

Faith Made REAL ©Keith Thorn 2025

Chapter 1: When Faith Wasn't Enough

My faith didn't come to me in a single moment of revelation. It was passed down quietly, like a well-worn quilt laid across my shoulders by two women who knew what storms felt like — my grandmother and my mother.

I can still see my grandmother moving through her kitchen, the heart of her home. The air smelled of flour and coffee, of onions frying in cast iron. She carried her faith the same way she carried her apron, tied tight around her waist, always at hand. I can picture her pausing in the middle of stirring a pot, her head bowing just slightly, lips moving in words I couldn't hear. She prayed about everything — not just the big moments. A sick neighbor. A bill she didn't know how she would pay. A decision to be made. Sometimes I'd catch her hands still, her eyes closed as though she had set her burden down in the presence of a friend.

She never preached to me. Her prayers weren't lessons meant for a child's ears. But I

learned by watching. I saw that she believed she wasn't alone, that she trusted Someone unseen to carry what she couldn't.

My mother's faith was different but no less steady. Her way was music. She hummed hymns while folding laundry, while scrubbing dishes, while walking through the house at night when she thought we were asleep. Sometimes she sang in a whisper, not for an audience, but because her heart needed the reminder. "Great is Thy Faithfulness." "It Is Well with My Soul." Those hymns were the background music of my childhood, and I didn't even realize it at the time.

As a boy, I didn't always understand. In fact, sometimes it confused me. My mother would talk about God's peace but then break down crying when the weight of life pressed too heavy. My grandmother read her Bible every evening, her finger tracing the words, yet I saw her worry about money or about family troubles. I thought faith meant those things should disappear. Instead, I watched them hold on to God even when the troubles stayed.

Sundays had their own rhythm. The hurried rush of trying to get everyone dressed and out the door. The smell of starch in a pressed shirt, the sharp tug of a comb through my hair. Piling into the car, my mother reminding us to behave. The drive always seemed shorter on the way there than on the way home.

The church wasn't grand. It was wooden pews polished smooth by decades of use, hymnals with cracked bindings and scribbles in the margins. Stained glass that threw colored light across the floor on sunny mornings. I remember sliding on the pew, legs too short to touch the floor, trying to pay attention but drifting as the preacher spoke words that felt too big for me.

But there were things I did notice. My grandmother bowing her head in prayer, her lips moving with the words of the pastor as if she knew them already. My mother closing her eyes when she sang, her voice not beautiful in a trained way, but strong in a way that told me she meant every word. I remember the sound of the congregation singing all around me, the way voices rose

together, some on key and some not, but all woven into something larger.

Back then, I thought faith was mostly ritual. Sit, stand, sing, pray, go home. I didn't yet know it was foundation.

There were nights when the house was quiet, and I would hear my mother moving down the hall. Her footsteps creaked on the old wood floors, her voice barely above a whisper. Sometimes I would peek around the corner and see her standing in the living room, head bowed, words spilling out like a private conversation. She never asked me to join, never explained what she was doing. But I saw it. And though I didn't understand, something in me knew it mattered.

Faith, for me as a child, was like learning a language by listening but not speaking. I knew the sounds. I knew the rhythms. But I didn't yet understand the meaning.

There were contradictions, too. Times when my mother would pray for peace but snap at us in frustration an hour later. Times when my

grandmother spoke about trusting God but worried aloud about the future. As a boy, I thought those contradictions meant their faith wasn't strong. What I would later realize is that those contradictions were proof of how necessary faith was. It wasn't a badge of perfection. It was a lifeline.

Even though I didn't understand it then, those images sank deep into me. My grandmother's hands resting on her Bible, worn thin from years of turning pages. My mother's humming filling the house on weary days. The pew creaking under the weight of a congregation that sang because they needed to remind themselves that God was still faithful. These were the bricks and mortar of the foundation they were laying in me.

