

Announcer

Welcome to Transformed by the Word, a podcast about discovering how to live your life with gratifying purpose. God created you for a reason and the Bible contains the keys to unlock your transformed life. Now, here's your host, Debora Barr

Debora 0:26

Thanks for joining me for episode 43 of Transformed by the Word.

We're continuing in a series of episodes of modern day people whose lives have been transformed by the word of God, and by their exposure to Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts, we meet a man named Saul, whose life was drastically transformed by his encounter with Jesus. And friends – Jesus is still changing lives today.

If this podcast has been a blessing to you, I encourage you to share it with your friends. And would you give it a five-star rating on a review platform at love.thepodcast.com/tbtwpodcast. I'd also like to invite you to let me know if you or someone you know, has experienced life transformation as a result of your encounter with Jesus and with His Word. And if you'd like to be considered as a potential future guest on the show, send me an email at DBarrministries@gmail.com or click on the link on my website, TBTWpodcast.com and contact me I would love to consider inviting you on the show.

Today, I have another amazing guest that will share his life story with us. His name is Luis Javier Ruiz and he's an Army veteran having served the United States for 15 years, including combat operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom. But nothing prepared him for what he experienced one night in Orlando, Florida in 2016. You see, Luis is a survivor of the Pulse nightclub shooting and he will share that experience with us today.

He's the founder of Fearless Identity, and co-founder of Freedom March International and he's using his story to share a message of truth and love that is found in Jesus, globally in all types of communities, raising up leaders in churches and standing up for the voiceless in school systems. Caring fearless righteousness as a kingdom influencer and ambassador in politics, and a kingdom influencer in the building up of the church, raising up fearless identity bases in churches.

Luis believes that Jesus doesn't just set you free. He sets you free indeed. And even if society says I was born this way, John 3:3 says I must be born again.

Stay tuned. We'll be back in just a moment.

<<MUSIC INTERLUDE>>

4:17 Debora

Hey, Luis, what a huge blessing to have you on the show today. It's so good to see you.

Luis

So good to see you too. And thank you for having me.

4:20 Debora

Yeah, I remember the first time that I met you it was in 2019 in Orlando, and I have watched you from the sideline ever since that time as God has been using your story to prove to the world that transformation truly is possible. And that is the focus of today's podcast.

Before we jump into the story of what happened with the nightclub shooting, and I've already let folks know that you survived that. Can you share with us just a little bit about your childhood let's get to know you a bit and have our listeners understand your upbringing and how you got to the point of being in that nightclub in the first place?

5:03 Luis

Yeah, absolutely. So, going back, I was born in Nuremberg, Germany. My father was in the military. So I was an Army brat.

Debora

I, I was in Germany for three years.

5:19 Luis

Okay. Yeah, I lived in. I was born in November, Germany. And then I also went to school in Hanau sports field.

5:29 Debora

Are you kidding me? That's where I was stationed for three years. Wow, look at that. We have connections I didn't even know about.

5:37 Luis

Uh hu - I went to Hanau Elementary and so we were there like off and on nine years. My dad loved it so much that he asked to get stationed there again. So that was yeah, that was a lot of fun. That was my childhood just learning. Imagine Spanish home trying to learn English. And then everyone else learns, talks German. So

5:58 Debora

that mixture? What are so different

6:03 Luis

Spanish! Yeah. Haha. So that was pretty fun. I did enjoy Germany, though. I did enjoy the beautiful castles and, you know, but also growing up with a mom that was very loving, caring and sheltering. And a father that loved this as well. But at the same time was always out at training, you know how the military is. So I was stuck with my mother and my sister a lot. And, yeah, so that was my growing up moving from base to base and city and towns. I lived in Panama as well. That was amazing duty station. We lived right in front of the Panama Canal. So imagine just seen those cruise lines and those boats just passing by, like as we wake up in the morning, and that was my childhood.

6:56 Debora

Yeah, that's cool. So what did you know about God as a boy growing up?

7:01 Luis

So, um, well, growing up at the beginning, my parents were Catholic. So it was just a check in the box, we go to Mass on a special holiday type thing. And nobody could tell us different we were Catholics and, and that's it. And so it was very rare.

You know, the only thing I knew about God was when we went to mass and you know, and that was, like I said, that was just like a holiday kind of thing. And then my parents came to know the Lord Jesus through an accident.

Debora

Oh, do tell.

Luis

Yeah. So my mom started secretly going to a Christian church, and she would bring us along with her and she would be singing and my dad's like, wait a minute, we're Catholics here. What are you doing? You know, and my mom kept praying and just going to this church and learning about God in such a different way. And so I remember, just going to California, we're on our way to Disney World. And all of a sudden, like, the car starts spinning around. And if you know, California, there's like these mountains. And like, as you're driving, there's this big old hill, they drop off. Yeah, so the car starts spinning around and spinning around. And I don't know, it, obviously, is the grace of God that literally put us like in the side of the road. I mean, we it was for all these cars to hit a sudden, a bad pile up, maybe. But God had other plans. And so I just remember, right then and there, my dad's like, I'm going to church with you.

8:38 Debora

God has protected us.

