{STEPS}

7 WAYS I FOUND HOPE IN A CHURCH THAT APPEARED HOPELESS



BRANDON GROSS


THE CHURCH IS NOT BEAUTIFUL
BECAUSE SHE IS PERFECT, SHE IS
BEAUTIFUL BECAUSE A PERFECT GOD, THROUGH
GRACE, IS MAKING HER
BEAUTIFUL. - BRANDONGROSS.TV

STEP {1}

I Had To Change My Focus

Yep, I had to change my Focus.

I'm sure a few of you reading this ebook probably expected my first step to finding hope in the church would have started with prayer. While prayer was certainly a big part of me rediscovering hope in the church, it wasn't because I prayed that I found hope.

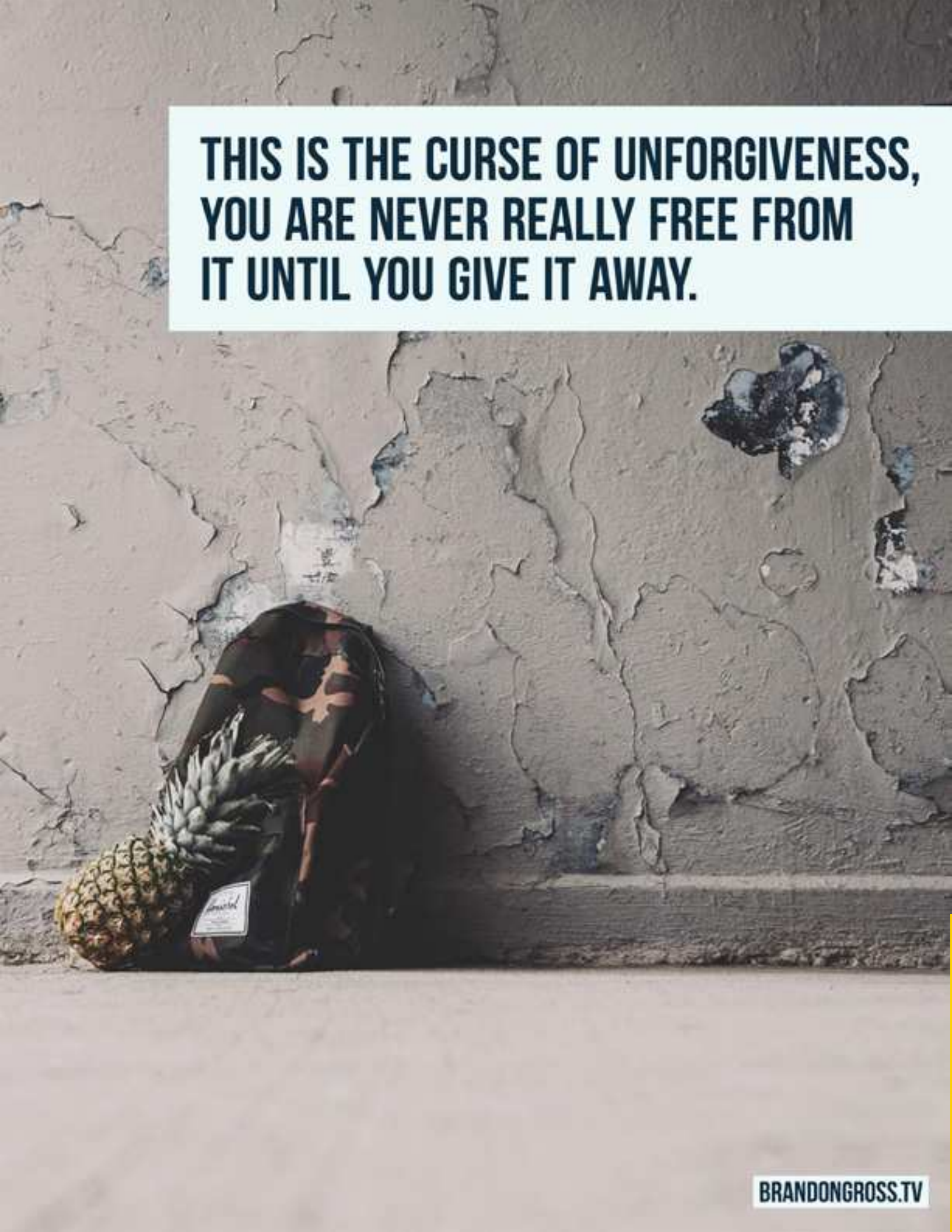
Nope. I prayed over and over and over for God to remove the feelings of hurt and anger I had toward the church. I prayed to just go back to how I was so I could feel connected again. But, God is not about taking us back to where we were. He cares more about taking us to a place that is closer to Him and making us more like Him.

It's possible to pray deeply about the wrong things while feeling like they are right.