I didn't know it at the time, but they were giving me something to stand on when my own storms would come. They didn't protect me from pain. They couldn't. What they gave me was a map, a language, a foundation that I would have to claim for myself when the day came that faith was no longer inherited but tested.

That day came with divorce.

The day my marriage ended didn't come with fireworks or shouting. It came with silence — a silence so thick I could hear my own heartbeat in the room. By then, we both knew it was over. Words had been said that couldn't be unsaid. Trust had been cracked in places we couldn't patch. What remained between us was paperwork, signatures, and a future that would now be split into two.

I remember the pen in my hand as I signed the divorce papers. It felt heavier than it should have, like I was writing more than my name. Each stroke of ink carried weight: the end of promises, the unraveling of vows, the dismantling of a family. I thought about the day I had signed my name on a marriage license years earlier, how light that pen had felt then. Now it was the opposite — like dragging iron across the page.

But the true breaking point wasn't the lawyer's office or the paperwork. It was walking into my children's room afterward.

They were quiet, too quiet. Kids know. They can read a room better than adults sometimes. They looked at me with eyes that were too old for their years, eyes that asked questions they didn't yet have words for. And I stood there, trying to form sentences that could explain why their world was falling apart. Nothing I said would have been enough.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, and the words felt thin, like paper trying to hold back a flood.

One of them looked down at the floor. The other stared at me, eyes wet, lips pressed tight to keep from trembling. That look burned into me, seared deeper than any argument or accusation. I wanted to promise them it would all be okay, but I didn't even believe that myself. So I stood there, a father who couldn't be what they needed, trying to pretend I wasn't unraveling.

That night, when the house grew quiet, I lay awake in the empty bed. The silence was deafening. I could hear the hum of the refrigerator down the hall, the tick of the clock, the sound of my own

breathing. Every little noise reminded me of what was absent — her voice, the sound of the kids down the hall knowing both parents were under the same roof. Now, half of that safety was gone.

Depression didn't arrive all at once. It crept in like fog, rolling slowly, dimming the light. At first, it was harder to get up in the morning. Then, it was harder to shave, to eat, to pretend I was fine. Some mornings, I stared at the ceiling for hours, bargaining with God to give me the strength to move. Sometimes I stayed under the covers anyway, choosing numbness over the weight of reality.

The worst part wasn't losing the marriage. It was the shame that followed me like a shadow. Shame when I saw other families together. Shame when I looked into the mirror and saw a man who had failed. Shame when I looked into my children's eyes and felt their disappointment.

A father is supposed to be steady, strong, unshakable. But I was none of those things. I was fractured, brittle, barely holding on. And the

hardest truth was that I couldn't hide it from them. Children know. They always know.

In those months, conversations with my kids grew shorter, colder. The phone calls came less often, until silence began to fill the space between us. That silence was its own kind of punishment. I would check my phone, hoping to see a text or missed call, and instead I saw nothing. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months. The silence between me and my children was louder than any shouted argument.

And then came the added weight of moving forward. Eventually, I remarried. Melody has been the greatest source of love and healing in my life, but the cost of that love was more silence from my children. They couldn't accept it — maybe wouldn't. Their distance hardened into absence. I had gained a partner who stood with me in grace, but I had lost pieces of my family along the way.

I don't think anything could have prepared me for that. Not the sermons I heard as a boy, not the hymns sung by my mother, not even the

whispered prayers of my grandmother. Those moments gave me foundation, yes, but the experience of looking into my children's eyes and realizing I had lost them — that was a fire I didn't know how to survive.

And I confess, in the darkest moments, I wondered if faith was even real. What kind of God lets a father lose his kids? What kind of God watches promises collapse and doesn't intervene? I wrestled with those questions in the middle of the night, the ceiling above me the only witness to my prayers.

It was during one of those nights, lying awake with tears wetting the pillow, that I whispered, "Are You even there?" I didn't hear an answer. The room stayed silent. But I breathed. And in that breath, as simple as it sounds, something told me I was not alone.

