

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

MIRACULOUS  
STORIES OF  
THE HEALING  
POWER OF PRAYER

*Faith*

STILL MOVES  
MOUNTAINS

HARRIS  
FAULKNER



NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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HEALING POWER OF PRAYER

HARRIS FAULKNER



## **Dedication**

To my husband, Tony, and our two daughters, Bella Grace and Danika Jo, thank you for teaching me every day that life's adventures require my unconditional love for the Lord and bravery to live out His purpose for me.

## Epigraph

“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

—MATTHEW 17:20

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## Introduction

You are divinely loved. If you haven't heard that today, read that out loud. You are so loved that God created, sacrificed, and resurrected His only son for you. It is also true that life is hard. And often it's easy to forget the power of prayer, relationship with God, and faith. This loss of faith is all around us. And it's contagious.

Journalists see people at both their best and their worst. Murders, rescues, robberies, reunions: we're there to cover all of them. In my quarter century on the job, I've seen some people blessed with miracles and others devastated by what can only be described as the work of the Devil. Some people pray for dreams that then come true. And there are random tragedies that turn others inside out with pain and hopelessness. I've witnessed people coming back from the brink over and over.

Through all of it, the one constant is God's presence.

God is with us when we are at the lowest of our lows and the highest of our highs. He's there at every point in between. Sometimes He makes Himself known to us in the most obvious of ways; sometimes in a quiet whisper. But always He's there, one prayer away.

This is a book about the power of prayer. It's about how God comes alongside us in our daily lives. He can bring us through any valley, be it a struggle with illness, depression, or death—or just a bad day. This book is full of stories reminding us that God sees and cares when we're struggling; miracles that provide the most visible evidence of God's greatness and grace; proof that prayer isn't just words—it's action.

We need reminders of that now more than ever.

One of the primary reasons why we are people of faith is that it helps to restore a sense of order in the chaotic world in which we live. A number of stories in this book deal with people who have found themselves subject to circumstances that overwhelmed their sense of order.

In many cases, they were, through no fault of their own, dealing with the random nature of tragedy. There's the story of the Alabama grandmother who survived a severe F4 tornado that ravaged her town. The one room in her house which survived, was her prayer closet. Even still she praised God, preaching His goodness to her family and community. I've covered a number of stories over the years when the randomness of destructive forces has devastated one family and left another untouched. And, in a number of

instances what explained why one house survived and another didn't, was the role of faith and prayer. It is a hard fact that people may not succeed in every circumstance because God has a plan. But, the positive impact of faith and prayer on outcomes is frequent enough that I believe that it is the common denominator of miracles.

Increasingly, Americans don't believe that. In 1944, the Gallup public opinion organization began asking Americans if they believed in God. The number was astoundingly high, nearly 100 percent. And each time it took that poll in the 1950s and the 1960s, the percentage of Americans who said they believed in the Lord remained in the same range.

Then something changed. We became less likely to say we believed in God and even less likely to have faith that God intervenes in our lives. Most recently, in May 2022, Gallup announced that currently only 81 percent of Americans believe in God. Digging deeper, only four in ten people surveyed told Gallup they think God does anything on our behalf. No miracles, no answered prayers.

That's not true. But that kind of despairing thinking can replicate faster than a virus. In a world in which our reminders of God are few, it's even easier to have to grapple with doubt. It's unclear where we're headed as a more secularly focused society pushes our future generations to ignore the power of prayer. Now is a perfect time to push back on the notion that God doesn't intervene in our lives; to remember that prayer is as powerful as ever; that faith does indeed still move mountains.

That doesn't mean God always acts in the way we hope or in our timing. As James 1:19 states, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." That last point is particularly important. Many of us find silence uncomfortable. When we think that God is silent, when we believe that He has forgotten us, when we think that He hasn't heard us, it is easy to get angry. We may not take it out on God, we may not be angry with Him, but we may be angry with ourselves and our perception that His silence is a result of our being unworthy. The question that is on the lips of many people throughout history in troubled times is "Where are you, God?"

The stories in this book are a reminder that He is with us at all times. And many of them also offer encouragement for those of us struggling with the silence of God. We may not know the hour or the means by which He will answer our prayer. Sometimes the answer will be silence. And in that



pause, we are many times able to answer our own questions, resolve our own problems. Throughout this book we'll examine stories of miracles, and discover that God speaks in many other ways, too.

