

Jessica Schultz
“Pieces: A Message of Hope”

What should I say? How much should I tell? Where do I begin? These questions were on my mind continually as I worked to prepare this message. One thing I know for sure, God urged me to be here in this chapel today---standing at this podium. It was God who gave me the words to share with you. I hope they will be helpful for you to hear. This morning I’m going to share with you the story of my personal journey. This message is not about me, but in order for you to understand its meaning, I need to present to you the road on which I have traveled that has brought me here today.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jessica Schultz. I am a senior psychology major and plan to pursue my passion to become a chiropractor after I graduate. I have been a peer advisor for the past three years, so some of you know me through that experience. Some of you know me from classes, and some of you are friends and family here today. Many people who know me use the word “smiley” to describe me, and know that I work hard in school and have strong values.

I accepted Christ as my Savior at the age of 15. As I was growing up, I was very active in church. I was a leader in the interpretive dance team and a member of the drama team, taught Sunday School and a program for children on Wednesday nights. I was a member of the Youth Leadership Board and was very active in the church youth group too. I was a camp counselor during the summer, and even my job throughout high school was at a Christian Bookstore.

I had a very strong relationship with God and tried to make choices that would bring honor to Him. I truly lived my life for Him. I spoke to God often and sensed when He spoke to me. He was my Heavenly Father, my Guide, my Protector, and my Friend. I always shared with Him my fears and joys. Unexpectedly, things began to change-----

Here's where you may expect some tragic event to have happened in my life. Thankfully, that was not the case. Actually, I became a college freshman, and I became too busy. Yes, that's it!! I began to fall away because life got in the way instead.

I didn't admit that it was happening right away. In fact, I didn't admit it was happening at all for about three years. It was a slow regression. I was so absorbed about getting good grades, making new friends, and being independent that my relationship with God began to be less important to me. I was always saying it was still important and that I was close to Him, but I knew that was not the truth. I was talking to God less. My quiet times with Him were becoming non-existent. Prayers were said on an as needed basis. I was traveling and growing on my life journey and not asking God to be with me. I was confident I could do it on my own. I never doubted His existence I just didn't think I needed to depend on Him anymore. I was becoming

an educated, strong, independent young woman. I was doing things and learning life lessons on my own. I was making my own decisions. That's what I thought.

Time marched on to Spring of my sophomore year. I started feeling tired all the time and never felt good. I was always telling my mom I didn't feel well, but could never put my finger on what was wrong. I had several medical tests when I went home for the summer, and they were all normal. We decided it was the aftermath of mono from my freshman year and not getting enough sleep.

I started my junior year still not feeling by best but hoping for a great year. I had recently decided to pursue a career to become a chiropractor so was facing some very difficult science courses and was ready to tackle them. I challenged myself more than I was able to manage and became really anxious before my tests and wasn't doing as well as I expected of myself.

I'm not an athlete or a musician, but academics was the area where I always excelled. I've always been hard on myself about my grades and if I didn't earn an A in a class, I felt that I had failed. When I received a C on a chemistry test, I felt like I was completely worthless. (I've now decided that C is a fine grade in Chemistry!!).

I would get so anxious for my physics tests that I would work myself into hysterics before hand, and one night, I actually started to lose my vision. Everything became very blurry, so I laid down and called my mom and was very scared. My parents and I decided it would be best if I dropped physics to reduce some anxiety from my life. So, I reluctantly dropped the course and pretended I agreed it was a good decision for me, but inside, I was tearing myself up because I believed I had become the ultimate failure. I decided I would continue onward and do all I could on my own terms. I hid my true feelings and still didn't recognize I needed God's help at this point.

During Christmas break of my junior year, I went back to the doctor, and he diagnosed me with general anxiety disorder and insomnia. I was prescribed some medications and the doses were adjusted for about five months with no success. I then began to see a psychiatrist this past summer and was also diagnosed with clinical depression. It's been a real struggle to find medications that would work for me. Finally, a medication started to take the edge off my anxiety, and that has gotten much better. However, the depression then started to really rear its ugly head.

For the past year I've been dealing with depression, but for the past six months I've been dealing with severe depression and treatment-resistant depression as well. I felt like nothing was helping me to get out of this deep hole I was in. The last couple of months of 2010 I reached my lowest point. I began to isolate myself in my room. I didn't want to hang out with friends or be around anyone. I began to become irritated easily and take it out on the people I felt closest to. I lost

important relationships in my life, and didn't put any effort into maintaining my important friendships. I didn't want to tell anyone what was going on in my life.

Depression is a complicated disorder to understand. As a psych major who studied about it, I never fully understood what it was really about until I had to live with it. I didn't expect people to understand it, but I was convinced they thought I was just being lazy or sad for no reason. I felt pathetic so decided it was best to stay away from people.

It became exhausting just to get out of bed and go to class, but I would manage to put my famous smile on my face whenever I did have to leave my room, however, each time I was faking who I really was and how I felt. One of my best friends said to me, "You know, Jess, you hide your symptoms really well," and I had to admit he was right. I was hiding not only my symptoms though, but also myself.

I finally reached a point where I would go to bed at 8:00P.M. every night and pray that I wouldn't wake up, because I was too exhausted to face another day. Every day I would wake up though and immediately start crying because I couldn't figure out why God wanted me around again that day. What was it He wanted me to do that someone else couldn't do? When I was able to get out of bed at all, I considered it a "better day".

One night, as I was sitting on my futon, in tears and desperate to feel better, I looked up and saw my Bible sitting on my shelf where it had been all year. I knew there was something in that book that I needed to read at that moment. I took my Bible from the shelf, opened it and began to read. At first, I don't think I was comprehending what I was reading, but then I was led to turn to Isaiah 41:10 which says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." The next verse I read was one of my favorites. It's found in Phillippians 4:6-7 where we're told, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

After reading those verses, I realized how much I was missing my relationship with God. I began praying and asking for strength and came to understand that no amount of medication or counseling alone would pull me out of this depression. I became aware that what I really needed was to get my life back on track with God. I spent the evening reading my Bible and when I went to bed, for the first time in many nights, I said, "See you in the morning, God!" I was beginning to have hope.

The message I pray each of you hears today is two-fold. First, it doesn't matter how far away you think you've fallen from God. People used to tell me He would still be standing and waiting for me where I left Him, but really, He continued to walk with me on my journey, and never left

my side, even though I ignored Him. It doesn't matter what choices you've made. God is standing right next to you with His arms wide open, ready to embrace you as His child.

Secondly, I pray you realize that no matter what your circumstances, there is always hope. There is hope in God. Do I still struggle with depression? Absolutely! I am taking medications and seeing a counselor still, and some days it is still a challenge to get out of bed, but now I have hope again. I have hope that this is not a life struggle I will face forever. I have hope that with God's help, I will recover from this disorder. I have hope that life is going to be not just okay, but great, because I know I am loved by my Heavenly Father, and that He has accepted me in the million pieces I was in and is putting me back together to be the person I am meant to be.

I have a song called Pieces by the band, Red, that I'd like to close with today. Please close your eyes and listen to the words and know that God is right beside you and reaching out to you. At the end of the song, I will pray for us before we adjourn.

Thank you for coming and listening to me today, and for being a part of my journey. It's because of many of you supporting me and caring about me that I was able to make it through the difficult times. It is because of God's love and the strength He provides that I have been able to face my struggles and stand here and share with you who I really am. I had fallen to pieces and feel so blessed to have a Heavenly Father who has given me peace and hope that assures me He will make me whole again.

God bless you all, and thanks, again, for coming.