8:40 Luis

Yeah. So yep. My mom and dad started going to the Christian church, and they started getting really plugged into it started learning and getting disciplined. And I mean, it changed our life around so now we go from just holidays to like being in church 24/7. Monday through Monday, you know, every service every prayer meeting, I mean, we were even cleaning the church on the weekends. So yeah, I mean, they want to just to be they were so on fire and in love for Christ. And so that was my childhood, just learning from all that.

9:17 Debora

Incredible. So who were some of your influencers in your life growing up? And, you know, how did you go from that to being in a nightclub?

9:28 Luis

Yeah, absolutely. I would say my dad was my biggest influencer. He was in the Army. I love the uniform. I love it was such a different like atmosphere. And so that actually, like caused me to join the Army later on in life and yeah, so I was, yeah, my dad and and I didn't have too much, many influences growing up, other than, well, when we started going to the Christian church, I remember one day going to a cuz I was in sports as well in high school. And so I went to this Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp. And I

remember this guy was just really real and raw and talking about stuff that you don't hear in the church about purity about staying pure for the Lord and watching out what you let in your eyes and what you hear. I mean, this guy was just, this is not what a guy does well in forms of bringing the conversation of lust and going deep into it. So he really influenced me when I was a kid, because I didn't hear that at church. You only heard that do not have sex. And if you have sex, that's a sin and you're going to hell in a handbasket.

10:42 Debora

Or you must repent and yeah, many pennants?

10:46 Luis

Yeah. So we saw sex as a bad thing growing up, and until you're married all this, and then all of a sudden, it's a beautiful day. So a lot of us are scared of it. So yes, so I remember him being just a great mentor in my life and stuff. And along the way, there were many men and women that inspired me as well. But yeah, I just remember just being a crazy rebel growing up, you know, the dad now is a pastor, you know, he became a pastor when I was in high school, I believe. And so I was a pastor's kid. So you know, and the enemy loves the pastor's kids. So, yeah. And just remembering just living up to that baby, you know, and getting in trouble. And being the leader, as a young kid, you know, taking all the kids and just, it was taking them

11:40 Debora

down the wrong path,

11:41 Luis

they get them down the wrong path. And then as a kid, I remember going to a youth camp. And I remember just the Lord just touching me for my first life. I mean, first time, I just, I felt, I felt good. I felt like wow, like, this is like being a Christian. And so I remember that impacting my life.

And then from there, the Lord was using me as a leader since since I was a kid. I remember people just speaking into my life, and people telling me that I was going to be a leader one day, and I was actually a president, for like the youth ministry of six churches. So at the age of 12-11, leading youth groups leading like district, overseer groups, you know, people wanted me to pursue more leadership. And so I dug into the Bible, I remember just wanting not even to watch TV, I wanted to be in the bathroom, just crying up to the Lord speaking in all kinds of tongues, like I just wanted to whatever hadn't been had to offer and at a such a young age, and even in the school, I remember there was a time where we let a prayer group see you at the flagpole. And we had, like, we were on TV, because at that time, you didn't hear too much of that. So it was just like, the Lord was using me in such a huge way, even as a kid, and the enemy didn't like that.

So yeah, I remember just, you know, even struggling with same sex attractions as a young kid, you know, and my father was there, but emotionally, there was a lot of things that as a son and a father, we didn't, you know, connect with. And so when you don't find answers at the house, you find them outside, you know, and, and when, you know, get that type of, you know, I've always told people that when you don't hug your sons or show them affection, another man will. And so in that aspect, I was searching and looking to fill that void, and I didn't find it. So I believe a lot of that led to like my rebelliousness growing

up, and, and then, you know, they raised me as, as best as they could, and they're wonderful parents. But, you know, there was a point where it was just, I was getting pastor all the time instead of dad, you know, and that's super important for Christian leaders. You know, we get so focused on just being in ministry in church, and we leave the forefront of the home you know, unattended so that's where the enemies like, Okay, I'll take I got out babysit while you guys go to church. Yeah, you know, I just like I said, I remember just struggling with this thing and wanting to reach out, but I couldn't because behind the pulpit, they were talking so bad about it. And so it would scare me because they would talk about like homosexuals, you know, they're going to hell in a handbasket. And there was so much love and compassion for the prostitute for the drug addict for the, you know, the sinner, it's, but when it came to homosexuality, this

14:39 Debora

was the one thing that couldn't be forgiven.

14:42 Luis

That was the one thing that couldn't be forgiven. It was just like, the worst of the worst. So as a kid, it caused me to you know, lie at a young age to deceive my parents and make it seem like I'm, you know, into girls and all these other things and just have secret lovers. And so I remember just, you know, keeping that into myself, my dad here and there would find pornography on the Internet when that started to become a thing. And it was gay pornography. And so there was just this like shame and guilt, like when he found out that there was no place to grow or to repent. It was just like, you're going to get ride. And it was just so hard. So yeah, so I kept it.

I said, You know what, I'm just not going to bring this up again. And so in that, I remember meeting a lesbian girl, and she was like, the prettiest, coolest thing in high school. And she came, everyone was cool here. So I grew up in the time, you probably understand as well that, you know, it wasn't the cool thing like it is now. Like, it wasn't a popular thing that Oh, you're gay. Oh, wow. Yeah, it was like, if you're gay, we're gonna beat you up. You know? You gotta be real quiet.