As a parent, I know that it is hard to see my children struggle with anything. But seeing them find solutions to their own problems is extremely rewarding. As our Heavenly Father, God has to measure out His degree of involvement. We are beings possessed with free will, and what choices we make are our own responsibility. In these stories, we see God at work, giving us the freedom we need and intervening at the most critical times to save us from ourselves. We receive the opportunity to learn and go on learning. Prayer isn't just about receiving a blessing from God, having Him answer a request. Instead, it is a back-and-forth exchange of questions and answers.

We also learn, no matter how afraid we are, how abandoned we feel, how much we think our Father has turned away, that He will never leave us alone. From an American pastor Andrew Brunson falsely imprisoned in Turkey to little Nancy Owen abandoned on the streets of her hometown to Tina Zahn, a mom locked in depression, I have found story after story of people who realized that God was with them, even when they didn't know it at the time.

We usually think of prayer as something which makes us strong. But the surprising thing about prayer is how it reminds us we are vulnerable, mortal, and needy. And that is a gift, because in our weakness we can see God's great strength. Throughout this book we'll see time and again, examples of God working through us when we're at our most helpless. After all, the son of God Himself became helpless to accomplish salvation.

Often when delivering commencement addresses and inspirational speeches to young audiences, I remind them that we are all like IKEA furniture—assembly required. I've had to mature in my faith and in how I conduct myself in my relationship with God. The Harris of 2022 is not the same Harris of 1992 or 1982. The same is true of my relationship with the Holy Spirit, with Jesus, and with God the Father. God has seen me at my worst, He's seen me at my best; that's part of the deal of being His creation.

But God did make me for a purpose. I believe that God's assignment for my life is to be a witness. That is my calling, and in sharing these stories and by witnessing so much, I am compelled to help others see that even in the midst of so much that seems chaotic and random, there is order. We may

not see it in the moment, but it is there. I believe that we all need reminders of this, especially because of what we all continue to endure. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in mass killings, war, economic downturns, and other events challenge us daily. In the face of all this, too often, hope fades. My wish is that as you read these stories of God's direct intervention in people's lives, hope will bloom again in your heart.

Ultimately, I hope that this book will serve as a source of answers and comfort. I also hope that it will make you ask questions; that it will lead you toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of God's mysteries. I urge you to read this book in reflective moments. Embrace the quiet, and let the wisdom behind God's works speak to you. God wants us to be curious. He wants us to seek greater knowledge. He wants us to sit comfortably in silence and know that He is the one true answer.

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There are things that happen to the soul when the weather moves in. It is the hand of God. You cannot control it. We remember then how fragile we really are. Stories of prayers answered in the midst of such scenarios remind us that God is God over nature. He created this world and holds it in the palm of His hand.

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# *Rescue*

That's why the psalmist wrote:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,  
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.  
He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he  
puts the deep into storehouses.

—PSALM 33:6-7

## **And All the People Said Amen!**

High school seniors on a fun outing run into trouble that only God can solve.

In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my  
God for help. From his temple he heard my voice;  
my cry came before him, into his ears.

—PSALM 18:6

**W**e could make it.”

Heather Brown looked across the swirling waters of Matanzas Inlet. For a moment she hesitated, sizing up the distance to swim out to the inlet, but then echoed back her friend Tyler Smith’s prediction.

“Yeah. Yeah, let’s do it.”

It was senior skip day in April 2019, and Heather and Tyler had joined their fellow classmates to play hooky on the beach. Located on the Atlantic Coast, on the north side of the Matanzas Inlet, Vilano Beach is considered one of St. Augustine’s best-kept secrets. It’s a strand so hidden away that the college spring breakers don’t even know to flock to it, and that day, with the winds up and the waves high, the group from Christ Church Academy had nearly the entire stretch to themselves.

It had been a great day, and Heather felt a thrill as they jogged across the blazing white sand of Vilano Beach and entered the water. It was going to be so cool, she thought, when she and Tyler were the first ones to make the swim to the inlet.

What the two seventeen-year-olds didn’t know was that the National Weather Service had issued a small-craft advisory for the day.