Still, the pain didn't lift. Depression doesn't vanish in a single prayer. Distance between a father and his children doesn't heal in one apology. And shame doesn't evaporate overnight. But I kept

breathing. And breath by breath, I learned that faith isn't the absence of brokenness. It's the presence of God in the middle of it.

Losing my marriage cracked me open.
Losing my jobs stripped me bare.

I had always believed that hard work would keep me steady. It was what I saw in my mother and grandmother — they carried burdens without complaint, pushed through weariness, and trusted that effort mattered. And for a while, I lived by that belief. I poured myself into jobs, often sacrificing time at home, thinking stability was the best gift I could give my kids.

But stability is fragile when markets turn volatile.

The first time I lost a job, I told myself it was temporary. I brushed it off with words like “restructuring” and “downsizing,” as though labeling it differently would soften the blow. But the truth was brutal: I was expendable. A name on a list.

I still remember the box in my hands, filled with personal items from the desk I thought I'd grow old at. A framed photo of my children. A pen I'd bought to celebrate a promotion years earlier. Coffee mugs and scraps of paper with notes that no one else would understand. Carrying that box to the car felt like carrying a coffin — not of a person, but of a life I had built.

The drive home was quiet. I rehearsed what I would say, how I would explain it. “The market shifted.” “It wasn't personal.” “These things happen.” But beneath the excuses was shame. Shame that I had failed. Shame that I couldn't provide like I wanted. Shame that my kids would look at me differently.

And it wasn't just once. It happened again. And again. Each time a little different — a merger here, a downturn there — but the result was the same: me, out of work, staring at bills, wondering how I would keep us afloat.

Every loss chipped away at me. It wasn't just the money. It was identity. Men are often taught to

measure themselves by what they do, by titles, by income, by success. And each pink slip felt like someone stamping FAILURE on my forehead.

I tried to pivot, to chase new opportunities, to reinvent myself. I even chased dreams I had carried for years — creative dreams, ones that gave me energy just thinking about them. I wanted to build something that was mine, something no boss or market crash could take away.

But dreams don't always pay bills.

I discovered quickly that creativity is intoxicating but unforgiving. You can pour your heart into it and still watch doors close. Rejections piled up. Ideas fizzled. Every “no” felt personal, even when I knew it wasn't. And when my creative efforts didn't feed the family, I told myself it was selfish to keep trying. That maybe dreamers don't get to be fathers. Maybe dreamers are luxuries other people can afford.

So I turned to entrepreneurship. If I couldn't build a creative career the traditional way, maybe I could carve out my own. Start something.

Own something. Control my own destiny. That sounded good — until I lived it.

Entrepreneurship is painted as freedom, but most days it felt like chains. Freedom to work every hour of the day. Freedom to carry every risk alone. Freedom to lay awake at night wondering if the check would clear, if the client would call back, if the bills would get paid.

I don't know if I've ever prayed harder than I did in those early years of trying to build something from scratch. Not for success, but for survival. "God, just let me make it through this month. God, just let me cover the bills." Faith, in those moments, wasn't lofty or polished. It was desperate.

The shame of job loss combined with the grind of starting over wore me thin. There were days I would sit at the desk, staring at a computer screen, paralyzed. The pressure of responsibility sat heavy on my chest. I was supposed to be the provider, the steady one, the man who made things

happen. Instead, I felt like I was drowning in quicksand.

And yet, there were flickers of grace. Clients who came through at the last moment. An unexpected opportunity that bought me time. A deal that shouldn't have worked out but somehow did. Each one was small, but each one was a reminder: I was still standing.

I'd like to say I faced all of this with unshakable faith, but the truth is more complicated. I doubted. I grew angry. I compared myself to others and felt less than. I wondered why God would give me dreams if they were only going to fail. I wondered if He even cared about the work of my hands.

But I also learned something I never could have without the losses. I learned that faith is not about tying your worth to your work. That jobs and titles and businesses can be stripped away, but your identity as a child of God cannot. I learned that sometimes the collapse of one path is the only way you'll ever consider another.