So yeah, so to just to move forward. I remember wanting to join the military, and people telling me that gays will not make it in the military. And at this time, I met this lesbian girl, she, she's the one that like, literally took me to the first gay club. For some reason, I always connected more with lesbians than actual like gay guys. And she literally, like, accepted me in her group. And, you know, it was like a kid at a candy store, you know, that didn't growing up with all these do not do not do not. And then all of a sudden, you see every, you know, guys dance together, women dancing together, it was a whole different world for me. And something inside of me just felt like, this is where I belong. You know, this is this is it? You know? And like I said before, when you don't talk about these kinds of things into church, we'll go find our answers outside, you know, and that's exactly what I went to go do. And yeah, so I'm joining the military. And, you know, I, I can't, I had fun, but I didn't have true joy. You know, I remember just trying to, like, have boyfriends and trying to make it work. And for some reason, like, there was just this disconnect, you know, I could never like there was we're always on faithful with each other. It was all about sex. You know, a lot was about sex. Yeah, so just joining the military. I said, I remember just saying, You know what, maybe the military would try me straight, you know, because I tried to pray the gay away at church, I tried to do all these things, you know, just to rebuke it away. And that didn't work. And that didn't work, you know. So joining the military, it definitely kept me masculine, you know, but at

the same time, there was struggle. I feel like I became more promiscuous, and every anything in the military. I remember marrying a lesbian just so that we can get into contract marriage so that I, we could hide it, you know, so that no one would know.

17:54 Debora

Yeah. Yeah. How did you end up in Orlando? I mean, you were grew up in kind of Germany, and then California. How did you end up in Orlando? And tell us how you ended up in the Pulse nightclub and kind of what happened there?

18:11 Luis

Yeah, absolutely. So I was in, I was stationed in Hawaii. And I was given the opportunity to move and finally reopened my contract for the military. And I said, Yep, send me to Orlando as a reservists. So I went to Orlando, I moved to Orlando. And I remember just being there. And it was just an awesome time. It was, it was on my bucket list forever. I wanted to move to Florida. And so I finally got the opportunity to and I live there. And I just remember, it was just for a young guy. It was like the life of the party.

Orlando was just Party City. So I felt like that's where now that as a reservist, I ended up getting out the military. And I just remember just being able to do anything now. So I'm talking about like drugs, alcohol, like super more than ever. And it was it was pretty crazy. I remember, just skinned to a point in my life, where I was just getting tired of clubbing all the time, every weekend, like I had to be at a club I had to be, you know, the life of the party. Now. You know, I'm getting really popular in the lifestyle here in Orlando, Florida. As the former military gay guy, you know, everybody loved that title for some reason. So I was in like magazines, and I was in like, all types of stuff when I had a body because now you know, obviously, time has passed. But I just, I just remember just the enemy just making sure that I was busy in that scene. And I was that's when I got introduced to the elites of the leads and doing all kinds of drugs at big parties and getting money just by having sex and doing things I'm not supposed to.

And so I remember just my dad and my mom always praying For me, you know, always calling me to see how I'm doing and just sharing the gospel with me, but I didn't want to hear it. You know, I was just so blinded and having so much fun that I just didn't need God. You know, I thought I didn't need God. And I remember, I remember my mom, you know, even making a pact with the Lord and saying, You know what, I'm not gonna cut my hair, I'm not gonna do anything in my hair. I'm not gonna color it or anything until my son comes back to you, Lord, you know, and, and my, and my father, his prayers were just like, I want him to get so tired. You know, that he's just so tired of that atmosphere that, you know, he just gives us like, and that's exactly what was going on.

I was getting tired. You know, I was like, Oh, here we go. Again, the weekend. There's no you know, same people, same crowd, like, it was just there was nothing new to my life. It was just, you know, and then waking up with hangovers, and you name it, like, like, the drugs had me. So like, making bad decisions, you know, losing losing vehicles and living with guys just because I needed a roof over my head, you know, and then all of a sudden, one day I get really drunk, and I end up driving home, something I shouldn't have never done. And I was driving, and I ended up in front of a church. And I don't know how I ended up in front of a church. It was a 24-hour church, and they were having, like the House of Prayer model. They were having worship and prayer. When I get up, I get out of my car. And

I'm like, Whoa, like, what is this? It's like three in the morning, what did they do in open so i And mind you, I'm like, drunk kind of so I'm stumbling walking in.

And I remember just the power of God being in that place. Now, I don't know how it happened, but I sobered up quick. I remember sitting at the, in the back, and this little old lady, short lady comes up to me, and she's like, looking at me. And then she starts like looking at my arm because it's all full of tattoos. And she's like, you have a story to tell. And I'm looking at her like, you know, because for me tattoos were also wrong, you know, growing up in a really legalistic, you know, side of church. And so I thought she was gonna come up to me and be like, you know, you have tattoos?