A typical NWS marine weather message like this would read, “Wind and wave conditions will be hazardous for small craft. Inexperienced mariners, especially those operating smaller vessels, should avoid navigating in these conditions.”

Despite the conditions, the two teens, who’d been friends since fourth grade, decided to swim across the St. Augustine Inlet from Vilano Point to Anastasia Island, a distance of five hundred yards. They were athletes at the school, but neither was a competitive swimmer, and in what Heather described as a “pride moment,” they decided that they were both in good enough shape to make the crossing, hoping to impress their friends. A third student, Heather’s neighbor, joined them.

There were no lifeguards stationed along that remote stretch of the beach.

Tyler and Heather had no way of knowing how a series of decisions they made would put them on course for a miracle rescue. But their prayers were answered in such an improbable way that it changed not just their lives but a total stranger's. God's provision always deserves a resounding "Amen!" yet in this case, it was a literal "Amen" that He delivered to the right place, at the right time, under the worst of circumstances for two teens who'd made a disastrous decision.

But all of that was in the future. For the moment, Heather, Tyler, and their friend swam along confidently.

At first their goal was modest—to reach a red buoy that sat bobbing in the water less than a hundred yards away. As they swam toward it, it appeared as if the buoy had become unmoored. Instead of closing the gap on the ocean marker, the kids were being tugged farther and farther from it. The trio was reduced to a duo. Doubting his ability to navigate the waters, the third student turned around and returned to the beach. Caught in a strong Atlantic Ocean current, the remaining two were suddenly victims of forces they couldn't see but could feel.

That was when Tyler decided that a change of plans was needed. He recognized that not just the land but the buoy as well were both impossible destinations to reach. As they rose and fell with the swells, the beach was barely visible. Back on the coast, their friends were trying to catch a glimpse of the pair but couldn't.

Tyler later told reporters that at that point, he decided that he and Heather should point themselves toward a known landmark: in this case, rising above the waves' crests, St. Augustine Lighthouse.

They were done with heading any farther out to sea. It was time to return to the safety of the shore. But again the current worked against them. Try as they might, the pull of the water took them farther out to sea.

Heather's thoughts, through the haze of increasing terror, were focused on what would happen when they got back. "I was worried that I was going to be in trouble for doing this," she said. Senior skip day coincided with her younger sister's birthday. That evening, the family had plans to celebrate, and Heather and Tyler's activities threatened to make the party impossible.

She would soon realize that their problems were much bigger than a postponed party.

“We started to realize we were getting further away from the lighthouse rather than getting closer,” Tyler later told a local news outlet. “That’s when we started to freak out.”<sup>1</sup>

Heather realized that the current had pushed them so far out that reaching the lighthouse was impossible.

A God’s-eye view of the scene would have shown two tiny dots in the vast expanse of slate gray, white-capped water. It might have looked like a movie. To God, such a scene is calm. When Jesus’ disciples were crossing a lake in Galilee and a storm sprang up, they must have been astonished by His calmness. What they didn’t understand was that He had a God’s-eye view. He was not afraid of a storm because He could calm it in an instant.

Tyler and Heather had no such ability. It’s easy to imagine the rising panic that quickened their hearts and unsettled their nerves.

Making little to no progress toward the lighthouse, they began to wonder if they would make it back to shore. They were treading water and trying to swim. And time was working against them. The minutes ticked by, and soon they had been in the water for an hour. People can tread water for longer than you might think, but doing it in rough seas is another matter entirely.

As the teenagers looked around, they saw only open water. Given the marine warning, no boats were in sight. Typically, only a few pleasure craft passed through the inlet anyway, so that day, they had little hope of being rescued. As the weather worsened, Heather and Tyler were surrounded by a miles of angry gray ocean.

Now, they were running out of time.

WEEKS EARLIER, ERIC WAGNER HAD also become very conscious of time slipping away too quickly. It was about to become necessary to move his home. His home was a yacht.

Years before, Eric had purchased a 1977 Hatteras motor yacht, fifty-three feet in length and capable of sleeping up to six people in three cabins. Since he worked in software, he was able to work from anywhere in the country. For years, he had kept the craft at a marina in Delray Beach, Florida.

