

Introduction

Bonus Time, the Broken Road, and a Map Home

I didn't go into surgery thinking I would die. Maybe that was stubbornness, or maybe it was a quiet grace I didn't recognize yet. Years later, sitting in another fluorescent-lit waiting room at Shands Hospital, a genetic counselor casually noted the gene tied to aortic dissection—medical shorthand for “your main highway can rip without warning.” I nodded like I was hearing a weather report. What I didn't say out loud was the part of my story she wouldn't find in a chart: I had already ridden the cliff's edge and lived to tell it. For over a week, I was on ECMO—life support that loaned me a heartbeat and lungs while mine rested. In that enforced stillness, I sensed God whisper, **I'm not finished with you yet.**

During those months in the hospital, there were no blood relatives camped by my bed. My mom was fading from Parkinson's and dementia. My dad had already passed. My brother had his own family in Texas. The room felt quiet in the kind of way that can turn an adult into a child. And yet—chairs I assumed would stay empty didn't. An older couple (the parents of a CEO I'd met back in college) became regulars; they prayed when I couldn't speak. A girlfriend with an old soul made round-trips after long workdays—three and a half hours each way—just to hold an IV-taped hand. Love showed up in faces I didn't “deserve,” on a timetable I couldn't control. I've never believed in “alone” the same way since.

This is a story about bonus time—and a field guide to live it on purpose.

You'd think a near-death experience would turn life into a trumpet solo—triumphant, loud, cinematic. Mine got...small, and holy. The first day I sat up without panicking, I would faint or lose my breath felt like summiting Everest. The lap from bed to bathroom was a victory parade. I had always judged life by highlight reels and big wins. God taught me to celebrate oxygen, an upright posture, and the kindness of a nurse who understands grumpiness as a dialect of pain. Looking back, it's almost funny: the man who once tried to quiet his brain with a shot (or three) of something strong was learning gentler ways to be quiet—shuffling down the hall, listening to his body, letting other people help.

That hospital season is one-half of why this book exists. The other half was forged six years earlier, far south of Florida, in a country that sells itself in two words: *Pura Vida*.

The Truth About “Pura Vida”

I didn't board my flight to Costa Rica to “find myself.” I was running—from a DUI, from a wrecked reputation, from the slow collapse that comes when you refuse to name your addictions. I had spent four weeks in rehab, told myself a few noble lies, packed my naiveté with my suit, and decided a new country meant a new me. Spoiler: geography can't outpace the heart. The skeletons you refuse to name learn to hitchhike.

I carry two medical epilogues into every chapter ahead: Costa Rica's flatline and Florida's week on ECMO. Two near-deaths, one theology—bonus time. If I sound stubborn about peace and presence, it's because I've tested them where monitors beep and mercy keeps time.

The welcome party wasn't palm trees and perfect sunsets. Our first apartment sat in a part of San José I wouldn't ask a stranger to walk through after dark. The neighbors? Mostly older men in town for sex tourism, "regulars" included. It was my first hint that *Pura Vida* can be a postcard on top of a landfill.

But I found work anyway. A man without papers and with enough English can. I bounced around sportsbooks getting ready for football season, call centers, whatever paid in dollars instead of colones (the Costa Rican currency) and left me just enough energy and money to keep the party going. Throw in some casinos—where free drinks are free, until they're not—and the usual suspects—cocaine to get high, sleeping pills to come down—and you've got a recipe for bad decisions.

Every orbit has a "center of gravity." Mine, for a season, was a mountainside place our crew called **The Crazy House**. It sounds like a joke until you've stayed awake long enough that bamboo turns into witches and a naked guy with a knife is just another Saturday. Parties bled into Mondays. Sobriety was a rumor. I didn't so much live there as haunt it. I even got fired from one job because I smelled after a four day long bender—literally. Shame has a fragrance. And still, I told myself I was "functioning."

When I tried to trade the hangover economy for something "legit," I landed inside a scam—complete with faux documents, staged lumber yards, and money that melted as fast as it was raised. I watched good people invest in an "opportunity" that evaporated when truth touched it. The moral math was simple and awful: my hunger for a win helped sell a mirage that I only found out about when I did my own investigation. That season taught me how self-deception travels: it calls itself *hustle*, then *network*, then *destiny*, and by the time it says *harvest*, it's already eaten your crops.

