

Climb Higher

...A Transformational Trek Story



The insatiable draw to the beauty and serenity of the Adirondack mountains was deep in Taylor's soul. Every weekend, Taylor was compelled to climb mountains and was easily taken in by the breathtaking summit views and wildlife around her. While she was lost in her thoughts, she would often get off-trail and unable to find the trail markers. What started as a carefree hike would often end in a bushwacking nightmare. This scenario mirrored her personal life. Taylor had a constant feeling of unrest, and she wandered aimlessly without purpose. Why am I here? Is this all there is to life? She often felt lonely, misunderstood, and ached for significance. Taylor wasn't sure what she was looking for, except she knew that she desired change. The Lord whispered to her, *"I will show you the path of life, and grant you the joy of my presence and the pleasures of living with me forever."* (Paraphrase of Psalm 16:11) Taylor talked to God out loud and said, "If you exist God, then please reveal to me the path of life."

Taylor didn't own any hiking gear, so she improvised by picking up a branch and using it as a walking stick to lean on for security. However, every walking stick turned out to be rotten on the inside and would eventually break under pressure. Taylor leaned on many different walking sticks to get her through the trails on her trek. Each walking stick represented a false sense of identity found in relationships, pleasure, good works, financial security, physical health, education, and reputation. As soon as one walking stick would break, she would quickly search for her security in another walking stick. Taylor began to feel restless and wondered if there was a better path, a stronger walking stick, and a higher purpose to life. Whether Taylor recognized it or not, she was searching for Jesus. The Lord met Taylor in her moment of searching and questioning. Jesus whispered to Taylor *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."* (NLT Taylor 14:6) Taylor pondered these things in her heart.

An unexpected turn of events occurred while she was wading across a large river to follow the trail that leads to the summit. Taylor pressed hard into her walking stick and little did she realize the many stress cracks that were present. When she leaned hard on the stick to steady her in the deepest part of the river, it snapped in two. Taylor's body went tumbling down the river in the fast-moving current and She forcibly plummeted down a waterfall and into a large pool of water. When Taylor was finally able to get her head above the water line, she saw that she was in a deep ravine with steep walls on either side. Her heart sank as she knew she could not get out of this watery pit without help. As Taylor treaded water, it turned into a soul-searching dark night of the soul. Fatigue and despair began to sweep over Taylor as it looked like there was no way out. Taylor cried out to the Lord to save her.

At that moment, the dawn broke forth sending streams of light into the dark cavern which brought hope to Taylor. The Lord whispered, *"The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."* (NIV Proverbs 4:18) Taylor heard voices above near the opening of the cave and yelled as loud as she could, "Help me, I'm down here!" Seconds later, Taylor saw several faces peering down and then a rope was lowered to rescue her from the dark waters." *When you go through the deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown."* (NLT Isaiah 43:2) The rope was strong and lifted Taylor out of darkness into the light and she was saved. When Taylor made it to the surface, she was relieved and full of gratitude. Taylor soon realized the hiking group that rescued her were a bunch of Christ-followers. They were wearing t-shirts that said, "Climb Higher" with the reference to Romans 10:9.

The Rescue Hiking Team gave Taylor extra clothes from their backpacks, so she could remove her soiled, wet, and torn clothes. They built a fire, fed Taylor a warm meal and gave her time to rest. Later that evening, they brought out a guitar and sang worship songs and praised God for His faithfulness. They prayed for Taylor's healing both spiritually and physically. For the first time, Taylor felt as though she was no longer alone in the world. Unspeakable joy filled Taylor's soul. She was grateful to be rescued from pending death and shown the way to a renewed life. They explained to Taylor why they had Romans 10:9 on their t-shirts. This scripture passage tells us how to receive and believe the gift of the gospel. First, confess our sins and then ask God for forgiveness. Secondly, ask Christ to be our Lord and Savior to help us live in a way that honors him. As we receive the gospel gift, the Holy Spirit begins to change us from the inside out. We are given a new life, a new nature and a new purpose. *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* *ESV John 1:12*) It finally made sense to Taylor, and she made the decision to follow Christ as her Lord and Savior. It was a pivotal moment in Taylor's life as she finally surrendered and confessed for the first time, and asked Christ to be the Lord and Savior of her life. She remembered the scripture that her grandmother told her, *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* *(NASB Romans 10:9)*. That night, Taylor was renewed by the Holy Spirit and slept in perfect peace.