“It was my home away from home,” he said, and during the winter he lived aboard it, anchored in that marina. The rest of the time he spent in New Jersey with his family. He’d had no intention of leaving Delray Beach. Then he had received short notice that the owners of the marina were

undertaking massive renovations that would last as long as eight months. He would have to find a new marina in which to dock his boat.

Eric found himself in a dilemma. He hadn't planned to go back to New Jersey right then, but his winter hideaway was suddenly no longer a possibility. Finding another slip in which to dock was proving to be difficult. Finally, he decided that he would instead run the boat up to New Jersey.

But that created more problems. Though aficionados considered the Hatteras a classic, at forty-two years old, it was in need of repair and regular maintenance. Busy with managing his own company, Eric didn't have the time to complete all of that work, and with the clock ticking on his rented space at the marina, he had to spring into action.

He plotted the course. The thousand-mile voyage would take ten days. He asked three friends to join him for a trip that was to start in early April. A trip of that length, especially in a boat of that vintage, required lots of preparation time—something he didn't have due to the imminent construction project. And as we've all experienced from time to time, little delays turned into longer ones. A part that Eric was told would be in stock wasn't. Customer service wasn't much help. Eric's stress level rose, and frustration set in. It wasn't just getting out of the marina in time that increased his sense of urgency; he needed to get going before the storm season kicked in.

“There's a lot of work that has to be done to make sure you have all pieces and parts running perfectly,” Eric explained. “We were running up against poor weather that was only going to get worse as we got into the springtime. It's not the time you want to travel the Atlantic coast. So I was trying to figure out how to get out of there as quick as possible and thread that needle to get up north before the weather got too bad. And it's not necessarily just the weather. The seas themselves are rougher in the spring, because the Gulf Stream going one direction, the winds blowing another, creates a lot of turbulence that isn't there during the fall or the summertime, which are much more comfortable to travel in.”

Despite all the obstacles they faced, they managed to leave Delray Beach on April 16. However, in their rush to do all the pre-trip preparations, they'd skimped on one of the patches they'd applied to the fiberglass hull, and it failed. The yacht started taking on water. Fortunately, it didn't have to



be taken out of the water to do the repairs, and five hours after pulling into a marina to redo the patch, they were under way the next morning.

It was then that Eric noticed that the diesel engine wasn't as responsive as it should have been. A quick look at the fuel tank revealed the source of the problem: a buildup of algae. Another round of repairs was necessary to replace filters. By the time they reached the Jacksonville area on the seventeenth, they were a day behind. At least, to that point, the weather had been favorable.

The following day, the eighteenth, the craft was in good repair, but the weather was bad. A small craft advisory was in effect. Eric estimates that the winds were gusting at thirty to forty knots—thirty-four to forty-six miles per hour. In a tiny inlet they could see whitecaps on the waves. Still, Eric was eager to take advantage of the fact that the wind was out of the south, pushing them. The boat could travel at high speeds out on the ocean, and with the tailwind they could make up some of the lost time.

Eric discussed their options with his companions, friends from New Jersey named Troy Tennis and Wayne Savage and a friend from Florida named Richie Petrusyk. Everyone but Eric believed that the wisest choice would be to forgo moving out into the open waters of the ocean. The risk to their comfort and safety would be greater than the reward of higher speeds. Yes, they were behind schedule, but how much farther would they fall behind if they encountered real difficulty in the troubling waters? Still, Eric was the captain and owner. The decision was his to make, and they'd support it. Knowing that he had limited time before he needed to return to his business in New Jersey, Eric opted to roll the dice. At fifty-three feet in length, the boat was structurally capable of running in such waters.

There's capable and then there's comfortable. Eric soon learned that the open-seas decision wasn't the best option. The violent water had the boat bouncing around; it was so rough that objects were dancing in the cabin. Judging discretion to be the better part of valor, they decided to abandon the idea of going out to the Gulf Stream for their northbound journey. Instead, they would use the slower but calmer Intracoastal Waterway, which essentially hugs the shoreline. They were miles from the next inlet that would help them gain access to the ICW, so, instead of cruising four miles out from the coast, they stayed closer, just two miles offshore.