From there, I chased commodity "deals" around the world without leaving my chair—gold dust in Ghana, platinum in Manila, fuel in Rotterdam. The only thing large about those transactions was the fantasy. Twenty-one-hour days and zero closings. A woman offered to "finance" my effort if I'd play a role that felt like both charity and a trap. I said yes because survival often wears the same coat as self-betrayal. I lived on a dog bed in an upstairs storage room and told myself it was temporary. Then came Atenas, rock bottom, and a two-story fall without stairs. There are stories from those months I still wish weren't true—bar confessions, public humiliations, the kind of loneliness that makes you believe you deserve whatever comes next.

If this sounds like a cautionary tale, it is. It's also setting the stage for a miracle I didn't ask for.

The Night the Lights Went Out

One ordinary Tuesday late in the day, a pain stabbed my leg so sharply I thought the muscle might tear off the bone. I collapsed near a busy road in a drizzle, waved down a police officer, and begged for an ambulance. The Red Cross showed up almost an hour later and shrugged off my condition. The emergency responders told me I had a cramp, and they reluctantly drove me the 45 minutes to the nearest emergency room. By the time I finally received X-rays, because they were a must follow procedure, two toes were purple, and my foot was white. I was losing circulation; my lower leg was dying. The transfer to a public

hospital in Costa Rica, Hospital México, felt fast and slow at the same time—sirens blaring, a clock somewhere mocking me. At midnight, they prepped for surgery. “Count back from ten,” the nurse said. I made it to six and bargained with God: **If You give me the chance, I’ll change.** Darkness.

When I woke, the pain in my lower leg was gone—because a bigger problem was coming. An infection, likely from poor sterilization began marching through my body. Peritoneal dialysis followed—imagine a hose in your abdomen and a fluid exchange, your mind labels *no, thanks*. Kidneys faltered. Immunity buckled. A transfer to a private hospital briefly felt like a rescue: English-speaking doctors, hemodialysis, a room with a view, the kind of competence that calms. Then the money ran out—they told me I had one hour before I’d be transferred back. That was the night my chest tightened and I couldn’t breathe. When you read about hospital transfers, no one mentions the existential part: **If I die in transit, who will know? Who will care?**

Back at Hospital México, the world narrowed to a tube down my throat and a tunnel in my mind. On the other side of that tunnel was a beach—white sand that felt like home, clear water that asked me to stop trying. I walked into it and swam without needing air, quiet in every cell. Then a hand pulled me toward the surface—back to fluorescent lights, bandages on my chest, and a machine’s beeping. The surgeons had operated on a heart valve eaten by bacteria; I later learned I’d died on the table and been brought back. A doctor had told my friends there was a twenty-percent chance I’d make it. Somehow, twenty percent was greater than my odds-making. I lived.

Recovery is a long hallway lined with mirrors: you see yourself without makeup. I lay in ICU listening to heart monitors flatline down the row—bodies covered with sheets, paperwork shuffled, grief wailing and then receding like a tide. I was moved to the sixth floor (“between life and death,” I called it), where surgeries became a rhythm and hope became a discipline. On the seventh floor (“the living”), stories braided around me: A man I called Ratoncito, little rat, scavenging leftover Jell-O, the man with 16 kids whose daughters could light a room, another patient whose son brought a book by Joel Osteen, and the kind of eyes that say, *I see your pain—you’re not invisible*. Holidays arrived. I watched fireworks through a window on New Year’s Eve with tears I didn’t bother to hide. If you have never prayed to get strong enough to use a toilet alone, you might not know yet the gospel of small victories.

Discharge wasn’t a parade. I was left in the care of a woman named Angela on a half-inch mattress that made me miss hospital beds. I learned how humiliating and holy it is to be bathed by someone else and to pass out on a toilet while a stranger saves you from the floor. I also learned what grief does to a house: sometimes it leaves a young boy’s shadow in the doorway—Angela’s son had died by suicide in that very bathroom. We cried for different reasons and found, in each other, a way forward. When I finally got a therapist named David and a walker, then crutches, and when I drank coffee at Abuela’s table, a good friend’s grandmother—strong brew, stronger love), I remembered the first time my legs held me up on a ranch pond levee as a kid. Walking can be worship. Coffee, too. And kindness—always kindness. All of these people became family as I had pushed mine away in my degeneration to alcohol, drugs, and running to Costa Rica. During these times, you see the true love and compassion of others.

I didn’t leave Costa Rica with a movie ending. I left with scars that still tell the truth when my memory wants to edit. Those six years were not a detour; they were seminary and boot camp and an altar where God wrote **mercy** in a script I will never fully understand. If *Pura Vida* means anything to me now, it means **this breath is borrowed; live it pure.**

What This Book Is (and Isn't)

This is not a travelogue. It's also not a self-help manual promising that if you copy my schedule, you can have my life. (You don't want my schedule. Parts of my life you might want, but not the parts that delivered it.) This book is a testimony—half ICU gratitude journal, half field guide for human hearts—and a map that has been tested on roads I would not choose and in rooms I would not decorate. It's for tired souls who suspect that peace has less to do with achieving perfection and more to do with receiving presence. It's for people who can make a room laugh and still go home to a silence that feels like a weight. It's for anyone who has tried to outrun shame and learned that shame has better cardio than you do—until Love catches up and puts its arm around you.

