

Preventing life's struggles
from strangling your life



Climbing

THE END OF YOUR ROPE

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A Strangled Life

“Mom?”

“I can’t believe it! She’s dead!”

“It’s Carrie! She’s dead!”

It was a normal, routine, ordinary day. The kids were in school, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson were at work, everything was going just as planned in this family’s happy life; but the words that Jackie Nelson heard from her youngest daughter screaming from the other end of the phone later that afternoon changed her happy, normal, family for the rest of their lives.

It’s Carrie. She’s dead. These words still echo through Jackie’s mind.

“Carrie was a beautiful girl with a bright future.” These were the words that many people used to describe Carrie Nelson, who was discovered hanging from the end of a rope in her bedroom by her little sister. Carrie had many friends and she was outgoing and involved in church and cheerleading. Carrie loved the beach, hanging out with her friends, and watching movies. In a short but true phrase, Carrie loved life. So why did she take it, why did she commit suicide?

These were the thoughts that ran through the minds of Carrie’s parents as they pulled their car into the driveway of their home. This was a home that was usually known for its

white, fenced lining, draped with the previous year's Christmas lights and surrounded by trees. But today, the appearance has changed. Today, the house was lined with yellow police tape and surrounded by uniformed officials. The police officers were only allowing a select few into the housing tract at a time due to the tragic event that had just taken place within the Nelson household.

The Nelsons' home was nestled at the end of the cul-de-sac. Neighbors were standing outside, speaking with reporters displaying a sad countenance accompanied by tearstained faces while kids were watching from afar, pointing and smiling. They didn't know what had happened, but they were curious just the same. A police chaplain approached the car of Carrie's parents and said nothing. He just offered a kind but sad smile as if to say, "I'm sorry," while motioning his hand to follow him. Carrie's parents stepped out of the car and began walking toward their house. Their slow walk turned into a paced jog as they swiftly entered the home and continued down the hall where family pictures were hung on the walls—pictures of Carrie and her sister on the river water skiing and family camping photos. There were school pictures ranging from kindergarten to Carrie's current school year, the twelfth grade. These happy memories weren't bringing any smiles to anyone's faces today. They were quickly fading into a painful memory of much better days passed; they will become a reminder of grief and anguish in the future.

As the Nelsons stepped into their daughter's bedroom, the sight was shocking to say the least. The rope was still hanging from the beam that was supporting the ceiling fan in her bedroom, and Carrie was lying on the ground, where emergency equipment was still surrounding her body—evidence that the

EMT workers had done their part in an unsuccessful effort to resuscitate her. Looking over toward the nightstand, Carrie's parents noticed a note still attached to a spiraled notebook. The poor handwriting was an indicator that the note was written quickly,
reading:

I'm sorry, I didn't want to hurt you, but I hate my life, and I don't want to live it anymore. Please don't blame yourself. I love you.

—Carrie

Carrie's parents were overwhelmed with grief and began to hold each other as they wrapped their arms around their daughter's chilling body. It was a sight nobody should have to see, not to mention experience. A police officer interrupted as he entered the room and asked the parents to accompany them into the kitchen, where Carrie's boyfriend was sitting at the kitchen table.

His name was Ronnie, a potential husband-to-be. Ronnie had a good head on his shoulders, with the intent of finishing school and going to college to get his degree in engineering. But much like the rest of the family, this event was something that would haunt him for some time to come.

Ronnie looked up at Carrie's parents; and shaking his head, he said, "I'm sorry," continuing to weep. "I'm so sorry. We should have told you."

The apologetic comments coming from Ronnie brought confusion to the Nelsons as they asked, "What? What are you talking about? Sorry about what?"

Speaking hesitantly, Ronnie continued. “She was pregnant. We just found out a few days ago. We were going to tell you, but ...” Ronnie couldn’t finish his sentence. The tears welled up in his eyes, and his head began to lower to a resting place on the table as he wept aloud.