Satisfied that they'd at least given the open-ocean option a shot, they settled in for the run to the inlet. They figured they might as well make the

best of a bad situation. They gathered on the flying bridge, a smaller open platform atop the main bridge equipped with a secondary set of navigational controls. Unlike many flying bridges, it was enclosed with a canvas roof and plastic (isinglass) windows. In the gusty winds, all those materials were rattling, adding to the noise. The original sales brochure had boasted that the craft had the latest in 1970s infotainment—a stereo tape system that was piped throughout the boat. The system had been upgraded, and the four men enjoyed listening to music above the sound of the wind, the loud thrum of the engines as Eric throttled up in order to get the bow of the boat to better plow through the rough seas. Their mood was high-spirited despite the rough seas. The sky was nearly cloudless, and the bright sunlight and wonderful visibility were a balm counteracting the difficulties they'd encountered over the last days. From their position high above the waterline, the distant shore was visible. Knowing that the decision had been made for them to return to the calm waters and having the shore in sight were a comfort. They were going to make the best of a bad situation.

As it turned out, their decision to go out onto the open ocean, however briefly, along with all the other delays, would eventually put the yacht into the right place at the right time to answer the teens' prayers.

HEATHER HAD CHOSEN A BIBLE verse for graduation. It reads, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts to the Holy Spirit and has been given to us." (Romans 5:3–5)

Endurance and hope were ideas that resonated strongly with her as an athlete. If the two students were adrift that day, that certainly wasn't the case with the rest of their lives. They were about to graduate in a month, and Heather had been accepted at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where she planned to be a naval ROTC marine officer. Her ultimate goal was to become a Marine Corps pilot.

For his part, Tyler was headed to Florida Atlantic University to study business finance. He planned to get his pilot license and join the air force. Though there are no guarantees in life, the two seemed to have a strong foundation in faith and service that held them in good stead.

Their lives were full of hope and dreams. But their endurance was about to be tested by suffering. Just after Romans 5:3–5 is a verse that reminds us that although our endurance may be tested by suffering, it was when we

were powerless that Jesus came to save us. That was about to prove true for Tyler and Heather.

The thought of dying didn't enter Heather's mind. She just thought, *No, I have to keep swimming. I have too much that I'm supposed to be doing. I'm supposed to graduate. I'm supposed to go to my sister's birthday dinner tonight. I'm supposed to be on the volleyball team. I'm supposed to be in the Marine Corps. There's no way this ends now.*

Somehow, she wasn't physically tired. "My adrenaline was through the roof. I didn't feel the cold until near the very end. I never had an image of drowning."

There was little to comfort Tyler and Heather. They rose and fell on the ocean swells, never rising high enough to see the shoreline. All around them were water and the sky above. Then, nearly two hours into their ordeal at sea, Tyler's muscles began to cramp. He clung to Heather, and, arms linked, they kept each other afloat and prevented themselves from drifting apart.

"If we kept swimming, we would have drowned," Heather later said.

They began to pray.

Tyler would later recall to news reporters, "When we linked arms, [I] honestly cried out to God, 'If you're out there, please send something to save us.'"<sup>2</sup>

The kids then saw something that made them both scream.

ABOARD THE YACHT, THE FRIENDS were laughing and talking. The ride was still rough, but they knew that it wouldn't last much longer. Soon, on their northerly journey, they would turn west toward the inlet that would take them to the ICW and calmer water.

The yacht had the ocean to herself. "All the fishing vessels go out to the Gulf Stream because you get a free ride," Eric said. "If you want to go north, you ride the current. And then you get to ride the wind heading back south."

At one point, above the noise of the wind and the motor and the music, the passengers thought that they heard something. "Somehow, we thought we heard a scream. We all stopped talking. We looked around."

All around they saw nothing but ocean and sky. Seeing nothing, they attributed the sound to seabirds. They carried on talking.

A moment later, they heard the sound again.

Troy, who was behind the wheel, didn't hesitate. He jerked the wheel hard left, shouting, "There's people back there!"

Eric looked back over his shoulder as the boat came about. "About two hundred yards behind us, I saw two little dots," he said later. "One of them was waving."

Tyler and Heather, spotting the yacht, had begun screaming, desperate to catch the attention of the crew.