And I don't know, but she ended up just being the heart of Jesus, you know, she ended up just like, you know, listening to me talk. And you know, and I ended up accepting the Lord that night. And, yeah, so I remember like, for a whole year, I gave up everything, I deleted my Facebook, my social media, disconnected from friends, I changed my phone number, I moved away from where I lived, and I went to this like house where they, cuz I joined the internship program, the House of Prayer internship for a whole year.

So it was kind of like a little seminary discipleship kind of thing. And so I did that. And I remember just, it was awesome. I remember just meeting the Lord in a different way to learn how to pray, learning how to read His word and understanding it. But there was just this one thing, I was still struggling with same sex attractions. And there was more of like, Go prayed away or go, you know, you got to fast more, or you got to do this, you got to do that. And so there wasn't really like the root issue. There wasn't really like this conversation around this subject to answer what I was going through, you know, so I was scared of, you know, sharing it because it went from like the men in the in the church to loving me, hugging me squeezing me and invited me everywhere to, hey, I struggle with same sex attractions. And then there's crickets in the room. And then so now they're, they're saying we're praying for you, but at a distance, because they think that I'm trying to be attractive. Yeah.

So it really caused me to be quiet about things and bottle it up and kind of just like, try to do this on my own. And, and you know, we can't do this on our own. So as an ally of the enemy, so little by little, I was getting to this place where I was just like, getting tired again, and overwhelmed and not getting that counseling or community that I needed. And I remember going to the mall and seeing a friend at the mall, and he said, Hey, it's like, we haven't seen you in forever where you've been. And I'm like, oh, man, I've been to church. I've been going to church. And they're like, Well, how about you come to Pulse nightclub? And for a minute, I wrestled and I was just like, Yeah, I'll text you guys. I'll let you know.

And this was around my birthday weekend. And so I remember just my mom called Out of nowhere, and she says, I had a dream, you know, and I'm just like, a dream. And she's telling me she was like, I don't know why, but because she doesn't know I'm wrestling. She just thinks I'm back in church. So she's excited all that and she's like, I had this dream out of nowhere. And she says I saw a lot of friends around you dying. I saw a lot of blood all over your clothes. I I saw blood all over the club, like you were at a club and there was blood all over the floor, and you were running for your life. And a lot of your friends were dying, and they were being shot. And so she was like, and then she instantly woke up. And I'm just like, whoa, like, you know, and I know that I'm like, I just was invited to Pulse, you know, and I'm just thinking to myself, I'm just like, Whoa, this is intense.

And then I remember going to church, and I was coming in from work late, and to this revival meeting that they were having. And I remember sending data back in a profit caused me to the front and invite a profit, and says, you know, he's just speaking into my life and does I don't know where he says, I feel like, I usually don't like this part of prophesying to people, but I feel like you're running for your life. Like, there's something happening and you're running from your life. I don't know what it is. And then he says, you know, just basic sort of praying over me and stuff like that.

And then the last one was that, on my way, to go out to Pulse nightclub, I'm wrestling with friends at church, because they're just like, we want to take you out for your birthday. Would you know, you don't have to go. And already I'm like being real with them. I'm just like, I think I'm going to go out with friends. Some of my old friends have wanted me to come out with them to the nightclub tonight. And I just, I think I would just want to be around people that understand me. That was like, my main thing. And I remember they just say, no, no, like, come on, and we'll take you out to a restaurant, we'll hang out with you whereby they're like, please stay with us. Like, they're just like begging. And I'm just like, No, no, yeah, my mind's already made up. I haven't hung out with these people forever. And right now I just, I need to be around people that understand. And I remember going out to the club.

And before that there was a house party, like a little, a whole bunch of friends just got together and they had food, alcohol, you name it. And that's where I saw my friend, Angel Colon, who's also part of Fearless Identity Ministries, and a hub. And I remember him asking me the question, Hey, are you going to go to Pulse? And I looked at him? And I said, Yeah, I'll be there.

And I remember not being able to see him. I didn't see that the last time I saw him was when he had asked me that question to find out years later that he gave his life to Christ, and that were both following Jesus and stuff. So but I remember, it took us like about 30, about 30 to 35 minutes to actually get everyone on board to go to Pulse, because I remember at the house, people were like, We got free alcohol here, we got free food, like, Let's just hang out here and know that you I know nothing. And then two females that were really advocates of this, unfortunately, passed away that night. So there was a lot of people that were at that house with us, that didn't come back home. And so I just remember just that. I always remember that wrestle of just people wanting to stay there. It's almost like if the like, there were things happening that the Lord is

28:07 Debora

opportunities to. Yeah, yeah, there's opportunities not to do it. But you were there.

28:16 Luis

Yeah. And then all of a sudden, we said, Okay, let's go. So we ended up going. And I remember the question of everyone saying, Where have you been? We haven't seen you in forever. And I'm just like, yeah, it was that church. And I remember even ministering to some people that were there that I was just like, so on fire for the Lord. And they're like, What are you doing here that you don't, I thought you don't come out and say you don't do this no more. And so I mean, God was all over this. And it was almost like there was warnings and warnings and warning. And who knows, like I think about this, sometimes I'm like, Man, I could have been the one that died. And I had no, there would be nothing to say to the Lord because there were so many signs and like him trying to reach my heart saying, Hey, I have something better and me just ignoring them.

