with Jesus. If that is real, I want it!"

And I drove home in the pouring down rain and my eyes are just flooded with tears. I could barely see, but I raced inside my house when I got home and just threw myself at the end of my bed and on my knees. I just said, "Lord, I have fallen in love with every kind of man out there and I have never fallen in love with you. And that is what I want. I want to fall in love with you." And it was almost in defiance. I almost was daring God to let me fall in love with him. And I prayed it and I got up and I did not feel any different.

And again, in defiance almost I the next night, same thing down on my knees, prayed it again. "I want to fall in love with you. I want to fall in love with you. I don't know what that looks like. I don't know what that feels like, but I want it. I want to fall in love with you." And I had made this determination that I was going to keep on praying that until something changed and before long I realized, wow, you know, *I can't wait to get home at night and grab my Bible and jump in my bed and read!* I would grab a bowl of cereal and I would just sit there all night long and read the Bible and just listen to God and his word and I have, I still have that Bible to this day. It is the very first life application study Bible that was released. It's the new living translation and it's a green hard back copy and I have all kinds of scraps of paper and sticky notes and things written all over it. I've saved it and kept it in tack just like that because I never want to forget that the early days of my romance with Jesus, but I started to realize, you know what, that's what's happened.

I'd come home night after night and continued with Bible study and I just started to crave being with him. And isn't that how relationship starts - you spend time with somebody. And so that's what happened. We just kept hanging out together. I kept spending more time with him and there'd be nights where I would start talking to him as I would read things in the scripture and I would just ask him about those things - things I'd struggle with. And there are many nights that I would literally open up my Bible and put my head on it and fall asleep and wake up with my head still in the Bible... I just couldn't get enough of him. And little by little, slowly, I just started to change the way I thought, the way I acted, the way I treated other people, the way I treated myself. It all begin to change.

[Michelle speaking] Yeah, Punky. I love that image of you falling asleep with your Bible. And you know, speaking of that change, it's just like in any relationship when you desire to know someone and you are falling in love with them, you want to spend time with them. You want to be on the phone, you want to text, you want to ask, "When can I see you again?" and before you leave, you're already planning the next time together. And so I know that that "feeling," while it can happen for some people, more often than not, we hear that it's not usually an overwhelming first feeling with Jesus. But it is something that if we spend the time and we are present with him - we know from his word he is already pursuing us - we just have to quiet the busy, we have to make the time, make the space and pursue him back.

So just for anyone out there who's thinking, "You know, I prayed this prayer and this didn't happen for me and I don't feel any different." I would just tell you - keep at it. Keep at it. He is not hiding himself from you. He is there and I promise you - because God promises us - that one day you will wake up and realize you are closer to him today than you were yesterday.

[Punky speaking] Well, yes, I completely agree with that. But it's like a lot of things. We have to make the decision that we're just going to do some things differently. And so for me, I made that decision to stop playing around at my faith and to start living it and to start pursuing Jesus.

And, you know, we've got to discipline ourselves. I know that's a word that people flinch when they hear it and shy away from, but we really do. If we're, if we're going to achieve something, you've got to discipline yourself to get the thing. Making time to invest in any relationship is going to bear fruit, but especially in our relationship with Jesus. And so we have to discipline ourselves to start investing in that relationship. And that's the first step, really. It's making the time, pursuing a relationship with Christ will be one of the very best investments of your life, the best investment of your life. And listen, I'm not saying we've to sit down and camp out for an hour every day with him. Maybe you'll get there but you know what? It starts small. So you give him your a little bit, you give him whatever you have to give and he will be faithful and he will multiply it.

He can do a lot in that few minutes that you give him. You start somewhere and then I really believe you gotta pray for it to happen. Jesus is in relentless pursuit of us, y'all. And he's the one that's coming after us. He wants us more than we want him, but we have got to want to want him and pray for that. We are wired to want him. So when the Bible tells us those things and tells us how much God loves us, and then he tells us in his word in Matthew 22 that we are supposed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Well, I believe that if he says that, then we need to pray for that. We need to ask God for those things that he says he wants for us.

I really don't believe that it is humanly possible to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. I don't. It is a supernatural thing. And he's given us his Holy spirit in us and his spirit wants that for us. The Holy spirit wants the things that God wants for us and he wants to help us have those things. So we pray in agreement with what God has already said in his word that we should do and what he wants for us. So when he says so then pray that. So when he says to do something, then pray to do that. Pray to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Pray to hunger and thirst for him. Pray to hunger and thirst for his word. Pray to love him more than anything and anyone.

Y'all this, this isn't just a one and done kind of thing. I believe this is a lifelong pursuit and a lifelong prayer to continue to pray to hunger and thirst for God's Word. I do that almost every day – even the night before I pray and ask the Lord to “Wake me up with a passion, with a hunger and thirst for you – just to get up and out of bed and get down there and enjoy that time with you.” And I pray, “Lord, more than what I want, I want what you want for me.” I keep asking him, “Lord, I want to love you more than anything and anyone and desire nothing on this earth as much or more than I desire you.” So praying in agreement for those things that he already says he wants for us is one way our relationship with him and our faith-life will flourish.