Across these pages, you'll find two threads braided tight:

1. **The Broken Road**—especially those six Costa Rica years and the long hospital months—because stories don't heal in the dark; they heal when told in the light. You'll read how running from accountability puts you on a treadmill that never asks for your heart, just your hours. You'll see how the body keeps the score—failed kidneys, failed plans—and how the soul learns to count by different numbers. And you'll meet the people who saved my life: a police officer who finally called an ambulance, a nurse who saw past my anger, strangers who became family, and a God who knows how to fish men out of both rivers and lies.
2. **On Purpose**—the practices that have, over time, given me a sane mind and a steady heart. I didn't invent these. I discovered them the way you discover a trail someone else cut through the underbrush—by walking slowly and noticing where the ground holds. Many of these practices were first sketched in the hospital waiting room reflections you'll meet in the opening chapter. They are simple on purpose, because simple is how healing sneaks past the ego.

Here's a taste of what we'll practice together:

- **Waiting on Purpose.** The waiting room isn't punishment; it's a pilgrimage. We'll talk about “bonus time”—waking up after days on life support and choosing gratitude before outcomes. The waiting room taught me that fear is not faithlessness; it's simply a human heart doing math it can't solve without God. We will learn to let God do the math.
- **Turning Down the Noise on Purpose.** I realized TV and political outrage was disciplining my nervous system faster than Scripture could heal it. I took a 30-day fast from political poison and watched my soul de-clench. We'll build a plan to reclaim attention from devices designed to keep you anxious, and give that attention back to God and people who love you. (Side effect: a full night's sleep.)
- **Audience of One on Purpose.** The fear of man is a trap; the smile of God is freedom. We'll swap fragile approval for durable identity. When you stop dressing for imaginary critics, you have more energy to love the real people in front of you.
- **Forgiving on Purpose.** Not the performative kind, the plumbing kind—opening the valve so grace can reach your heart and move through it. Part of my story is forgiving an employer and a set of

leaders while God was retrofitting the whole painful chapter into providence: the right surgeon, the right recovery, and the right person to love. Resentment is expensive rent for a room you don't even like. We'll evict it.

- **Forgiving Yourself on Purpose.** This one took me the longest. God distinguishes between condemnation (“you are your worst moment”) and conviction (“you did that—come into the light so I can heal it”). We'll practice rituals of release that let you stop re-typing a ledger God already shredded. You'll meet my younger self at a ranch pond and see how grace redeems even stubborn patterns.
- **Self-Compassion on Purpose.** Hospital wisdom: measure progress in hallway tiles. We'll bless effort, not just outcomes; set one-inch goals; and talk about how a stubborn inner critic isn't holiness—it's just loud. God is not your heckler. He's the Shepherd who restores your soul. (Also: golf. Because nothing tests sanctification like a three-putt or a shot that would require a swim to recover the ball.)
- **Nature on Purpose.** “Church without walls” saved me—sunrise tee boxes, ducks I talk to (they're great listeners), Florida gators admired from a respectful distance. Creation hums the presence of God; you don't have to be outdoorsy to hear it. We'll craft small rhythms that retrain attention for peace.
- **Compartmentalizing on Purpose.** Not denial—holy focus. We'll practice threshold prayers (leave work at the door; bring love inside), worry windows (write it, pray it, close the notebook), and digital fences that keep your peace from leaking onto the carpet. Attention is love in a language people can feel; give it on purpose.
- **Boundaries on Purpose.** Jesus withdrew—and returned—on purpose. You can too. We'll make our “Green/Yellow/Red” maps, speak kind “no's,” and remember that peace and self-control are fruit, not flaws. Love needs hinges *and* gates.
- **Taking Wise Risks on Purpose.** While protection once kept me alive, it also nearly turned my heart into a bunker. We'll take small, courageous steps—toward God, toward trusted people, toward callings that make you feel like a kid again. (Don't worry no awkward middle school dances involved)

All along the way, we'll return to the lesson that surprised me most: **accepting love is as holy as giving it.** In Costa Rica, letting people wash my hair at a kitchen table or wheel me to a shower when I could not stand felt like failure until I heard a mother's line echoing in a nurse's hands: *Let me love you. This is what love does.* (You'll see this refrain again when we talk about receiving without apology and saying *thank you* instead of *you shouldn't have.*) The truth is simple: a starved heart has trouble sharing food. To love well, you must first have lived loved well.

