

Stories of Strength

SAMANTHA ROLÓN

March 2017

I have been so blessed that the family I was born into knows Jesus and has directed me towards His heart in the way they live their lives and the way they instructed and disciplined me as I grew up. We attended Sunday church, Sunday night youth group, and were always there on Wednesdays for Awana or Youth Group. I remember my parents praying with my brothers and I and telling us Bible stories. Being a Christian was about being with Christ every day, and so at the age of four I asked Jesus to come into my heart. I knew at that age that I loved Jesus. At that young age, my first memorized verse and a verse I have loved since is “We love because He first loved us.” —1 John 4:19. I didn’t know fully what it meant to follow Christ and what great weight that decision held at that early age, but I knew God made me happy and that I wanted to make Him happy. As I got older, I struggled with self worth and God’s grace. This was no fault of my parents or family because they always encouraged me, but just deep down, I always felt like I was falling short of people’s expectations and wasn’t good enough. Because of these feelings, I often didn’t feel comfortable in larger groups of my peers. I always doubted that anyone wanted to be around me and that I had anything to offer. In addition to my self-doubt, when I would make a mistake, I was absolutely sure, that I had lost my salvation and would surely be going to Hell. These feelings really drove a wedge between myself and Christ’s heart. I have always thought

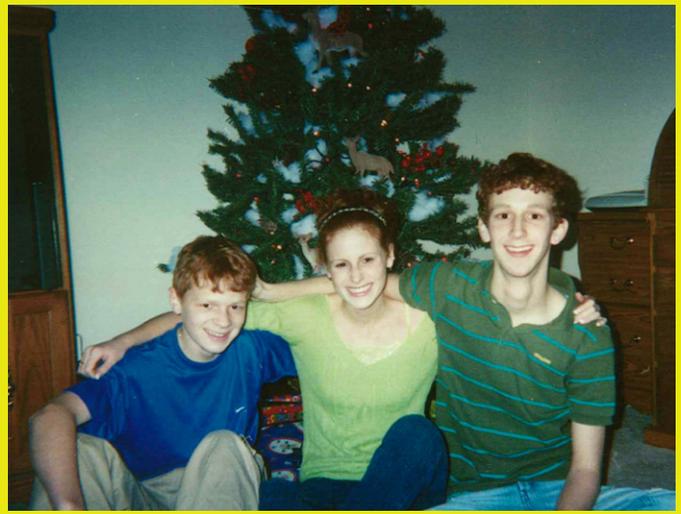
that God does not want to be in a relationship with someone like me, someone with so little to offer and someone with so many problems. I can remember over and over again asking Jesus to come into my heart because I didn’t understand that God’s grace was enough to cover all of my iniquities, no matter how extreme I thought my shortcomings were. High School was not my ‘jam’ but having such a great friend in my brother, Dustin, made it more worthwhile and tolerable. My brothers and I have always had a great relationship and have enjoyed being around each other. We were taught to be loyal to one another, because friends may come and go in your life, but your siblings are there to stay, so treat them well. Dustin was really my best friend through High School. I told him everything and he was always there to protect me and encourage me. My Sophomore year Dustin and I signed up for a small group together at our church. One week, our youth leaders brought index cards and had us write the acronym ‘ALIVE’ on them. They told us that this stood for ‘Always Living In View of Eternity.’ This hit home for my brother and I. We discussed what that meant. We talked about how that meant dying to ourselves and living in Christ. How it meant to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, no matter the cost. It was one of the best Spirit filled conversations I have ever had. One week later my brother was on his way home from work on a Wednesday night to pick me up to go to Small Group. As I waited for him to come and get me, I remember feeling in the pit of my stomach like something was not right and asking my friends I was talking to on MSN messenger to pray. Dustin was late and that wasn’t like him. This was before everyone had cell phones, so we could not call him to see where he was at. Eventually, my Mom told me to get into the car and she would take me to church. On our way there, we were stopped by a long line of traffic. There had been an accident. A semi driver was making his way back to each car to tell them that there had been a fatality, that it would be awhile before everyone could get through, and that they should probably turn around. When he got to our car, I remember my Mom and I asking the truck driver if he knew what the car looked like. We explained that my brother was late getting home. We wondered if Dustin was just stuck in all this traffic or if he was one of the individuals in the accident. Did this man know what cars were in the accident? At that moment, I could see all the happiness in the world vacate his eyes. I think that man knew that one of those cars belonged to my brother, and that he didn’t know how to tell us. My Mom made a u-turn and as we headed back home, I told my Mom that something didn’t feel right and she said she felt the same way. Shortly after arriving back at home, our Pastor and a few police officers, one who was my High School Choir teacher, arrived at our home. From then on, most of what I remember is just a blur, as cliché as that sounds. I remember feeling as though the weight of the world was on my chest. I could not breathe. I felt weak. Where was Dustin? This can’t be true. This is not real. As we made our way to my grandparents’ home to tell them that Dustin had passed away, I remember crying out to Jesus asking Him to not desert my family and I. I remember asking Him to hold us close and that He would prevent us from pushing Him away. I just remember feeling so desperate for Him to wrap me up in His arms and to keep us close. Next to my prayer for salvation, I believe this is the most important prayer I have had in my life because Jesus is what has helped me get through the grief of losing my brother. I don’t know where I would be if