The Nelsons were speechless. Questions ran through their minds. *Did she kill herself because she was pregnant? Was her life not as good as it had appeared?*

The Nelsons joined Ronnie as they too wept aloud at the kitchen table, mourning the death of their daughter and their newly discovered unborn grandchild. With so much confusion about their daughter’s life, they were unsure of how to feel. The only word that could truly reveal the magnitude of their feelings was *shock*. They just couldn’t believe it.

Two weeks later, Carrie’s family and friends filled the local church to attend Carrie’s funeral. Many were there for closure while others were there to support the Nelson family. It seemed as if time stood still for those two weeks prior to the funeral services; but after the funeral services were over, time began to move once again. The local press moved on to other stories. The Nelsons’ family from out of town returned to their own homes to continue living their lives. Carrie’s friends returned to their classes in school, pursuing what Carrie would never receive: a high school diploma.

It soon appeared that everyone’s life was going back to normal—everyone except for the Nelsons. They were left to an empty home, a home that was once filled to the brim and overflowing with laughter and hope was now vacant with nothing more than broken dreams and so many unanswered questions.

Carrie's best girlfriend, Joanne, knew more about Carrie than anyone ever could about a person. Carrie and Joanne grew up together, living on the same block, taking the same classes, and even having the same crushes on the same boys. Because Joanne had spent much of the day at school with Carrie on the day of her death, Joanne felt a need to meet with Carrie's parents and shed a little light on Carrie's frame of mind during the final hours of her life.

Joanne revealed that Carrie was having a difficult time that week coping with her newfound pregnancy, but the pregnancy was just an added stressor in Carrie's already frazzled mindset regarding her life. Carrie was living each day in uncertainty of the future and fear of the unknown and waking each morning to feelings of inadequacy. Carrie's disposition began to change; she was quiet, reserved, and most times she appeared distant and sad. In a short but toxic word, Carrie was becoming more and more depressed as graduation day approached.

Joanne stated that Carrie had enough anxiety about taking care of herself and her own future needs, not to mention caring for a forthcoming child. "She didn't know what her life would become," Joanne said. "Carrie didn't know if she would ever get to go to college and pursue her hopes and dreams." The thoughts that Carrie had were that of being confined to her hometown, possibly getting married very young, and then being trapped to (in her mind) the prison of being a housewife.

These were not the dreams that Carrie had envisioned for her future. As Joanne succinctly put it, "The movie *Riding in Cars with Boys* is a story that was soon becoming her reality, and it scared the daylights out of her."

Sadly, this pressure of her present circumstances and the unknown future pressed Carrie to the point of abandoning her life.

The dreams, aspirations, and hopes that Carrie had had begun to run dry. Carrie assumed that the things she used to daydream about would never come to pass. And sadly, the only known motive behind this tragedy was Carrie's difficulty in coping with life's pressures. The past and present difficulties of her young life were enough to shorten her vision for the future. This ultimately pushed her over the edge. And as a result, Carrie gave up trying. She gave up living.

This account of Carrie Nelson's life is a tragic story to say the least. Unfortunately, that's not the whole story.

As the days of mourning continued within the Nelson household, Carrie's parents found themselves steeped in depression. The Nelsons' faith in God had diminished, and their once bright and colorful outlook on life had become dismal and faded. The very thought of having happiness in life without Carrie caused an amazing amount of guilt that led the Nelsons to stop pursuing their dreams and goals in life.

Ultimately, Carrie wasn't the only life that was taken away that fateful day. Her parents and their own ambitions to live died with her. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson were living in a state of hopelessness; they jointly resolved to file for their divorce. A family was separated and their lives were lost as a result of Carrie's decision to take her life. Little did Carrie know that her decision to stop living took her family's life down as well.

Carrie was popular with a bright future. Anybody who had the privilege of knowing Carrie knew that she had had a level head on her shoulders, with plenty of ambition to make her dreams come true.

Mr. and Mrs. Nelson were still purpose-filled, breathing human beings who were both faced with a choice of their own: to live their lives, living in the promises of God for a hope of future blessings, or abandoning their hopes and dreams for their life. Unfortunately, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson made a choice that put an abrupt halt to their future as well.

We all find ourselves shaking our heads when we hear of someone taking his or her own life, and rightly so. But what about those who are still alive yet have chosen to just stop living their life as a result of life's trials and hardships?

