

We live in an incredibly challenging world. This world tries to set our standards of beliefs and values. It tells us what we should look like and how we should think, feel and respond in life. From every advertisement and self-help book to the people around us, they tell us that we are broken on the inside and that we aren't enough. We willingly take personality test to see how "broken" we are compared to everyone else. Out of fear of rejection, we quickly learn to wear different masks to meet these expectations. The problem with the masks is that they don't fit and leave us feeling alone and unprotected. The stress to manage these masks drives us to find places of relief to take them off. These places can quickly become a prison that closes in on us. There, an inner conflict between who I am and who they say I am supposed to be becomes a never-ending battle.

We also live in a world that says getting help and going to counseling is for the weak and shouldn't be talked about. I will tell you that going through the Refuge program is not for the weak. This is a time where you have to set aside your pride and go through all the broken places in your life. It's an opportunity to change and start healing from where we are to becoming who we are. This process is far from glamorous and it can be quite uncomfortable. They take you to places in your life where there were hurts that you may not be aware of. To places that may hurt so much that are too painful to revisit. They help you see situations that may have happened to you as a child and help you realize the fears that you have carried for so long. They help you understand why you felt the need for masks and hiding places. It takes an inner strength to do this that we don't have on our own. It takes people commissioned by God to go on this journey with us; To show us God's love and patience. The Refuge showed me where God has been through all if this and how to accept His love.

On goods days we are told to embrace our exterior bodies as being beautiful, no matter what our size or shape is. We are not told to embrace our inner selves. Through the Refuge, I have learned to embrace my inner self, including my "weaknesses ". I have a God who fills in the places where I am weak. I now understand what Paul means when he says he boasts in his weakness. I have a God who have provided ways for me to speak up and fight my battles when I can't. I have seen him move in my life and protect me. I have seen so many blessings that can only be from Him, including my son. I used to believe that my strength came from me or from those around me and would be crushed when that strength would fail. I have found that my strength doesn't come from them or me, but from God. It is his patch work of the broken places in my life that holds me together and guides me through the trials of life. Many of my circumstances haven't changed. My family still lives far away, there are people who still try to keep me in my broken prison by what they say or how they treat me and life as a single mom can make you feel isolated. But knowing that you are not alone and that you have a God who fills those places in with truth and loves you as you are, doesn't make you want to seek out the old and familiar comforts that left more holes in your spirit than what you started with. I have learned that I am not broken, but my beliefs and actions were. I was made perfect by God, just a little different than everyone else. The hardest thing I have ever done is go to the Refuge, but it has been the most rewarding thing that I have done for me and my son. I thank God for bringing them into my life. Without them, I would have never met God the way I know Him today.



*Robin & Waylon*