Troy continued to turn the boat around hard, heading in the direction of what they'd heard and now seen. All four men had years of boating experience. They knew what to do in case of a rescue. Troy kept piloting from the fly bridge, and Richie stayed with him to serve as a lookout. Eric and Wayne ran down to the bow of the boat. There on the lower deck they grabbed life vests and rope that were stowed there in case of such an emergency.

From their vantage point, they only occasionally got a glimpse of the young people in the water. In between those brief sightings, they consulted with the other two men. The roaring wind made it nearly impossible to hear, so they communicated through hand signals and pointing. Eric and Wayne had tied ropes to the life jackets. In seas like that, it was potentially dangerous to get too close to the victims in the water. Not only could the boat slide sideways and expose the people in the water to the propeller, but they could be slammed into by the hull.

Troy continued to pilot the boat, creeping up on the two as skillfully as he could. Eventually the boat was positioned so that Eric and Wayne could toss the life jackets in the direction of Tyler and Heather. They worked their way toward them and held on. As he hauled on the line, Eric shouted, "Where's your vessel?"

He believed that the only way the pair could have been that far out in the ocean was if they had been on some small craft, a sea kayak or such that had overturned. There was no other plausible explanation.

Exhausted, bobbing up and down, Heather was barely able to respond, "I'll tell you later!"

That's when Eric realized the full extent of the seriousness of their condition. He could see it in Heather's eyes and hear it in her voice. Tyler wasn't speaking at all. Both teenagers wore pained, fearful, wide-eyed expressions. With the motor cut and riding sideways to the waves, the boat rocked relentlessly. How would they get them on board in their condition?

Eric hoped that the pair would be able to climb the ladder to the swim deck, the platform closest to the waterline which they could access with a ladder.

His heart in his throat, he watched as they maneuvered themselves toward the ladder and then clung to it. He had no idea how long the two of them had been in the water and how weak they'd become. They couldn't pull themselves up the ladder. Realizing that, Eric and Wayne rushed down to them and helped haul them aboard. As Eric pulled and Wayne pushed Heather aboard, Eric said, "She looked me square in the eye and said, 'God is real.'"

Stunned, all Eric could say was "I know."

The two men assisted the drenched teens in getting onto the main deck.

"We could tell they were in tough shape. Their lips, his lips especially, were white, and they were shivering uncontrollably," Eric recalled. He was afraid that hypothermia was setting in. He and his friends provided towels for the two to wrap themselves in.

"Do you have a boat?" Eric asked. He was still wondering how they could have gotten out that far.

"No," Tyler said finally through chattering teeth. "We were swimming."

Eric shook his head in disbelief. "How long have you been out here?"

"I don't know," Heather said. "I have no idea what time it is."

Eric told them that it was nearly one o'clock.

She did the math. "Two hours."

Eric's jaw dropped. Two hours in water like that must have felt like an eternity, he thought.

Very worried about the kids' condition, Troy fired up the engines again to stop the boat from rocking so hard from side to side, while Wayne called the Coast Guard. None of the four crew members was a medic, and they thought it might be best to get the kids onto a Coast Guard vessel. Eric led them into one of the cabins and gave them blankets to help insulate them and keep in their body heat. Rich heated water in the microwave for them to drink to help bring their body temperature up.

Within a few minutes, Eric noticed that Heather and Tyler had started to get their color back. Eric had never seen anyone with stone white lips before. He wondered how much longer the two of them might have been able to last in the water. Their shivering lessened, and they recounted what they'd gone through.

"Out of desperation, we started to pray—" Heather said.

“I started to call out to God,” Tyler cut in.

Eric wondered what the young man meant. Tyler continued, “And that’s when you showed up.”

“The name of my boat is the *Amen*,” he told them.

They all fell silent. The reality of all that had taken place and the significance of that brief exchange settled over them all.

“It got emotional, and it was just kind of overwhelming, how crazy that whole moment was,” Eric recalled. “I’m a man of faith. I knew that they were people of faith as well. I told them that and had to catch my breath. I was choked up about it. So the gravity of the situation kind of sunk in. At that moment, these guys were really close to death.” The two teens began crying.