Still, I carry the scars. I can feel the weight of every pink slip, every rejection, every late-night panic wondering if I was going to make it. And I can feel, just as real, the presence that never let me go.

Looking back, I see now that losing jobs and dreams was not the end of my story. It was the classroom where faith became real. Not inherited faith, not borrowed faith, but scarred, desperate, lived faith.

And though I would never choose those losses again, I can say this with honesty: I found God in the failure more than I ever found Him in success.

If losing my marriage and jobs was the storm, the silence that followed was the aftermath that nearly drowned me.

I thought faith meant that when you called out to God, He answered. Not always the way you wanted, maybe, but at least in some way that you could hold onto. That's what I had seen in my grandmother — she prayed, and somehow, life held

together. That's what I thought my mother's hymns meant, that God was near enough to comfort. But when I prayed, the room stayed quiet.

Nights stretched long. I would lie awake staring at the ceiling, whispering, sometimes shouting, "God, where are You?" I begged Him to fix what I couldn't — to heal the gap with my kids, to give me strength to get out of bed, to open a door that felt forever closed. Sometimes I prayed with words. Other times, all I could manage were tears. And time after time, the silence stayed.

That silence broke me.

It felt cruel. It felt like betrayal.

I remember one night in particular. The house was still, but my mind was raging. I sat on the edge of the bed, hands gripping the sheets so tight my knuckles turned white. I whispered, "If You're real, then show me. Say something. Do something. Anything." My voice cracked. The silence answered back.

The only sounds in the room were the hum of the refrigerator and the tick of the clock on the wall. That tick-tick-tick mocked me, a reminder that time was moving, but God was not.

And I'll admit it: I got angry. Angrier than I'd ever been. My prayers turned sharp, sarcastic. "So this is what faith is? Silence? Thanks a lot." I hurled my bitterness upward, daring Him to respond. Nothing.

What I didn't say out loud, but carried like a stone in my chest, was the real accusation: You don't care about me.

That thought poisoned everything. It colored how I saw my failures. Lost jobs weren't just bad luck — they were proof I was forgotten. My kids' silence wasn't just pain — it was confirmation that God had turned away too. Every unanswered prayer seemed like another nail in the coffin of my faith.

And then came the comparison. I looked around at others and saw what looked like miracles. Families that held together. Careers that

survived market crashes. People who talked about how God had answered their prayers in amazing ways. And I sat there, empty, wondering what was so wrong with me that heaven stayed silent.

I thought maybe I had failed some hidden test. That maybe my sin disqualified me. That maybe God loved me less.

That misunderstanding nearly crushed me.

But here's the strange thing: even when I believed God was silent, something in me kept reaching. Like a child calling out in the night, even when convinced no one will come, I kept praying. Not because I was noble, but because desperation has its own language. Because somewhere deep inside, I remembered the foundation my grandmother and mother had laid. I couldn't stop reaching, even when I believed no one was listening.

And that's when something began to shift.

Not in the way I wanted. I never got the thunderclap of assurance, the booming voice in the

dark, the miracle that tied everything up neatly. What I got instead was smaller. Quieter. Almost invisible.

I got breath.

I wanted God to write answers in the sky. Instead, He gave me one more day of strength. I wanted Him to heal my family overnight. Instead, He gave me a friend who called out of nowhere, checking in at just the right time. I wanted Him to deliver financial security. Instead, He gave me an unexpected opportunity that bought me one more month.

At first, I dismissed those things as coincidence. Too small to be divine. But over time, I began to see them for what they were: mercy in motion. God was not absent. He was silent, yes, but present. And silence did not mean abandonment.

That realization was like oxygen to a drowning man.

I still wrestled. I still prayed prayers that went unanswered. I still felt the ache of my

children's absence, the sting of rejection, the crushing weight of bills. But I also began to notice something: I was still standing. Not because I was strong, but because I was held.

Faith began to change shape in me. It was no longer a transaction — my prayers for His blessings. It became trust without evidence, hope without answers, love without proof.