It wasn't until I changed my focus that I found the ability to hope again. My prayers changed from,"God please just remove this hurt and brokenness" to "God, help me to see you regardless of the hurt and brokenness." The change that needed to happen was in me and how I was allowing my anger and hurt with the church to blind me from seeing God work through her regardless of the brokenness.

My focus changed from listing all the faults in the church to finding Christ through the faults that resided in the church.

We can't allow ourselves to focus on brokenness outside of grace. Grace is the great catalyst of Christ that takes brokenness and makes it beautiful. The church is not beautiful because she is perfect, she is beautiful because a perfect God, through grace, is making her beautiful.


THIS IS THE CURSE OF UNFORGIVENESS,
YOU ARE NEVER REALLY FREE FROM
IT UNTIL YOU GIVE IT AWAY.
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I Offered Forgiveness

STEP {2}

I Had To Forgive.

Unforgiveness has a way of masking itself as something it is not. It tells us we are right in our unforgiveness that our unforgiveness is really not unforgiveness at all but instead it is justice and deserves our rejection.

This is the curse of unforgiveness, you are never really free from it until you give it away.

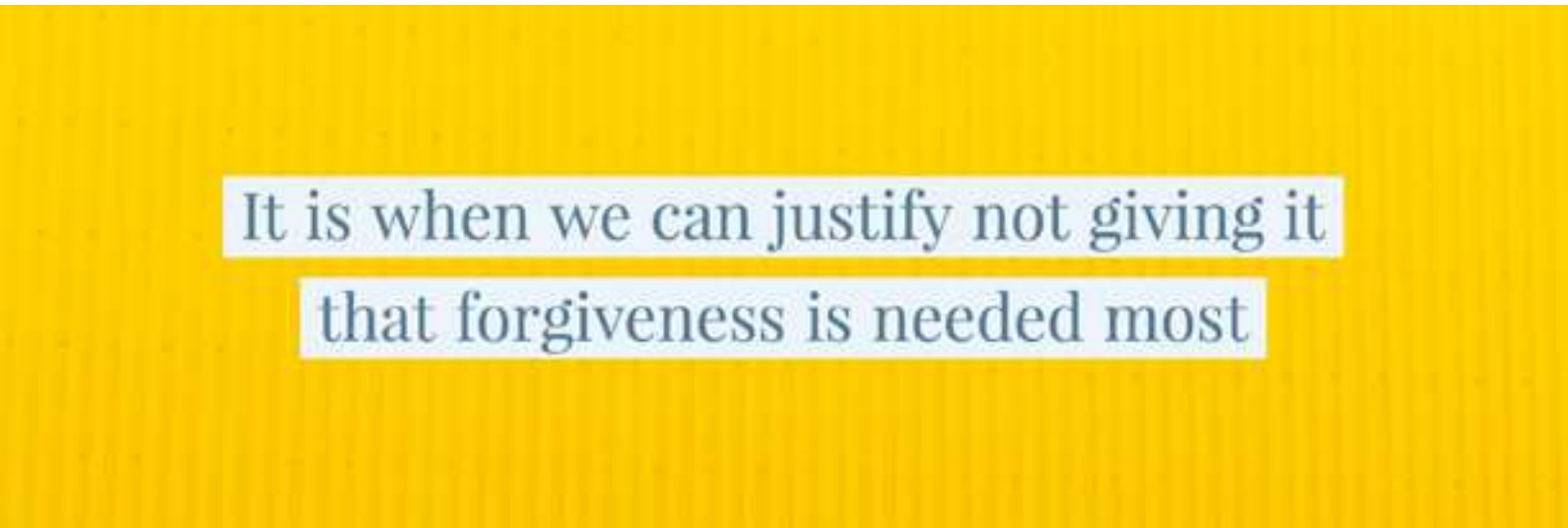
Many of us have been hurt by people in the church and for some this was the tipping point that caused them to leave the church and never look back.

I was one of those people.

What we have to realize is we are not designed to carry the burden of hate and anger. Regardless of the affliction, unwillingness to forgive will account for more destruction to our souls than any persons actions toward us could ever accomplish.

I found hope in the church by forgiving those who hurt me. It was awkward, difficult and beautiful all at the same time. We cannot be the church without walking in the footsteps of forgiveness.

Who Do you need to forgive?



STEP {3}

I Looked For Relationship

The Church is people, broken and imperfect people.

For us to ever be able to rediscover hope in the church we have to be willing to build relationships with those who make up the church. It's only through relationship we can begin to see the fingerprints of Christ in one another and build the trust necessary to be Jesus to one another.

Often we over spiritualize this and think any time a group of Christians get together there needs to be a Bible study and some worship hymns. I don't buy that. Jesus spent a lot of time simply eating and enjoying time with those He was around.