And so I just remember just it was like about to about 2am or something like that. And they were doing last call for alcohol. So everybody can close up their tabs and get ready because the club you know, the bars are about to close down. And I just remember just dancing with a friend of mine, the ones that invited me to the club that night, and I remember the shooter was at before that I remember someone screaming and saying Run For Your Life Run for your life.

And I'm hearing fire like what sounded like fireworks. And I look over to my friend and I'm like, Hey, like the fireworks sound really close. And because we live in Orlando, and you know, there's Disney Universal and SeaWorld. They all do fireworks at a certain time. And then it was gay days in Orlando too. So like they do a lot of festivities.

So I'm thinking you know someone's popping off fireworks. works so, and he was just like, wow, you're right. And then that's when we heard the kid just screaming like run for your life Run for your life. And we're like what I think he has had too much to drink. And then the shooters right there in front of me at the door. And I remember just, I was kind of drunk and tipsy.

So I remember my friend just grabbing me and he's like, run for your life. And as I like quickly reacted to run out through a door, I turned around, and I see that he was shot. His boyfriend was shot trying to jump in front of him, people are being shot, people are on the floor. later to find out that same area that I was at Angel, close, just a few steps right in front of me. And so yeah, I'm running from my life. I'm going, I'm trying to get out this store, a lot of people are trying to get out the store. So it was really hard to get out the store. I'm finally out of the door, I'm in the patio area. And people are jumping over the fence. But I'm so scared a lot of as a skill to just jump over because he's shooting everywhere. So I'm thinking in my head, if I drop he's gonna shoot me I'm a fallen on the ground. I mean, shots and bullets were going everywhere.

31:09 Luis

I remember getting to the end of the patio, where me and my friend are trying to kick the door open. And as we're trying to kick the door, I mean, the fence, we're trying to kick it open, when he finally does the last kick and it opens up. And so my foot gets stuck in the fence area, and I fall to the floor. It's like my leg kind of twisted in a way that I fell. And I was in so much pain when I was on the floor and couldn't get up. And I remember there was a door right there that we didn't notice was there and it was open and the shoot, we could see the shooter just yelling and screaming and shooting people.

And so I said, wow, like, I went around this whole patio just to find myself right back where the shooter was. And I remember the only thing I knew how to do was to get on the phone and to call my mom and dad and to apologize, because I knew my time was coming. And so I get on the phone. And I remember the phone ringing in my mom picks up and mind you, she's hearing all these shots happening in the background. And all I can say was mom, and the phone died.

Debora

Wow.

Luis

And so right then and there, I was just like, This is it for me. Like, you know, I didn't even get to really talk to my mom or anything. Or you know, and imagine mom on the background just calling everyone to

pray and trying to call me but my phone is dead. So I just remember to make a long story short, I, there's a guy that came in and he was just like trying to help people. And he had actually helped me out to walk across the street to the 711. I'm finally sitting there out of the club area and then later to find out that the shooter had a car parked, right where I was escaping, and he had some bombs inside of it. So he would literally just detonated those bombs trying to get out that fence area.

And because of the grace ago because I have prayed parents, you know, they believe in God, I believe that he went and able to detonate those bombs and stuff. And so yeah, just, it was a horrible night. Crazy Night. I remember thinking, I mean, you won't hear this on the news. But there were lesbians, there was a group of lesbians that I remember, they got together and they were like, we have to pray. We have to pray.

And it was so crazy, because you saw them like in a little circle just praying for people that were inside. I mean, so much was going on that night. And I remember helicopters and the paramedics it took a while for them to get there but they finally got there. I remember sitting at the hospital just seeing names of my friends they died because we didn't know who died. Who was hurt. I mean, and as I was in pain in the hospital, I was just looking at the TV and then I was now that I have juice in my phone, I was able to call my parents, my sisters on our way down. She came down real quick from Texas.

And all you see is dead. That the names of people and the names kept piling up and piling up and so I mean, we were all stuck to the TV. Like I remember just being stuck to see if we knew anybody or any friends and as we're seeing friends that we know of the guys invited me to the club, both of them gone. You know, it was it was very hard for me and then to find out months later that I have HIV, you know, just you know getting that report grieving and all of a sudden now this is happening and then even then I just seeing people in the name of God quote unquote, you know, coming and saying that's what homosexuals get. This is the wrath of God homosexuals are going to hell, this is what they get.

So it caused me to get cold and bitter, you know, and it was just so hard. Around that time and I where I needed the church the most it was like we were getting so much awkward. position. But I do want to retract that there were people that had the love of God, and that would go and hug families and asked to pray for them in the hospitals. And even my parents, there was a huge turnaround. They were so loving to this community, they were so passionate, and as far as I'm seeing my parents in a whole different view, because they almost lost me. And I felt like that changed their hearts tremendously towards this community.

35:29 Debora

What changed about your relationship with God? And through this experience?