How the Costa Rica Years Knit into This Book

You'll see Costa Rica woven throughout these pages on purpose, not for drama, but for context:

- **Running vs. Rest.** My six-year sprint from accountability taught me that avoiding pain multiplies it. I ran to new jobs (sportsbook, call center), new schemes, and new ways to feel important (commodities mirages). Each promised a clean slate; each delivered a dirtier one. Only when God sat me down—with an IV, a prayer, and a surgeon—did real rest become possible. That truth hums beneath our chapters on silence, Sabbath-like rhythms, and attention.
- **Humiliation vs. Humility.** Being fired for body odor is humiliation. Being bathed by someone who doesn't flinch is humility's classroom. The first collapses your false self; the second grows your truer one. We'll explore how humility doesn't shrink you; it frees you to stop performing. That's the heartbeat of *Audience of One*.
- **Loneliness vs. Community.** Druga and alcohol taught me how to be alone in a crowd. The hospital taught me how the community finds you when you can't stand. Coffee at Abuela's table—and my friend's father lifting me upstairs, uncles hovering, family fussing—was a sacrament as real as any altar call, I've ever answered. You'll feel that gravity when we talk about the embodied church and the difference between isolation and solitude.
- **Control vs. Surrender.** I loved the myth that I was the author, director, and lead in **my** story. My charts, scans, and surgeons suggested otherwise. In surrender, I found a truer agency—the freedom to take the next faithful step, to laugh again, to choose quiet over outrage, to forgive, to be forgiven. That shift undergirds every “On Purpose” practice in this book.

What You Can Expect (and What God Might Do)

Each chapter will braid story, practice, and prayer. You'll get candid pages from my broken road, not because oversharing is virtuous, but because testimony is how light gets in—and out. You'll get practices that have proven themselves in kitchens, clinics, office parks, tee boxes, and pews. They're not impressive; they work. You'll get prayers you can whisper before a meeting, on a porch, or in a hospital gown with sticker maps on your chest.

The aim isn't to make you a spiritual Olympian. It's to keep you company as you walk, to steady your moral compass when headlines scream, and to hand you, one ordinary day at a time, the peace Jesus promised—a peace “not as the world gives,” a peace stubborn enough to sit beside a hospital bed and say, **I am held**.

If you're arriving here angry, numb, or exhausted, you're not a problem to be fixed. You're a person to be loved. God is kinder than the loudest voice in your head. He wastes nothing—not rehab, not relapse, not hospital bills, not scars you still avoid in the mirror. If He can thread my detours into a story that helps anyone else take one faithful step, He can do the same for you.

On Purpose (A Few Starter Steps)

If you're the practical type—and I am—try these simple openings while you read:

- **Name one small mercy today** (clean sheets, a parking spot, a text from a friend). Write it down. Gratitude tilts the room.

- **Fast one hour from the feed** that spikes your blood pressure. Fill that hour with a music and a walk. See if your nervous system says “thank you.”
- **Before a meeting or a meal, whisper:** “Father, I’m here to love, not to impress.” Watch your shoulders drop.
- **Choose one boundary** (no non-urgent texts after 10 p.m., or phone in a drawer at dinner). Guard it kindly. Peace is built at the edges first.

And if you’re in a steep place right now—a road shoulder in the rain, a waiting room with bad coffee—this prayer is for you:

Prayer:

Father, thank You for keeping me alive when I could not keep myself alive—for nurses who stay, for friends who drive to support me in the dark, for strangers who become family. Thank You for a God who finds us in run-down apartments and ICU bays, on mountain roads and in hospital corridors, and says, I am here. Quiet the noise. Unclench my jaw. Teach me to live loved and to love well. As we walk these pages together, give me courage for the next right step and grace for the steps behind me. Write mercy over my scars. And let Your peace—stubborn, steady, and strong—guard my heart and mind every ordinary, holy day You give me. Amen.

A note about the road you’re about to travel: You will hear a lot about Costa Rica in the chapters ahead—not as a postcard, but as a patient teacher. I spent six years there. I arrived fleeing, stayed breaking and rebuilding, almost died, and left more alive than when I came. If my story can do anything for yours, I hope it convinces you of this: **you don’t have to earn love to receive it, and you don’t have to be perfect to be at peace.** The One who pulled me from clear blue water back into a room full of beeping machines is the same One who walks you into the next chapter—on purpose, with joy.