There is something deep and spiritual about not trying to make something too deep or spiritual.

Relationships also mean we must ask ourselves a few questions:

Can we lay down our views of the institutional church for the sake of relationship and unity in the body of Christ?

Can we allow ourselves to go unrecognized or even seemingly unappreciated for the chance to show love to one another?

What we may very well find is this is the test of our faith that we use as an excuse to keep us away from the church. We desire change but only according to our understanding and on our terms. This is not how God works with and through His bride.

We are invited as family to walk with Him on a journey of discovery, with others, but when we think we understand fully enough how to direct our own path we only find disappointment and frustration. Because at that point we are no longer walking with God but instead away on a path of our own making that was not laid out for us to travel.




LOVE PEOPLE WHERE THEY
ARE NOT WHERE
WE MAY WANT THEM TO BE


WE HAVE BEEN CALLED
TO LIFE BUT MANY TIMES WE FORSAKE
LIFE FOR THE CAUSE OF LIVING

STEP {4}

I Saw The Rituals For What They Were

Is There Hope In The Rituals?

Is there hope in the rituals... No but hope is in Christ and Christ can be found through rituals or without them.

I found the rituals were not what were stopping me from finding Christ it was my unwillingness to look for him in everything. We must be willing to look for him in the rain and in the light, in what we understand and what we don't.

Christ is found by those who are willing to look for Him and then follow. No ritual has the power to reveal Christ more than a heart that is willing to search for Him regardless of the surroundings it finds itself in.


"WE LOOK
AT THE SIZE OF THE
TASK WHILE
GOD IS LOOKING
AT THE HEART
BEHIND IT"
#YOUARELOVED
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STEP {5}

I Had To Put A Face To The Church

The church has a face.

In order to move past my frustration with the church I had to see her for who she was. She was a group of broken people, with broken lives and broken ideals who were saved through the perfection of a perfect God who relentlessly loves her despite her brokenness… and I was part of her.

We can not love the people and hate the organization. We are simply making them two separate things. We can live in the illusion of this possibility but it only deceives us into ignoring the matter of forgiveness. The people are who make the choices to run the organization the way they do. We can hate the things the people are doing while still loving them but we can't hate the organization separate from the people.



NEED TO SEE THE CHURCH?
LOOK NO FURTHER
THAN THE FORM STARING
BACK IN A MIRROR.

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STEP {6}

I Had To Admit I Was Just As Broken

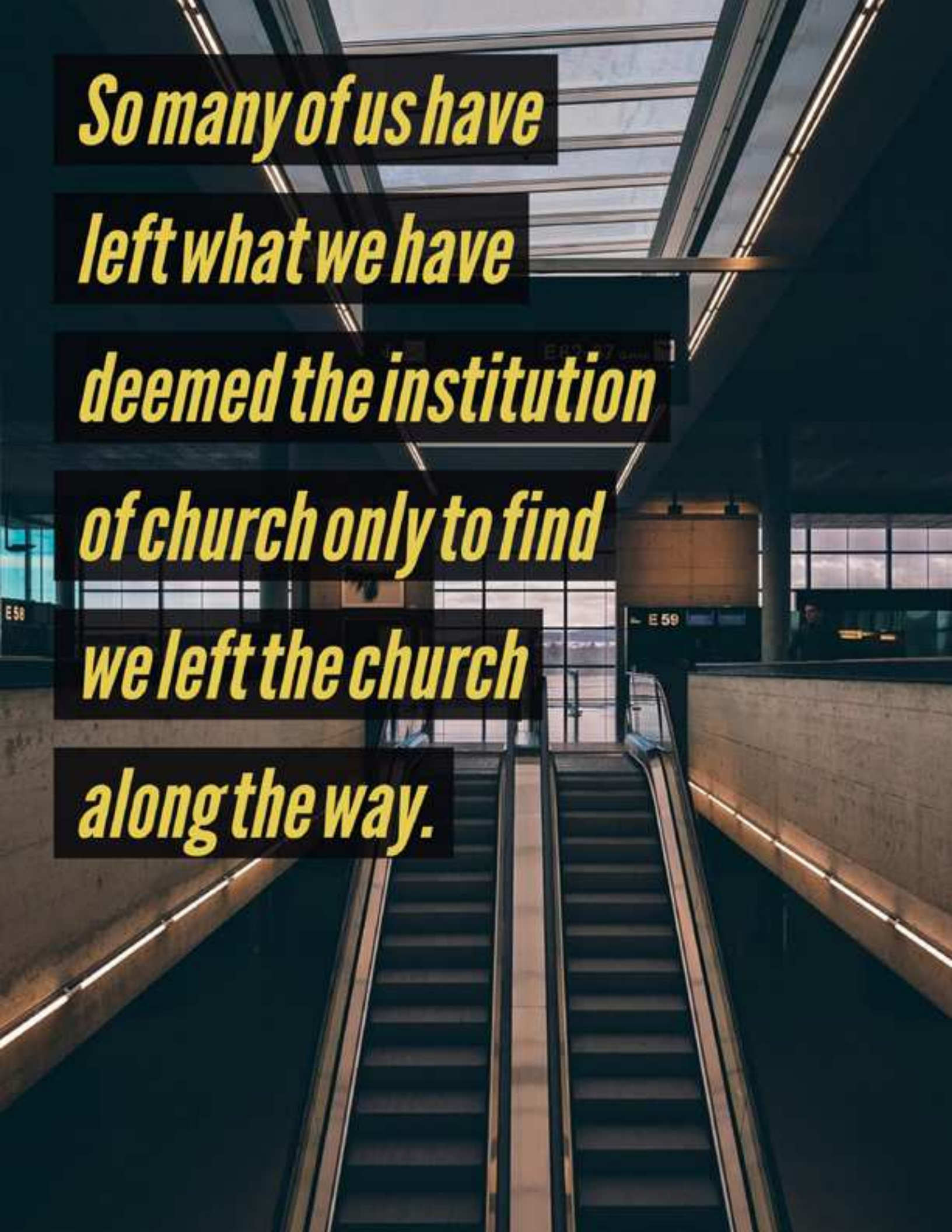
I was broken.