The *Amen* was soon setting course for a rendezvous with a Coast Guard rescue boat. Very soon, the pair was reunited with their family and friends. Eric and his friends continued on. Once under way toward New Jersey, they realized that they didn’t even know the last names of the two teens they’d rescued. Only after Eric posted on Facebook about the experience did the media pick up on the story.

Later, Tyler explained what he had meant about his calling out to God. “I cried out: ‘If you really do have a plan for us, like, come on. Just bring something,’” he told a reporter for WJAX, a CBS affiliate in Jacksonville. “. . . From us crying out to God, for Him to send someone for us to keep living and a boat named ‘Amen,’ there’s no way that it wasn’t Him.”<sup>3</sup>

Their school, Christ’s Church Academy, issued a statement on Facebook, calling the rescue miraculous, and saying “The staff, students and families of Christ’s Church Academy are incredibly grateful for God’s protection over Heather and Tyler.” They also expressed their gratitude to Eric and his friends.

In considering all that had led to the rescue, Eric later told reporters, “The young couple was gracious and grateful to us and to God. It was the latter all along.” Also, as he later put it, “We had no business being out there.”

As it turned out, they were doing God’s business.

Eric reflected on all the circumstances that had contributed to their being in the right place at the right time, how the boat had first gone past the pair, and then, with the wind coming from behind, their voices had been

carried over the wind and water and audible above all the noise aboard the *Amen*.

“I believe it was miraculous. There were too many coincidences, in my opinion, for this to be a coincidence,” he said. “I truly believe it was divine intervention. It had nothing to do with me. I was just put there at the right place at the right time, and I did the same thing anyone else would have done, pulled them aboard.”

He added, “There’s no radar sensitive enough to pick up two heads bobbing in the water. We didn’t have the radar on. We only run it at night. We just go visual during the day. We were out there in the clear middle of the day in bright sunny skies. There was no problem with visibility that day, but it’s amazing how things disappear out there. You’re in a vast blue sea. You can’t pick up small things, like a buoy or a marker, not unless you’re really looking for them.”

Eric also reflected on the significance of the name of the boat. He hadn’t named it the *Amen*, the previous owner had, and when it had come time to repaint the boat after Eric had purchased it, he had considering renaming it. For some reason, he was unable to come up with one that he liked. He stuck with *Amen*. He now says that he will never change the name of the vessel.

Heather has since had time to further reflect on the events and the role it played in her life. She said, “I’ve grown up in a Christian household. So I’ve known that, obviously, God is there for you. But I’ve had that idea thrust at me for a long time through going to a Christian middle school and high school. It gets to a point where that just becomes background noise. But having this experience and being a literal firsthand witness to God just rescuing me like that, and way too many things that shouldn’t have happened happening, and seeing the name of the boat, there was no doubt that God had handpicked me out of the ocean and rescued me. In the Bible, it literally tells you that God is your rescuer. And that weekend was also Easter. Our pastor talked about how God is our rescuer, and I was losing it. I actually experienced that truth. I had an eye-opening experience that told me that God being a rescuer is for real. It isn’t just something I heard about.”

Whether it is active moments of doubt or simply taking for granted God’s greatness and his compassion for all of us, we’ve all likely experienced what Heather had in thinking of the Gospel as “background noise.” Daily life and our own concerns become distractions. Since her

rescue, Heather has experienced that drifting from God as well. She admitted, “Freshman year of college was a little rough. I was doing so many things. I was playing volleyball. I was doing Marine Corps ROTC. I was a freshman, bottom of the barrel, so I had to do everything for those groups. I had to adjust to college academics. I was spreading myself too thin and not making good choices. This was my first experience with real freedom. It was nice being on my own and getting to make my own decisions, but I didn’t make the best ones.”

She experienced another perspective shift, one that many young people do: “I guess I got, in quotation marks, ‘rescued’ again after freshmen year. Everything got put in perspective when COVID-19 hit. I was like, ‘Man, what have I done with my life, my whole year of schooling?’ I decided I didn’t want to be like this. I know better than this. I saw how God was in my life. I needed to show that. I just kind of reminded myself that I got rescued for a reason. I needed to do things differently.”