35:35 Luis

Yeah, so I remember just getting the report of HIV. And I remember going into my room, and just crying out for a whole week because I didn't know. I was just like, wow, like, I finally got HIV. I can't believe this. Like, you know, I knew I was sleeping around a lot. I was very promiscuous. But I just, for some reason, you think that you're, you know, you won't get none of this stuff. And I remember just screaming out to the Lord and saying, I'm a gay man, I am tired. Like, I've tried to pray the gateway, I've tried to change. I've tried to do everything, according to Scripture, and I'm still gay, like, what do you want for me. And I just remember just falling on my knee, just crying, I'm screaming and crying. And I

remember getting, I remember just being in a room and I felt like a wind, like a wind just come into a room of fresh air. And just, it was so amazing. Like, I heard a whisper of the Lord, just say, it's not a gay to straight thing, it's a lost to saved thing.

I want all your sexuality and not just bits and pieces of it. And so just I felt the Holy Spirit, and I felt is so strong on me that little by little, now I have an appetite, even if he didn't change me, even if he didn't do anything, I was already feeling like, I need to come back to him, you know, whatever they may look like. And I started little by little, I started reading the Bible, you know, little, I was reading chapters, and then I was reading books. And then I was finding myself talking to the Lord a lot, you know, praying and learning how to pray again. And then I heard the Lord say, you need to get plugged into a church you need to submit and or a pastor get some leadership on Yeah, and so that's what I did, I started looking for a church and finally I found one and and I started getting mentorship and I started getting counseling and meeting up with this pastor now twice a once a month, sometimes twice a month.

And I started finding healing in that and then to later find out that this same pastor was at Pulse nightclub when he afterward the aftermath of it. And he was praying over the families and prayed over the people and someone had prophesied in his life that a pulse survivor was going to walk into this church and that I want you to mentor him, I want you to love on him and heal and, and that he would change like the culture of this church. And literally, that's all come to pass. And, and that's how I'd have it didn't happen, like right away, you know it, but it definitely it's been a beautiful journey of just growth, you know, trusting in the Lord and, and just giving him my whole heart and not just some of it, you know.

38:20 Debora

So Luis, you have experienced something just absolutely traumatic. And you could have kept all of this to yourself is I'm sure there's many people that were in that nightclub that night that don't talk about it, they don't get out there, and their lives haven't been changed. So how did you go from all of that to be given your life over to ministering to others now? Which is where you are?

38:46 Luis

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's kind of weird, because I was also that person. Like, at first, I didn't want to share my story, just because I it's a sensitive subject, you know, and I had a lot of friends that passed lots of people that died. Family members also that lost their, their children in this. So for me, it was just like, how do I even begin to like, talk about this stuff that I'm a Christian, because I know the truth is inside of me now, and I'm going to have to share all of it. And I remember just taking a shower one day and just screaming out to the Lord again. And I was just like, What do you want me to do? Like I don't know how to do like, I know like, you want me to share my story. I know, there's going to have to be a point where now I have to share all of it.

And I remember the Lord just I remember a wind again, just hearing that I haven't forgave this shooter. And I haven't forgave myself. And so I broke down on my knees and I cried out to the Lord that I am sorry, I forgive myself. And I forgive this shooter and I just felt something break off of me. And in that moment, I get this drive to get on Facebook and just share, you know, and that's exactly what it is. sort of typing away, I started typing my testimony. I was like, Okay, I'm just gonna put this in. And, and all of

a sudden, like, I literally closed my laptop and I said, You know what, I'm just gonna share whoever hears it, whatever, but I need to get this out. And who to find out that.

40:16 Luis

At the same time God was healing me. You know there's power when you share your testimony you overcome by the blood of the lamb and the whatever your testimony, yeah. And it's also healing, it's healing inside because you're sharing with other you're pouring out.

And so I shut my laptop, and then all of a sudden, my sister calls me she's like, I need you to check your Facebook and I'm like, Oh, why? And I'm like, Oh, my goodness, people are like talking bad or whatever. And so it went viral. Like, everyone here is, uh, you know, all of a sudden on the news gate, Pulse survivor turns straight or goes to church. I mean, they were putting all kinds of crazy titles, right? And I just remember just getting all kinds of news anchors, knocking at the door and calling me and, you know, people like Jennifer Lopez wanted me to go down there to talk about this. Ben Shapiro's putting me on his show. Ellen DeGeneres is calling out to try to get an interview with me. I mean, this is just like, What do you mean, a gay Pulse survivor? Is now you know, serving Jesus.

And yeah, so yeah, it just, it's almost like if the Lord was like, whatever's left of you, that's part of this group. I'm taking you out completely. So you can share the truth of the gospel because I was still halfway in halfway out, you know, serving two masters, I was like, I want to be nice and caring and loving to these people, because that's what I'm called to do. But it's almost like in that same position, I was just hiding the truth so that I can, you know, not hurt people and not hurt my friends and family that we're still in the LGBT by sound. It's almost like through all this, it's like the Lord's like, Now who are you going to choose? You know, and it was in this that all of a sudden, the same people that I was so like, tied to we're now talking about me on social media.

I mean, the news was just spreading my story in such a hateful way. I'm a homophobic, I'm a bigot, like, there was just so much going on. That it just it. I never received persecution like this. I've never I just thought that I was going to live a nice Christian life and pass out some like chick tracks or Bibles and everything will be okay. And I'll get married one day, and but no, it just, it really changed my life around to persecution and to like really diving stronger and trusting in the Lord, like trusting and putting my faith in Him and that everything will be okay.