Our first step in rediscovering hope in the church is to retrain ourselves to see her the way God sees her. It's retraining ourselves to see ourselves the way God sees us. When nothing seems to change in the institution we can celebrate its weakness since we know who is really in control and out of great weakness God shows His great strength.

I had to come to the point where I was willing to admit that all the brokeness I saw in the church was no different than the brokenness in my own life. I was part of the church whether I attended a service or not. And, that realization meant I could either sit back at a safe distance and judge or I could become part of the solution, beginning by offering grace.

The journey in rediscovering hope lost in the church is a journey you will find begins by looking in a mirror. We can easily see the shortcomings of the institution but also just as easily glance over many of the same shortcomings present in our own lives. For radical change to occur in the institutionalized church it will require the church body to begin to allow Christ to work in the nooks and crannies of their own hearts. It will require the church to bring herself to the foot of the cross and allow Christ to perform heart surgery.

And just as in real heart surgery, exercise is required afterward. The church body will have to exercise her action and faith. She will have to exercise hope, though much of the time hope will not be easily found. And mostly she will have to live a life of forgiveness and grace toward others and herself.


So many of us have
left what we have
deemed the institution
of church only to find
we left the church
along the way.



I Took A Step

STEP {7}

And Kept Stepping.

So many of us have left what we have deemed the institution of church only to find we left the church along the way. Our intentions were good and we desired a greater sense of community, and for many that is just what they found in small consistent gatherings, but for the rest of us we lost hope and gave up. We simply replaced our weekly interaction with the whole of the body with intermittent lunch dates with friends.

Our loss of hope in the church caused us to reject anything that looked like church as we knew it and in all our hopelessness we became bitter without knowledge of it. Life went on, Sundays became another free day from the previous week's work and we slowly, day by day, drifted further and further from consistent interaction with other groups of Christians. In this place, it's possible to not even feel hopeless any longer but instead feel something much worse… nothing.

The danger of a calloused heart is its inability to warn us of it being calloused.

The last step I took in finding hope in a church that appears hopeless was to simply take a step. Taking a step can be intimidating. It requires us to move, often without clearly seeing what is ahead.

But, that is the nature of faith. Taking a step into the darkness but knowing wherever we land our Father will be there to guide us.

So, I leave you with this. Take a step.

Rediscovering hope in a broken church will not happen all at once and that's ok. Just keep stepping. When you see someone who needs to see Christ, then take the step to be Jesus to them.

When the rituals and institution tries to get in the way, just keep stepping. God is a master in taking what is broken and making it beautiful. He will do that for you and His church.

Keep stepping.

B





Let's Stay In Touch!

Hi, I'm Brandon.

I'm an author and wedding photographer based out of the rolling hills of Middle TN. Sometimes I say Ya'll... but only on special occasions!

This small ebook came out of my own experience from growing up in the church only to later leave, never intending to return. I was one of those statistics you hear all the church people talking about. After many years outside of the church, I was able to rediscover hope in her by placing hope in her Creator and not in her ability to change.

I am currently finishing my first full length book, "I Forgive Church", where I walk through this journey in more story-filled detail.

In the mean time, I would love to hear from you! Send me your questions, comments or favorite stories. It might take me some time but I will respond. While your at it, if you want to be updated on my book release and other info, give me a like on my Facebook page and Twitter. Talk to you soon! -B

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