So yeah, while there's no magic formula to falling in love with Jesus, there are some things we have to do in this life of faith that help us start walking it out and living it out and

drawing deeper into the heart of Jesus and deeper in love with him. And as my counselor said, "If you want something you have never had before, you have to do something you've never done before." So yes, of course we have to cultivate some habits, some Holy habits that will help us to grow and that will draw us deeper into the things of God. And then what happens is that our "have to" becomes a "get to" and a "want to." We move from "I *have to* sit down and read my Bible" to "I *get to* and I *want to* sit down and read my Bible and spend time with Jesus" and look- he wants that! He wants that with you, that depth of relationship and that intimacy with you.

He doesn't want us sitting down every time for just Bible study. He just wants our nearness and we want his nearness too, whether we realize that or not. You know, the Christian life is not a religion. You probably heard that before. It's not a religion, it's a relationship. It's a relationship with a live person, a real live person, the creator of the universe. And like any relationship, relationships grow and evolve and get deeper over time as we spend time with one another. My love and my relationship with John is so much deeper and richer now than it was the day we got married. I loved him then, but our love is on a much deeper level than it was at that point.

And likewise, my love for Jesus just keeps on growing deeper and stronger the more time I spend with him- the more time I spend listening to him and his word and just thinking through what he said, engaging with him and dialoguing with him in his word... then also just throughout the day in my ordinary routines... then in my calling as a teacher and as a communicator and in my marriage and in other relationships, just inviting him in and engaging him in all of those aspects of our everyday life. And the more we walk with him and invite him in to those places in our daily living, our struggles, our ups and downs, the scratchy places, the highs and lows- the deeper we grow in our intimacy and our relationship with him. And we learn then to depend on him more and rely upon him and include him in everything.

And y'all, it takes practice. Like anything, it takes practice. It takes making the commitment to do it. And then this stick-to-it-ness kind of thing. He's faithful. He wants this *for you* and he wants this *with you*. He does. But I caution you this, don't get hung up on feelings if you think that you're going to feel every day, like you're in love with Jesus and like you feel like you want to spend time with him. Don't go on feelings. Go on facts. Go on the fact of the matter that Jesus Christ is there, he says he is always with you and he will never forsake you. *And he is there.*

After a while we come to do things because it has become our way of life. Look, I don't get up every morning, day after day and run down the stairs with, you know, goosebumps on my arms and a thrill in my heart to meet with God. But I just keep doing it. Yesterday morning I got up and I just felt blah and I really could've crawled back into bed. But I got up and I went downstairs and I still felt blah and I made my coffee and I still felt blah. But you know what, I sat down in my chair and I opened my Bible and I said, "Here I am again, Lord. Here I am again. It's just me and you because I really want to be with you and I really want to hear from you."

So we just keep at it. You guys, we just keep at it day after day, not perfectly, but as my husband always says, *progressingly*—making a little bit more progress every day. The more you stick with it, as you do this over time and you spend time with Jesus and his word gets deeper and deeper into you, you start to flourish in your heart and in your mind and you begin to notice that like, “Hey, yeah, I am actually walking this thing out. I'm actually experiencing God's activity in my life.”

So yes, absolutely. We have to begin by doing some things that we have to do in order to get to where we want to go. It's what Eugene Peterson, the writer of the Message Bible - and one of my favorite people and writers ever - he calls it “a long obedience in the same direction” - running hard after Jesus, pursuing Jesus with all you've got because he is so worth it. He is worth it. He is worth *everything*.

And so as I wind up the podcast today, I want to pitch out to you a challenge to think about, to take into your small groups or share with a buddy that you're listening to the podcast with and that is to have a conversation about what you're really pursuing and how your relationship with Jesus is moving forward. Talk about where you are, what the struggle is, where the successes have come and what you are pursuing... like what's in your heart, what is it that you desire, what is it that you're craving and how are you filling that up (if it's not Jesus). Have the honest conversations with one another and discuss that in your group.

And then I challenge you with this too, to pray along with me. Would you just pray just for the next seven days, “Lord, I want to fall in love with you. Lord, I want to love you more than anything and anyone and desire nothing on this earth as much or more than I desire you.” Would you do that just for seven days? Just try it and see if you don't notice that something starts to change because Jesus wants that with you. He wants that intimacy. He wants that relationship with you.

Well, let me end the podcast today with one of my favorite passages of scripture and you're just gonna love this. This is from Revelation 19 and I'm reading out of the New Living Translation and it says in verses 11-16, “Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.”

Y'all. That is not a fairy tale. That is the dream that was planted in your heart and mind come true. That is really going to happen one day. Jesus is coming back for you and me and he is bringing an entire army with him to take you away to live in the happiest of happily ever after ever.

OK, that's that for that. And don't forget that you are greatly and dearly loved by The King!

xo -P