

Skyler's Walk on Water Testimony

Died to Self: February 2, 2025

I came to the Wild at Heart Basic Retreat two years ago in August and was really in the thick of a deep valley. I had just lost one of my spiritual mentors to COVID in 2021. My life group of four other couples decided that we were in different stages of life and no longer wanted to commit to meeting anymore (I thought I would grow old in community with these people). I applied for a job that I felt called to do—as Operations Director at a wilderness Bible camp—which ended up being one of the worst interview processes, emotionally, I have ever gone through. And then, we welcomed our second girl into the world. It was a season of immense grief and sorrow. Things that once gave me joy no longer did. I felt alone and like I just needed to bite my tongue and persevere through the hardship. The Basic Retreat gave me some hope. I was able to do some good introspection to try and tackle some of my past and current pains. God gave me a word/phrase for myself to strive for: I AM PRESENT. However, as much as I had wanted to change, I was still grasping onto past versions of myself and not wanting to let go and die to self.

Fast forward to February of this year—I was still feeling lost and just stuck in a bad rut. My wife had put a book on my desk that she had just finished called *Imagine Heaven*, which documents people's near-death experiences and their journeys to heaven and hell. I had been staring at it for five months when I decided to pick it up. It was really good. I had made it through about half of it when my yearly ice fishing trip with my college fraternity brothers came up. It's usually the only time we can all get together during the year, catch up on life, and reminisce about days of old.



Wanting to just relax on the last day instead of overdoing it, I decided to have a THC seltzer instead of the beer and whiskey the others were partaking in. Around 1 p.m., I cracked the can open and drank the blackberry lemonade THC seltzer. It tasted good. I finished it and thought, *Well, that tasted great—let's have another.* That led to finishing another one as well. I wasn't trying to get high; it just tasted good. I had never been this high before. I had dabbled in weed here and there during college but could probably count on one hand how many times I had smoked. I had just ingested 60 mg of THC in a matter of a couple hours.

It then hit me all at once. In that moment, it was calm and relaxing. It was just my buddy Pringle and me in the ice "fishing" house that day. I then had the urge to ask him if he was God. Obviously, as anyone in their right mind would, he answered, "No." In that moment, it was like a light switch had been flipped—and sheer panic set in. If he wasn't God, he was the devil... and I was in hell. The music we had been listening to soon turned dark, the lyrics making me feel extreme guilt. In that moment, my perceived reality was that I was in Hell and that I would never see my wife or my girls again.

Overwhelming sorrow poured over me—regrets, just stewing in all the bad things I had done and the things I had said. *It can wait until tomorrow.* I walked out of the ice house to get some air. I looked up at the grey sky and cried out to God in my head: *I don't want to be here. I need you. I deserve to be here, but I don't want to be here. If this is where you want me to be, I guess this is my fate.* I heard and felt nothing... so I accepted my fate.

It started getting late, and it was time to pack up and get off the ice. I had an urge in that moment that I needed to save my brothers. I couldn't let them go to hell like me—they needed to know about God. I'm not sure what I said, but it probably made no sense, and they just stared back at me. They said nothing, which scared me even more. I had to get out of this place. I had to leave. I had to try and get back to my family. I told them one of them needed to take me home—*I need to go home now.* Obviously, we still needed to finish packing up our things off the ice, and this was an absurd request. Frustrated with their lack of help, I cursed at them for not helping me and said I would do it myself.

I then proceeded to walk off the ice in an attempt to get back to the cabin. I had no clue where we were or how to get back. My freshman year roommate ran after

me and bearhugged me hard. Then he told me he could not let me go. “You have a family,” he said. He wasn’t about to let me go and potentially hurt myself. I was stuck here, and there was no getting away. I was just along for the ride.

We got back to the cabin, unpacked, and had dinner. I asked what I needed to do. They all just said, “Drink water,” so that’s what I did for the remainder of the night. I drank water and sat in deep thought at the table while they drank, talked, and played card games. Thoughts of all the bad things I had done kept flooding my mind, and then they would start talking about the same kinds of things in their conversation. This freaked me out even more.