Samantha with her family at the 2015 b STRONG event
From Left: Michele Hartsough, Jon Rolon, Robert Hartsough, Samantha Rolon, Jackson Rolon and Tyler Hartsough)



Samantha and her brother Dustin at a Christmas dance in 2004



Tyler, Samantha and Dustin, Christmas 2004

it wasn't for His love and His faithfulness. As days turned into weeks, and weeks into months and then years, the grief changed. You never really 'get over it' or 'move on' like people who have never had a similar circumstance instruct you to do, but, you are able to handle it. People tell me all of the time that I am so strong and that they never could handle the same thing happening to them. This is not true at all. This story has nothing to do with me or my 'strength' but has everything to do with God's strength and faithfulness in my weakness; it is the testimony of who He is to His children. There is a phrase that many believe and say, "God won't give you more than you can handle" but, there is no place in the Bible that says this. The Bible does say, however, that He will be our strength in our weakness ("That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 corinthians 12:10). The Bible tells us that He will sustain us (Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be moved" Psalm 55:22) . The Bible tells us that He won't desert us (It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Deuteronomy 31:8)and that He mourns with those who mourn ("Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matthew 5:4). The Bible tells us that we are supposed to trust in God no matter our circumstance, even when the water we are treading through seems unmanageable and intolerable. These truths and promises have been what have filled me with joy even when happiness was absent in my life. I truly believe that happiness is a reflection of circumstance whereas joy is a reflection of Christ's goodness and presence. You can be filled with joy even when your life is falling apart and hanging on a thread, because God is faithful and good. He can create beauty from the ashes in our life. Losing my brother taught me that God's grace is for everyone. Not accepting God's grace is being arrogant because it is saying that Jesus' sacrifice was not enough for you and that you are too much for Jesus to handle and save. God is bigger than my sin! Woe. When I put that into perspective my view on my relationship with Christ transformed and that acronym 'ALIVE', became even more relevant to me. I realized that the days are numbered and tomorrow is not promised, so I needed to live every day to the fullest with Christ at the center. Eternity is the prize my eyes should be set upon; whatever fire I have to walk through before getting there will be worth it. I realized that I didn't want to live another day wondering if I was saved and if I was enough when God was telling me I was enough and that His grace was sufficient for, yes, even me. I still struggle sometimes with accepting God's grace and feeling like I have value. When I start to question these things, I just rebuke Satan and allow God's scripture and promises to flood my heart and mind..."He loves me ("But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8) . I belong to Him. God doesn't make junk. God has a plan and a future for me ("For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11) Jesus died for me. His grace is enough. I am a child of God."

6 STRONG

THIRD ANNUAL

1 MILE FAMILY WALK / FUN RUN & 5K
Sign up online @ www.bstrong316.org

SATURDAY, JULY 29TH 2017



Like us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/bstrong316



Follow us on Twitter
@bstrong316



Follow us on Instagram
@bstrong316

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS ON JULY 29TH-REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

****GET THE 5K EARLY BIRD PRICE OF \$20 NOW UNTIL MAY 1ST!****