And that's when I finally understood what my grandmother and mother had known all along. Faith is not proven in what you avoid. It's proven in what you endure. It's not tested in answered prayers. It's tested in unanswered ones.

It was in the silence that my faith became real.

Not because God gave me everything I wanted, but because I discovered He had never left me. Not once. Not even when I thought He had.

It's one thing to wrestle with silence inside your own heart. It's another thing to hear the voices of others piling on.

During the darkest seasons of my life — when my marriage fell apart, when jobs disappeared, when the distance with my children grew into a canyon — I heard the same question more than once, sometimes spoken aloud, sometimes implied in a raised eyebrow or a cynical smile: Where was your God?

It stung every time, partly because I was already asking the same question myself. When someone else said it, it landed like confirmation of my deepest fears. Maybe they were right. Maybe God had turned His back.

I remember sitting with an old acquaintance not long after losing a job. We met for coffee, though I barely touched mine. He leaned across the table and said, “You’re always talking about faith, but if God was really with you, why are you struggling so much?”

I didn’t know how to answer. My mind scrambled for verses, for neat theological replies, for something that would defend God’s honor and prove I was still on the right side of the story. But

the truth was I didn't have a tidy answer. I just sat there, staring into the dark liquid in my cup, wishing it would swallow me whole.

Later, the memory replayed in my head over and over. His words became my own: If God was with me, why was I struggling so much?

Other criticisms came less directly. Some were wrapped in pity — “I’ll pray for you” spoken in a tone that really meant, Poor guy, he’s lost it. Others came wrapped in intellectual superiority — people explaining how suffering disproved the existence of God, how faith was just a crutch for the weak.

I heard one person laugh once, after hearing about my circumstances. “Man, if that’s what trusting God gets you, no thanks.” I laughed too, because what else could I do in that moment? But inside, it cut deep.

Criticism from outsiders is one thing. What hurt worse was criticism from within the circle of believers. Well-meaning voices who tried to explain away my pain with platitudes: God must

have something better for you. All things work together for good. You just need more faith. Each phrase was like salt on an open wound. Instead of lifting me, they pressed me lower. Because if the problem was that I didn't have "enough" faith, then it was my fault after all.

Faith became, for a season, something I had to protect rather than something that protected me. I felt like I had to defend God in conversations, to prove He was still real even while my own life looked like evidence to the contrary. And that was exhausting.

The turning point came when I realized something simple but freeing: I don't have to explain God.

Atheists and skeptics spend their energy explaining why not. They carry the burden of proof, working tirelessly to rationalize every miracle of life away — every sunrise, every breath, every unexplainable act of kindness. They try to prove absence. That's a heavy load to carry.

I don't have to. My job isn't to explain Him.
My job is to trust Him.

That realization lifted a weight off my shoulders. I stopped rehearsing arguments in my head. I stopped worrying about defending God like He needed me as His lawyer. I started resting in the truth that faith isn't about winning debates. It's about surviving storms.

Still, criticism left marks. It forced me to examine what I believed, to strip away the easy answers I had once given others. It forced me to admit that I didn't always feel strong, that I doubted, that I wrestled. And strangely, that honesty became the bedrock of a deeper faith.

Now, when I hear criticism, I don't flinch the way I used to. I don't have tidy answers. But I do have scars. And scars, I've found, speak louder than arguments.

Faith isn't proven in victories. It's proven in wounds that have healed enough to show survival. When someone asks me now, "Where was your

God?” I can say, “Right here. With me. Through all of it.”

Not in a way that erased the pain. Not in a way that kept me from falling. But in the way that kept me alive when I thought I wouldn't be.

My grandmother and my mother had shown me faith, but I didn't truly understand it until mine was tested in fire. They gave me the foundation, but it was up to me to build. And when my house collapsed, I had to learn to build again — this time with my own hands, my own trust, my own scars.

I once thought I knew God. But in truth, I didn't. Not yet.