Then a song came on the speakers—*We Didn't Start the Fire*. They all sang along... and in that moment, an even deeper fear set in. You see, we had a house fire in college. We would jokingly sing that song to make fun of the night our house almost burned down. We were able to put it out, but a thought came sneaking into my mind: *What if we didn't put it out? What if we all died—and they're here with me?*

I needed to find something to calm myself down. I thought, *If I'm in Hell, I won't be able to access a Bible*. So I grabbed my phone and opened the Bible app. It opened, and I was able to read some Scripture, which helped relieve some of the panic.

At this point, it was around 2 a.m. Everyone else had just gone to bed. I had an urge to talk to someone—either my best man or my dad—but I just couldn’t bring myself to do it. I was frozen in fear. Then I thought, *I really need to get on my knees and pray*, but I couldn’t even do that.

As I lay in bed, I thought about how Peter denied Christ three times before the rooster crowed. I started to feel guilty again, thinking I was denying Christ. I couldn’t fall asleep, so I decided to just stay awake until morning. The rest of the night, thoughts rushed through my head—how I’ve been such a selfish person and haven’t done anything noteworthy or good with my life. I just kept feeding into the lies I’d been dwelling on all night long.

As day broke, I got up and started cleaning up the kitchen from the night before, getting things ready for us to leave. As I was picking up the empty cans, I heard a

rooster crow followed by three gunshots. I started spiraling again: *I'm in Hell, and I've denied Christ.*

Everyone else started getting up. I apologized for being the one guy who overdid it during the weekend. They were gracious and said, "No problem. We're just glad you're okay." I also apologized for trying to talk about God while under the influence and admitted that it wasn't the greatest idea. But I told them I truly care for them and have always wondered where they stand with their eternity.

As we packed up, I was still unsure of what reality I was in. I didn't know if I would be able to leave the cabin—or if I even should. We got everything packed up into everyone's vehicles, but I was still unsure what to do, and I think the guys could see I was struggling. They asked if I was alright, and I said, "I just still don't feel right, and I don't think I can drive myself home."

Then I realized I had empties in my car because I was bringing back the recycling... and I was still high. *I'm going to get pulled over. I'm going to jail.*

One of the guys volunteered to drive me home. They were headed back to the cities anyway, so they said they'd just drop me off at my house. I agreed. We got in the car, just about ready to leave, and then I got very anxious about going. I jumped out of the car and ran back into the cabin to ask Pringle—the guy who had been in the ice house with me the day before—what I needed to do.

He just looked at me and said, "Dude, just go home. You just need to go home."

I took that as my permission to leave. So I hopped back in the car and set off into what I thought was going to be a never-ending car ride to nowhere. As we were riding back, Pat—who also went to my childhood church—drove most of the conversation, asking about things he knew I was interested in. Everything he talked about just kept piling guilt on me.

"How's your truck?" Well, it's just been sitting in my garage for the last two years. I haven't even used it.

"How are the house projects going?" Well, I have a lot of work I've just been putting off or prioritizing over my family.

"How's work?" It's going well. I had the best year ever... and all I could think about was how much time I spend at work compared to time with my family. I didn't

even feel good about having the best year of my career. I just felt disgusted with myself and filled with despair.

We finally made it back to my home, much to my surprise. I felt some sense of relief. I thanked them, and they took off. I came home to an extremely sick wife who had the flu. So I took my two girls and played with them—which was all I had been hoping for. I just wanted to enjoy time with them. I made dinner for them and then put them to bed.

I finally had some time to decompress everything. I just needed to talk to someone about the experience. I gave my dad a call and told him I had accidentally gotten high, and that I felt really guilty about being a poor human being—and that I thought I had denied Christ. He listened and calmed me down. He said, “I think you have some repenting to do, and it sounds like you’re struggling with your identity in Christ. I’ll send you some scriptures you should read through—and then pray and repent.”

I felt good at that point. I went upstairs and told my wife everything that had been going on and said that I needed to go pray and read some Scripture. Then I’d join her for sleep. I went into our guest room, got down on my knees, read the scriptures my dad sent, repented, and prayed. Then I went back to the bedroom and fell asleep. I had a restful night of sleep.

The next day, I was able to work from home, which was good because I was still feeling off. I still felt like I didn’t know what reality I was in. It was truly like *The Truman Show* or *Matrix* stuff...