And so I'm at the mall. And I have to be careful now, because like, you know, people are confronting me and I now it's like, a whole different life. But it caused me to share it. When I started sharing my story, I also started seeing the Lord working behind the scenes, I started seeing people writing to me, pastors and leaders and people that are in the LGBT lifestyle that want out, and just don't know how to do this, that they had my same story that they've been trying to pray the gateway that they've been trying to do that, but they've never, they didn't know how. And so I started to see the Lord working in such a beautiful way of my testimony that I was just like, I've got to share more.

Because at the same time, while I'm sharing with people, like I said, Before, he was he was healing, I was finding out that I was being healed from this and that I was just like, whoa, like, this is a good feeling. And just seeing, you know, people turning their hearts to Jesus to do this. I mean, I can tell you, and you probably know what I'm talking about, like, drag queens transgender that are just like, I don't want, I want what you have, like, I don't know what it is, I don't know how to do this. But I've got to have that

because there's something inside of you that just burst out with hope and joy and and, you know, so that's what caused me just to be, you know, just to launch out and just share my testimony. And little by little, now, I'm being invited to speak at churches and school communities, and even in the political realm, you know, which I have no businesses, meaning because I don't understand the language. I don't speak the language. But now I'm being invited into these groups of kings and politics. And it's just so like, wow, like God's hand is really on that for the person that has this boldness. I believe that the Holy Spirit though those winds that I was feeling was the Holy Spirit, you know, just pouring out his boldness over me and like it was becoming to the point where, like I said before, what I was afraid of by sharing and hurting people, and that, you know, these people were really, people were wanting and hungry for the truth. Yeah, yeah. It was beautiful.

44:52 Debora

Tell us about Fearless Identity and Freedom March and how people can connect with you.

44:57 Luis

Oh, yeah, absolutely. So Fearless Identity, you could find us on [Fearlessidentity.co](https://fearlessidentity.co) We, me and Angel Colon, another Pulse survivor that was actually shot six times and has survived from the Pulse nightclub shooting as well.

The Lord has gone through that persecution that I was talking about the Lord actually gave us fearless identity. Because it's all about our identity. It's been an identity issue from the beginning since the time of additive identity identity out in the Scriptures. And so the Lord gave us identity to be fearless about it. Because the kingdom of God suffered violent and violent, take it by force, you know, and Jesus himself was very fearless in his identity.

So now, like we go into the school communities, literally God has given us the story of poles, everyone's everyone wants to hear the pollster, because they're connected somehow. And so we go in there with the pulse story, and then all of a sudden, at the end, we share the gospel, we use it, we put it in there, you know, and so we've been just going all over, we were before you know, COVID, shut everything down. We're gonna go to the UK, we were in Taiwan, we went there for like two years and stuff, but we just been ministering to people, and joining and building alliances with other ministries that share the same message as we do so. And so that's what Fearless Identity has been doing all through Florida.

Now were involved with all the, you know, the political arena with the churches here. It's been something so beautiful. And then with freedom March, we partner with freedom arch. And I'm actually a co-founder of Freedom March. And so we go into the inner cities, and we share testimonies. And it's, it's incredible. And why because all the nominations are coming together. We've had people up there that are from the Catholic denomination from the Baptist phenomena, Pentecostal, and we just had one from the Adventist community share his story, and I'm telling it, we're all coming together with one message, and that's Jesus. And that change is possible.

You know, so we come and we do worship outside. You know, that's where people are at. They're outside, they're jogging, they're on their way to work, you know, and they're hearing the gospel. They're hearing what, you know, because this site is louder, and they're saying that change doesn't exist, that we're a fraud. And that, you know, and then all of a sudden comes is Jesus people on the scene, and they're worshipping, they're sharing testimony, we're praying for people as they walk around. And then

we're baptizing people, to the people that have come to Jesus except Jesus, at the end, were baptizing them and sharing, getting them plugged in to a church and connecting the church. And that's what I love about this, the Moses that we're connecting with the body of Christ. You know, we're saying come to these come tours, because it's a celebration, you know, so freedom March is a celebration of, of change, you know, and so then we connect them with the body of Christ, we connect them to a local church. And we've been doing that for quite a while now. And I think our next one is in Washington, DC for our annual one, and that's in June. And so we're super excited for what the Lord is doing at the Capitol

48:08 Debora

Capitol. Yeah, me too. I've been I've been to two of them so far here. And yeah, very excited. It's amazing. So, is there any final words that you would like to share with our listeners? Maybe they're struggling with their own identity, and they're not sure that change is possible for them? What would you say to them right now?

48:27 Luis

Absolutely. Yeah, so I, I honestly, I know, there may be some people that are listening, that are going through a rough season. I know if COVID and everything that has just gone by with our nation, and you know, the rumors of wars and things that are going on, I know that it could be very hard for a lot of people right now. But I want to let you know that with Jesus, when we hide under his wing, when we abide in Him, He abides in us. And the beauty of that is that you're covered to remain in Him to abide in Him. He will protect you, he will cover you from all types of like, anxiety, depression, one thing I've learned about COVID is that you've got to stay close to his wing under his wing in His presence.