The next day, the Rescue Hikers invited Taylor to join them on their trek up the Holy Mountain. Taylor was eager to join them because she wanted to see the One who set her free. *"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free."* *(NIV Psalm 119:32)* When Taylor asked them, "how will we know the right path up the mountain?" They replied, "God will

show us the way and he will light the path.” *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (NIV Psalm 119:105)* The Rescue Hikers warned Taylor, “the trail is narrow, steep and we will be climbing upward towards the summit. The trek will not be easy, and there will be difficult terrain, but we will be here for each other to help and encourage one another along the way.” The Lord whispered to Taylor, *“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.” (NLT Matthew 7:13)* Taylor replied to the team without hesitation, “I’m ALL in, when do we start?”

The Rescue Hiking Team looked at each other with big smiles on their faces and let out shouts of joy. One of the women came over to Taylor and said, “Welcome to God’s family! We want to give you a gift of hiking gear for this long trek towards the mountain peak.” She gave her a helmet to protect her head while she climbed up the rock ledge, a backpack, a 3-pound water bladder, and a filter so she could drink living water from the stream on the mountain. Another new friend gave her a compass so she would always know her true north, a head light so she could see the path, and a knife to help cut her way out of snares. Another friend gave her strong aluminum trekking poles, and hiking boots so she could be surefooted as a deer, enabling her to stand on mountain heights. *“The path of life leads upwards for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave.” (NIV Proverbs 15:24)* Upward they climbed, helping each other each step of the way as the terrain became difficult.

The climb up the mountain was steep, and their bodies were weary, when suddenly, Taylor noticed a different path with Reckless Hikers that looked like they were having more fun

on their journey. Unfortunately, Taylor was still learning how to let go of worldly temptations and she became easily distracted. She noticed the Reckless Hikers' t-shirts in big red lettering, "I'll do it MY way!" They yelled out to Taylor, "Hey, come over here with us! It's a much wider and easier path!" *"Proud men have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path."* (NIV Psalm 140:5) Taylor naively believed the Reckless Hikers and started to detour away from the right path. The Holy Spirit whispered, *"Do not swerve to the right or to the left, turn your foot away from evil."* (ESV Proverbs 4:27) However, Taylor dismissed the prompting from the Holy Spirit and the warning of the Rescue Hikers, and she left the narrow path thinking she had found an easier way. Shortly after she disappeared into the deep forest with the Reckless Hiking group, she tripped over a root and slid part way down the side of the mountain. Her body stopped sliding when it hit a small ledge with a great thud. The forceful impact knocked the breath right out of her and shooting pain pierced her hip. The Reckless Hikers laughed at her misfortune and none of them wanted to take the time or make the effort to help her. After all, they had their own agenda and being sacrificial to help someone in need wasn't convenient for them. The Reckless Hikers disappeared in Taylor's moment of greatest need, but the Rescue Hikers who were searching for Taylor, heard her cries and came to her aid. Taylor was beginning to learn who her real friends were when she was literally between a rock and a hard spot.

The Rescue Hikers were humble and kind, and they took time for their hurting companion, and even risked their lives to move her off the perilous cliff to higher ground. They poured medicinal oil on her wounds, bandaged them, and gave her a helping arm to steady her as she walked. They showed Taylor loving-kindness and were patient with her. They helped Taylor

in her brokenness and guided her to a place where she could be healed spiritually, emotionally, and physically. After Taylor recovered from her fall, she courageously stood up and said, “Let’s climb again.” The Lord whispered to Taylor, *“Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.” (NLT Proverbs 4:26)* Suffering became Taylor’s tutor in righteousness. Taylor learned it is better to follow God than to follow man. A life-threatening lesson, learned the hard way, reminded Taylor to keep her feet on the narrow path from that point forward.