I decided that I needed to do a devotional, so I found one called *7 Day Refresh*. Great—I needed a refresh after this experience. But I hadn’t fully read the description of the devo. It goes through the whole book of James, which deals with trials, tribulations, and the things you shouldn’t be doing as a Christian. I just went through the entire book—I couldn’t seem to get enough.

I got to the end—James 5:14: *“Is anyone among you sick? Call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”*

I felt the urge to call Drew Shepp, my senior pastor. He actually picked up—he had a meeting canceled and could meet me in 30 minutes. He listened to my experience and said, “Well, sounds like someone who has had too much THC. Some people can have extreme panic.”

He affirmed who I am in Christ, and said I needed to call out the things that seem hazy and unclear—those are lies and they are not from God. He told me I should write them down and burn them. Then, write down the truths of who I am.

I felt peace in that moment. I went home, wrote everything down, shared it with my family, and then burned the lies in front of them as witnesses.

You would think after this that I would have my feet on solid ground and that the story would end there—but that was not the case.

The next morning, I needed to take our oldest to homeschool co-op since Emily was still very sick. So I dropped her off and then had an urge to go back home and pick up a Bible tract I had gotten from a speaker at a men’s retreat I attended in Ohio the previous year. I grabbed it from my notebook, where I keep all my retreat material and notes, and headed into work.

When I got to my desk, there was an Ohio State LED old-style camp lantern sitting there. I’m a big Ohio State fan—my family is from Ohio, and I was born in Columbus. This freaked me out, because through this whole experience I’d been trying to tie things together symbolically. I had seen that lantern on someone else’s desk at work before, someone who had left the company. I had thought at the time, *That would be nice to have, and I should take it.* I saw that desire as sin—and now it was sitting right here on my desk.

I started to get really unsettled and asked around about who had put it there. My direct report, who sits next to me, said, “I also got something weird on my desk,” and handed it to me. It was a book titled *MIDWAY*. In that moment, I took it as confirmation that I was still in some sort of hell, and I really started to panic.

One of my coworkers could see that I wasn’t myself and tried to lighten the mood. He said, “Skyler, you should just grab that lantern and let it light your way...” That was such an odd thing to say. I didn’t really want to hear it, but it sounded like a biblical message in the middle of my darkness.

Then another coworker came over—the one who had actually put the stuff on our desks. I kinda thought he was some kind of demon or something. He smiled at me and said, “Are you alright, Skyler?” I told him, “I don’t feel so good.” He said, “Yeah, you don’t look too good. You should probably go home.” I agreed. Maybe I should just go home. I needed to get out.

I was legitimately having a panic attack. I quickly emailed my boss, told him I was taking the day off and would be unavailable, and then walked as fast as I could to get out of the building and head back home.

When I got home, my wife was surprised to see me. I told her, “I need to quit my job.” I didn’t know where that thought was coming from, but in that moment I truly believed I needed to quit immediately.

She asked, “Did you quit your job, Skyler!?”

I responded, “No, I just don’t know what I need to do. I just don’t feel like I’m here. I don’t feel like I am home. This isn’t my home. This isn’t my home.”

In that moment, she saw the fear and panic on my face. She looked at me and said, “I think you need to read through Ecclesiastes.” Then she left to take lunch to our eldest and bring her to dance class.

I sat on the couch and read through the whole book. It calmed me down. Then I remembered the urge I had earlier to grab that Bible tract and get into my notebook. I looked at the first tract—it was one titled [Are You a Good Person?](#) Kind of ironic, in the moment. Then I looked at the next one, titled [Steps to Peace with God.](#)

I thought to myself, *I really need some peace right now.* I went through the little booklet and rededicated my life to Christ. A weight came off my shoulders.

Then I thought, *Alright, let’s go deeper. What else does God have for me?* I opened the notebook, flipped to the folder page, and grabbed the first thing inside. It was the paper I had written on during Wild at Heart: “I AM PRESENT.”