Because if you don't stay in that secret place, I feel that the enemy can come and and try to spread his false identity, you know, depression, anxiety, and, and I've even people that feel that I don't want my life like I'm so tired, I'm depressed, like I want to take my life. And so if you're hearing our voices today, like I want to let you know that there is someone who wants your life and if you want to give your life away, give it to someone who wants it and that's Jesus. He wants your life he wants to transform you. And you know what I always say it's not a gay straight thing. It's a lot of the same thing. Because you know, sometimes we get into this like right away as a People that come out of the lifestyle, what do we think automatically? Oh, now I gotta turn straight, you know? And it's just like, no, like, He wants our hearts. He wants, He wants all of us. And in that process, you let God do the change in you, and he'll do it, you know.

So for that person that just, you know, have that rough season going on, just know that you're not alone. And that we would love to partner with you would love to journey with you get plugged into a community find a church that is so vital in these times right now to be in a place where you can go and hear God's worth. Why? Because faith is produced by the word by hearing and listening of the word. And so how do you how do you keep walking in this life is through faith. If you and I alter the Scriptures, God asked us to have faith as small as a mustard seed. The only way I can have faith is that if I'm hearing His Word, hearing His scripture, so when we marry that together, we're able to walk effectively in this journey. You know, rains gonna come Debora. It's gonna come for the just and the unjust. But those who build their house on a rock, they build that great foundation, surround yourself with a community of believers that can speak into their life when I'm going through a hard time. We're going to get through today, and we'll get through tomorrow.

51:18 Debora

Yeah, absolutely. What an encouraging word when you close us out with a prayer.

51:25 Luis

Absolutely. Yes. Father, I thank you so much for these opportunities to share the gospel to share you to share the cross, the share that powerful, powerful blood that you shed on Calvary, Lord, I thank you because you left the 99 for the one. And although I know that there, there may be listeners right now, that are wanting to give their lives away that are stuck in depression and anxiety, maybe even sexual addictions that have been trying to shake off for such a long time. But we believe in the power of the blood. And so right now, we ask that the Holy Spirit would, would just turn hearts to Jesus, that you would start activating people to share the gospel with boldness, that you would Captivate hearts in such a way.

And if there's even parents listening, that you would give them strength, again, to keep going, that if there's parents on here that are ready to throw in the towel, because they just feel that I can't do this anymore. Like I'm tired, that you would give them strength, strength that falls from heaven, and encouragement and faith to continue this race. And I'm so thankful, Lord, that my parents didn't give in. I'm so thankful that my parents didn't turn in the towel, that they kept trusting in you, Lord, that you are the source of their strength. So I pray that you become the source of strength for many listeners out there today. And so I also pray for the leaders and the pastors that are listening, Father, that You would just that your Holy Spirit would just do something so beautiful in the churches in the body of Christ, and that the body of Christ, the real body of Christ will begin to activate in love and truth. In Jesus mighty name. We thank You, Lord, for what you're doing in this nation. We thank you for what you're about to do. And we love you so much.

53:31 Debora

Amen. Don't go away. We'll be right back after this short break.

<<MUSIC INTERLUDE>>

54:17 Debora

We just heard from Luis Ruiz, about how God completely transformed his life. Wow, what a story. What an amazing testimony of the power of the Lord. Jesus is in the business of transforming lives. No matter where you are in life, what you've done, what you might be addicted to how far you think you are from God. He loves you. The Bible says that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And that life is not just in eternity. But it starts right here, right now.

The Bible tells us that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Jesus did this for us by dying on the cross, to take the punishment that we deserved for living in sin. He was buried and rose from the dead to give us everlasting life. And Jesus invites you to accept this free gift of salvation right now.

If you've never surrendered your life to Him, and you sense that He is drawing you near, you can repeat a prayer of surrender and faith with me right now.

God, I confess that I'm a sinner, and I need Jesus in my life. I repent of my sins and I turn to you. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. He was buried and rose from the dead. And I accept this by faith and invite Jesus to be Lord of my life, to reign and rule in my heart. And today, I surrender my life to you. Take control of my life and teach me how to live for you. Thank you for forgiving me and for saving me. Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer with sincerity, and you're declaring that you will turn away from your sins and follow Jesus, He will transform your life. I would love to know about your decision and help you with what to do now that you've surrendered to Him. If you would visit my website at TBTWpodcast.com. And click on the link to let me know about your decision for Christ so that I can reach out to you.

My prayer for you today is that you will trust Jesus with your whole heart. He truly wants to change your life. To give you that joy deep down on the inside that does not depend on outward circumstances. Friends, Jesus is the only one that can transform your life from the inside out. The most important decision that you can make this side of eternity is your decision about Jesus.

Stay tuned for our next episode of transformed by the word where we will hear another life transformation story.

Announcer 57:47

Thank you for listening to transformed by the word with your host Debora Barr, be sure to subscribe to our podcast on iTunes or Google Play and connect with us at TBTWPodcast.com. Until next time, be blessed.