After a long, hard journey, the Rescue Hikers and Taylor could see above the tree line to the peak of the Holy Mountain. There, on top of the mountain was a glorious house that shone radiant in the sunlight. An angel of the Lord spoke to them in a vision, and they kneeled down in a posture of worship. The angel of the Lord spoke and said *“In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house will be the highest of all – the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and the people from all over the world will stream there to worship. People from many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of Jacob’s God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” For the Lord’s teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem. The Lord will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” (NLT Isaiah 2:2-5)*

Overwhelmed with the vision, they praised and worshiped the Lord with all their strength. Glory to God in the highest! Praise the Prince of Peace and Lord of Lords! One day,

Christ will come again, and He will bring the sword of judgment this time. The people who believe in Jesus will enjoy the new creation, heaven on earth and be in the presence of the Lord for all eternity. The people who did not receive Christ will go down into the lake of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth for all eternity. Taylor was so grateful that she believed and received Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord and her name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The Angel of the Lord said, *"It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega – the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give the springs of the water of life without charge! All who are victorious will inherit all of these blessings and I will be their God, and they will be my people."* (NLT Revelation 21:6-7)

In the presence of the Lord, Taylor began to forget about the suffering and pain along the way to the mountain peak. Looking back, she realized how glad she was that she climbed the mountain! Hallelujah! All the pain and suffering on her long journey was worth it to spend eternity with the Lord. This world is but a shadow when compared to the radiance of life with our Heavenly Father. Taylor started to hum a familiar song... "and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." The Angel of the Lord reached out His hand and said to Taylor, "Welcome home... good and faithful servant."

Taylor's Transformational Trek has been completed, but your personal Transformational Trek is just beginning...

Discover Your Trail to New Beginnings

Are you tired of trying to climb your personal mountain alone? Do you desire to have joy and peace along life's journey and be in community with authentic Christian friends? Your story does not need to end at the bottom of the mountain alone or worse yet...off the side of a cliff! Did you know that My Story, and Your Story are woven into God's Story? You can learn more about God's heart and character as you read God's Story in the Old and New Testaments. You will be amazed how God guides ordinary men and women to trust Him as they travel through the peaks and valleys of life. God's desire is to lead each one of us to the summit of redemption and He promises to light our path on the way we should go. His Son, Jesus, has made a way through His life, death on the cross, and resurrection. He paid the price for our sins on our behalf and has shown us how to discover the trail to new beginnings.

Jesus has given us the gift of the gospel for a new life. *"Once, we too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy. We hated others, and they hated us. But then God, our Savior showed us His kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did. He declared us not guilty because of His great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life."* (NLT Titus 3:3-7)

Pray this prayer out loud with me... Lord, I have not lived a perfect life. I recognize and confess that I have sinned against you and others. I'm tired of falling off emotional cliffs and getting the wind knocked out of me. I want to turn away from my selfish ways and live and love

differently. Will you be my guide and help me reach the peak of your Holy Mountain? Would you please change me and strengthen me through the power of the Holy Spirit? Thank you for revealing to me that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the grave.

I know that it is through Christ's life, death and resurrection that I can have a renewed life. Your living Word says, *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* (NLT Romans 10:9) God, I believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior and I know you raised Christ from the dead. I confess, believe and receive the gospel as truth into the depths of my soul. I am grateful that I can now have a victorious life here on earth as well as live eternally in your presence. Thank you, Jesus, Amen.

Welcome to the family of God! We celebrate your decision to follow Jesus! We want to encourage you to get connected at your local church (focused on the Bible) so you can grow and fellowship with other believers. We were created to be in community, not to do life alone. The next step is to join a Bible Study/Small Group so you can become stronger in your faith as you read God's Word, and to encourage one another to stay on the path of righteousness.

Your faith journey continues with the **Transformational Trek Study Guide** you can download from my website at SharonEleanorTodd.com. The Study Guide contains questions and journaling reflections which will lead you on a spiritual hike to repurpose your pain for God's glory and discover the God of New Beginnings.

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hiking adventures.*