Take for example Mr. and Mrs. Nelson. What caused them to make the decision to throw it all away? Was there still promise for their future? Or did they believe that God and his plans for their lives ceased the day that Carrie made this decision to take her own life? Did they assume God had forsaken their family, throwing up his hands saying, "Well, I guess that's the end of that family. I'll just have to go bless another family's life instead." It's sad to believe that someone could live their life with this frame of mind. However, this is the position that many of us have found ourselves in when engaged in the hard pressing warfares of life.

It's a great deception that we're so willing to receive—believing all hope is lost when life gets tough. It's easy to find ourselves shortsighted, with feelings of hopelessness and defeat. But ultimately, this is a rope around our neck, a rope that is trying desperately to strangle our lives. But let me scream as loudly as this book will allow, "Open your ears, lift up your head, and realize that there is hope!"

I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help (hope) come from? My help (hope) comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1–2 (niv)

Scripture tells us that God has a wonderful plan for our lives, plans to bless and prosper us. God has plans to give us hope in our lives, regardless of the circumstances. God's plan for our lives is to give us a future of abundance (Jeremiah 29:11). God's plans for you and I are mind-blowing and marvelous. Yet, as we look around us and quite possibly at ourselves, it's evident that the trials of life have caused many to make the decision to stop living their God-given, purpose-filled life.

As a result of past failures, we've found fear in chasing future adventures. As a result of past broken dreams, we've put a halt on the pursuit of future goals. Due to past broken hearts, we've chosen to harden our hearts to the world around us. And trusting and serving God? Well, that's something that we've tried before; but now we've become tired of pressing on and seeking God's will for our lives. Life as we've come to know it is unfair, difficult, burdensome, and just too much work. So we've resolved to stop planning and just dangle through life, effortless and hopeless, allowing the past mistakes, trials, and hardships of life to take our promises, blessings, and hopes for our future hostage.

This is a person who breathes day in and day out, living according to their own feelings while neglecting a purposeful life. This individual may very well occupy a church pew but often neglects to live the way that God had intended: free from

the past of bondage and excited for the future of blessings. This person lives a defeated life, and although they haven't killed themselves physically, they're spiritually, mentally and emotionally dead. Yes, our own difficulties in life can easily cause us to make a decision to stop living, and the condition is called hopelessness.

Many of us have referred to this condition of hopelessness as the "end of our rope." This is a metaphoric term symbolizing the rope of life, a stretch of our lives that ties the past, present, and future together. But when things have gotten too hard to handle, it's at this point that we make the decision to cut the rope short of the present and future, living; and as we've commonly come to know, this is the point that we claim is the end of our rope.

But listen up. Coming to the end of our rope doesn't mean that we've run out of options; it simply means that we've come to a crossroads of life with some decisions to make. Either we will dangle hopelessly at the end of our rope, living without purpose; or we will gather whatever strength we have left in us, grab onto the hand of the Lord, and climb the end of our rope into the promises of God.

Something that I've noticed is that most people who claim to have reached the "end of their ropes" in life give up because they just don't know what to do when they get there. Giving up is usually the first response to any hardship, burden, or tragedy. This is a common response, and most of us have realized this in our own life. But we do have another option. We can dare to be different and change direction in our lives from giving up and giving in to pressing on and pressing in. True, it's more difficult, and no doubt it will require much effort; but boy oh boy, is it worth it.

Within my full-time position as a hospice pastor, I have the privilege and the opportunity to sit with people at the end of their lives—people who have approximately six months or sometimes less to live. I've taken note that the only thing that is left to do when awaiting the call home from the Lord is to reflect on the life they've lived, the decisions that they've made, the things they've accomplished, the things that they haven't accomplished, and the hardships and trials that they've endured.

In most cases, I've found that someone who hasn't accomplished their dreams and goals is usually someone who has allowed the trials and tribulations of life to lead them to a hopeless state; and as a result, they give up planning, dreaming, and living the life that God had given to them. This condition often leaves someone at the end of their life with a tremendous amount of regret and despair. Unfortunately, this story is common and could result in any one of us dying in the same condition.