A part of the miracle of Heather and Tyler’s rescue is the fact that they stayed afloat for as long as they did. God’s strength was transfused into Heather. “It’s funny,” she observed. “Now, as part of my ROTC training, I have to do different qualifications. One of them is in the pool. Now I’ve been taught how to tread water properly and how to prone float and how to save my energy. I didn’t know any of that before, and it’s ironic learning it after the fact. Even treading water in the pool now, I think back and I wonder, ‘How did I do that?’”

The answer, of course, is that through God, all things are possible. He brought together three people, and transformed their lives, and set into place an example for all of us to learn from.

Eventually, Eric did speak with Heather and Tyler. Their parents were also in touch to thank him. To this day, on the anniversary of the near tragedy, Heather’s father sends Eric a note of thanks. (Heather now teases her sister by saying that the day is no longer her “birthday” but “our day.”) Eric believes that as a man of God, he and his family have been blessed in many, many ways.

Still, as he said, “I have anxiety and stress like everybody else. I can meditate and talk with God, and I feel better. And I’ve yelled at God before in the past when things went wrong. I apologize and realize He’s got a much bigger picture that I don’t understand. And He forgives me immediately, and I know that. So I’ve lived a life of forgiveness. I’ve been



wronged by many people. I just move on. I have to forgive and move on. God is right that forgiveness makes everything better. And it's something [I've] taught my children, and they do the same. And my parents are that way as well. You know, I see people who live with faith and I see people who live without, and those who live with faith have a much better road, a much happier life.”

Being involved in a miraculous rescue, as he was, stirred up a lot of feelings and reflections for Eric. He believes that God was reaching out to him not just to rescue those teens but to remind him of his need to remain faithful, “At times everybody, you know, loses sight of faith or just isn't as focused on it. And I do believe that God's intervention did renew my faith. It sparked conversations with my family, with my friends about faith. And for months and months afterwards, we had very healthy conversations about faith and about religion with my brothers, my sister, with my nieces and nephews, with so many people. A lot of my friends confided in me who I didn't even know were faithful, who I didn't even know were religious people, that they said a lot of prayers themselves after hearing about what I experienced. So it absolutely was a kick in the tail for me to be reminded of who's in charge. And you know, that reminds me to stay strong in faith, regardless of the trials and tribulations.”

Eric faced difficulties in both his personal and professional lives, and he did lose sight of God at times. But it wasn't only in the darker times that happened. As he explained, “Sometimes you forget the reason for your success. You can easily enjoy the pleasures of life as if you did it yourself. You take credit for all the things going so well. This miracle rescue reminded me that the reason things are going so well is in part because I'm faithful. I rely on times of prayer. I rely on meditation. I rely on leaving things to God and knowing things are out of my hands. And that takes away a lot of stress and relieves a lot of anxiety and allows me to focus on things that are much more important. And it's easy to forget about that message. It's easy to walk away from that for a while. And something like this certainly puts you back in the right track.”

Though Eric didn't say so, I was struck by several thoughts. One was the way the *Amen* had arrived just in time. So many things had gone wrong before and during the early stages of Eric's voyage that only God could make them right. Even the smallest of delays had contributed not only to Eric's rising frustration but also to the miraculous intervention of which he

was a small part. It's a good reminder of how we never know what part we're playing in the enormous machinery that is God's design and craftsmanship.

In addition, as Eric pointed out, not only do we all lose sight of God, but the noise and interference of our daily lives frequently result in our not being able to hear Him calling out to us. Unlike the *Amen* and its crew, which could have easily, but gratefully and miraculously did not, cruise past the shouting teenagers, God will always persist in His efforts to reach us. That day on the Atlantic, not only did God listen for, hear, and respond to Heather and Tyler's request, He called to Eric and his friends.

We are in a constant dialogue with the Lord our God, and as we sometimes do in life, we may drift into and out of full awareness of what is being said to us and its importance. God not only saved Tyler and Heather that day but had a powerful influence on the life of Eric and his family and friends. His message was carried on the wind and the water, moving far beyond who we might have believed His Word was intended for, to all of us.

One thing that Jesus' disciples forgot, on the water, was that God is always in control. What they didn't realize, of course, was that God was in the boat with them. It can be so easy to focus on the storms of life—the things right in front of us—and to forget that taking a nap in the hold of our ship is the Son of God.