

*I believe it's only fair to share more of my life with this church. One experience, one moment, one real conversation with God in the wilderness can change everything you know about life.*

*I shared part of this story with the music pastor once, but I want to share it here. When I was a young child, I developed a deep interest in playing the violin. 🎻 I was drawn to classical music—Bach, Beethoven, and all the greats. I was excited to start my musical journey, unaware of the lesson life was about to teach me.*

*In third grade, my music teacher handed me a violin. While the other children received new, pristine instruments, I was given the oldest, most broken-down violin they had. The case was wrapped in black electrical tape to hold the handle together. The locks were missing, and the ones that remained didn't even function properly. When I brought it home, my mother thought it was a joke.*

*But here's the thing—my mother didn't know that the other children had received new violins. She didn't know what everyone else had. What she did know, with every fiber of her being, was that something was wrong. She saw that old, broken violin and trusted her instincts.*

*She busted it into pieces, marched up to the school, returned the violin, and made it clear that her child wouldn't be treated that way. After that day, I never went back to that school. My mother didn't give that teacher another opportunity to make me feel small.*

*At the time, I didn't understand the significance of that moment. I was just happy to hold a violin in my hands. But as I grew older, I began to understand. My mother is a strong woman who loves unconditionally. Without question. She showed me, in that moment, that I didn't have to accept someone else's bias or mistreatment. She taught me how to recognize and confront the quiet, cruel ways people sometimes try to diminish others.*

*Later, we bought our own violin. I practiced at home, learning on my own with the gifts God gave me. I didn't need a teacher to teach me how to love music. God had already placed that passion in my heart.*

*So, what lesson can we draw from this? How often do we see broken pieces of wood—*

*like that violin—and assume they are worthless? And yet, the psalmists remind us that even broken things, when placed in the hands of the Master, can make beautiful music.*

*This experience taught me that life will present us with choices. We can accept what others hand us—labels, brokenness, limitations—or we can seek something better. I never knew if that teacher learned her lesson or if she continued giving broken instruments to children she deemed less deserving. But I do know this: If she had nurtured my passion, if she had seen my potential instead of my differences, perhaps my path might have been easier.*

*Still, I am grateful for my strong mother and for the strength she instilled in me.*

*You see, the church isn't the only place I've faced exclusion, oppression, and judgment. I come to church with a lifetime of memories—moments that have shaped me and deepened my relationship with the Almighty. And while others may not understand the weight of those experiences, God does.*

*And this is where I find such profound connection with Christ. Jesus was no stranger to judgment and exclusion. He was marginalized by the religious leaders of His time, misunderstood by the very people He came to save, and ultimately crucified by those who saw His truth as a threat to their power. Yet through it all, Jesus remained faithful. He drew closer to the Father, never letting the world's rejection shake His purpose.*

*When I look back at my life, I see those moments of exclusion not as reasons to turn away from God but as invitations to walk more closely with Him. In the wilderness of pain, I've heard His voice more clearly. In the shadow of judgment, I've felt His comfort more deeply. Just as Jesus taught us to love those who persecute us and to find strength in our suffering, I've learned to rely on God's grace and let Him use these moments to shape me.*

*Jesus took what was broken—like the old violin I was given—and showed the world that even the rejected can carry the sweetest music when placed in the right hands. My life has been a testament to that truth. The broken violin didn't define me, just as the judgment of others didn't define Jesus. It was the response to that moment that mattered. My mother's response, my choice to keep playing, and God's hand guiding me through it all.*

*In the end, my relationship with Him is the longest and most enduring relationship I'll ever have. It is a lifelong journey, and through every challenge—whether a broken violin or a broken heart—He is there, making music from the fragments.*

*And just like Jesus, I will continue to love, to serve, to stand firm, and to trust that God uses every moment—especially the difficult ones—to draw me closer to His heart.*