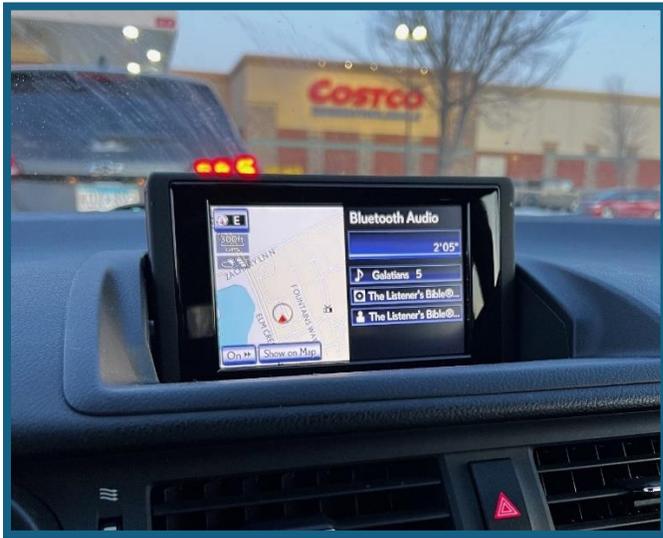
“I am here... I am in the world...” Then I thought, *The Great I AM is present. God is with me.* That completely grounded me. A calmness and peace surrounded me.

I just started going through everything in the notebook, diving into Scripture, and stayed on that couch until 4 p.m., when my wife got home and found me in the exact same spot she had left me.

The next day—Wednesday—God wasn't quite done showing me what He had in store.

I went into work and had a decent day. After work, I stopped into Costco to grab some groceries. As I shut my door to leave, a voice came on over my car stereo. It was a man's voice—and he was reading Scripture. This freaked me out. *Who is reading this? Is someone else's phone synced to my car?*

I took a photo of the screen, and it said: *Galatians 5:16 – So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*



I pressed pause, and the voice stopped. I pulled in to get gas and was questioning, *What is going on?*

Eventually, I figured it out: somehow, the Bible app had opened up on my phone. But I never use it in audio mode, and I definitely wasn't in Galatians. The only explanation I could come up with was: *This is the Spirit working.*

I had confidence. I wasn't scared. I said, "Let's go, Spirit. What do you have for me?"

I pressed play and headed home, listening to what God had for me. The app read the rest of Galatians aloud. It truly felt like God was having a personal

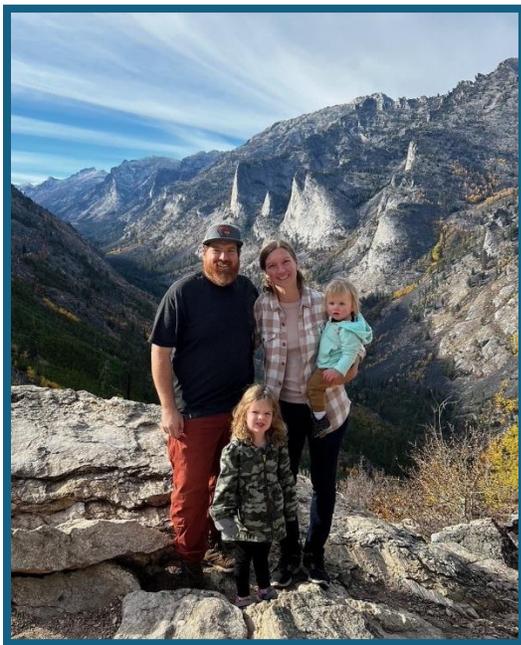
conversation with me—and I just lost it. I started crying—ugly crying—on the car ride home.

In that moment, I fully knew the hope, grace, and love of God for myself.

My old self died out on the ice on February 2, 2025. I think the best way to describe this whole experience is that it was godly sorrow from a buildup of unrepented sin that had kept me from His presence. I felt the true gravity of living in sin—and truly wanting to change. He searched me out and found me.

Realizing you might not have a tomorrow really puts things in perspective. I need to stop saying, *“It can wait until tomorrow,”* and start saying yes to the God things—pursuing Him and doing life with Him. I don’t need to go it alone; I can have other godly men alongside me.

I do feel like there is a higher calling on my life, and I need to take steps forward to figure out exactly what that is—my godly purpose. I’ve been wanting to carry the torch of my mentor who passed away, the one who led wilderness retreats for men. I connect with God the most when I’m out in His creation. I don’t know exactly what that will look like for me yet, but I do want to keep taking steps forward toward doing something similar to what he did.



**Rinehart Family. Skyler, Emily,
Felicity (5) and Aubry (2)
Bitterroot Mountains, MT 2025**