

WRITTEN BY

BETHANY HAMILTON

professional surfer and shark-attack survivor

From
the surfer
who inspired
the movie
Soul Surfer

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BETHANY HAMILTON
with Ann Byl



NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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This book is dedicated to Jesus Christ,
who has given me the most wonderful
friends and family and who loves me
with an undying love.

—Bethany

Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)
[Where Am I Now?](#)
[God Has a Plan!](#)
[Different Words, One Language](#)
[The Big “What If”](#)
[Decisions, Decisions](#)
[Freedom](#)
[No Worries!](#)
[Just a Thought](#)
[Extreme Christianity](#)
[Water of Life](#)
[Master of the Impossible](#)
[Women I Admire: Ruth](#)
[God Makes Us Different](#)
[One Big Adventure](#)
[Compassion in Action](#)
[Sticking with the Jesus Recipe](#)
[Weighing In](#)
[The Big Spider \(or Centipede or Lizard\)](#)
[Listen Up!](#)
[Packing Your Bags](#)
[Women I Admire: Mary](#)
[The Real You](#)
[Standing Strong](#)
[A Taste of the Bible Every Day](#)
[Favorite Bible Verses](#)
[Popularity Contest](#)
[Living for Christ in the World](#)
[Talk the Talk](#)
[Finding the Positives](#)
[Practicing Patience](#)
[Women I Admire: Sarah Hill](#)
[Thanks for Everything](#)
[Training for the Big Event](#)

[God Never Leaves](#)

[God Created Diversity](#)

[Everybody Needs a Friend](#)

[Die to Self](#)

[Women I Admire: Joni Eareckson Tada](#)

[Whom Are You Living For?](#)

[Log in the Eye](#)

[The Rock and the Hard Place](#)

[Employment Opportunity](#)

[The Big Lie](#)

[The Right Path](#)

[Peace Meets Storm](#)

[Feeding on God's Word](#)

[It's All About Timing](#)

[Broken for God](#)

[Women I Admire: Cheri Hamilton](#)

[A New Role](#)

[Salvation](#)

[Sticking Up for Your Friends](#)

[Epic Waves and Troughs](#)

[God Looks at the Heart](#)

[What's a Boyfriend Anyway?](#)

[The Best Advice](#)

[Resisting Temptation](#)

[Women I Admire: Gladys Aylward](#)

[Promoting Peace](#)

[Free to Be Me](#)

[The Way of the World](#)

[Parents Need Forgiveness Too](#)

[A Friend to All](#)

[Justice God's Way](#)

[Fragrance of the King](#)

[Slow to Anger!](#)

[Women I Admire: Rachel Joy Scott](#)

[Making Adjustments](#)

[Judging Your Neighbor](#)

[God's Timing Is Perfect](#)

[First Love](#)

[The Real You](#)

[True Friends](#)

[True Beauty](#)

[I Surrender All](#)

[Women I Admire: Jackie Pullinger](#)

[Make a Friend](#)

[Serve One God](#)

[Partner Up!](#)

[Just Thirteen!](#)

[24/7 Open Line](#)

[Every Detail, Every Hair](#)

[Winning for Jesus](#)

[Aloha](#)

[Trophies on the Shelves](#)

[Garbage In, Garbage Out](#)

[A Young Woman I Admire: Cassie Bernall](#)

[Spread the Word](#)

[The Blessing and a Curse](#)

[Goodwill Ambassador](#)

[God Sees the Bad Stuff](#)

[Light vs. Darkness](#)

[The Secret to Winning](#)

[What Does the Future Hold?](#)

[Second Chances](#)

[Women I Admire: Esther](#)

[Why Not Me?](#)

[The Body Is Weak](#)

[Used, Not Abused](#)

[Motivated by Love](#)

[Faith Meets Real Life](#)

[A Willing Heart](#)

[Every Day for God](#)

[True Courage](#)

[Can I Stir That for You?](#)

[What's Slowing You Down?](#)

[The Power of Prayer](#)

[Who's Your Savior?](#)

[The Greatest Dad Ever](#)

[Skittles](#)

[Ticked Off](#)

[The Usual Questions \(just so you know\)](#)

[Oh, Brother!](#)

[Strict Training](#)

[Don't Stop Trying](#)

[Motivation](#)

[Heaven on Earth](#)

[Staying Focused](#)

Acknowledgments

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To all my other friends and family, thank you for the love and support you've shown me throughout my life!

—Bethany

At Home

Well, it's been more than seven years since I lost my arm in a shark attack, and my life has changed a lot since then. I've seen God answer a lot of prayers in my own life and in other people's lives. I've traveled all over the world and have been able to see that God is working in places that most people have never even heard of.

But at the same time, some things in my life are pretty much the same! I'm still living on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, in the same home with my parents, Tom and Cheri. I turned twenty-one on February 8, 2011, and have grown to the height of five foot eleven! The main reason I still live at home is because I travel so much. I'm usually traveling more than 50 percent of the year. So it's kind of pointless to get my own place at this time in life.

My oldest brother, Noah, got married in 2009 to my friend and personal assistant, Becky. He is still my main photographer and shoots weddings, portraits, and lots of other photo jobs; and he helps me manage my surfing. And my brother Timmy, the bodyboarder, is working as a camera PA in the television/filmmaking industry. He still shoots video of me and does other video-related work on the side. Both brothers worked on *Soul Surfer*, the feature film about my story.

That brings me to some big news: a major motion picture is coming out about my life! It's so weird to even be saying that. It's based on my book *Soul Surfer*, and it's being released by Sony Pictures Entertainment! It's so exciting yet nerve-racking to have this movie come out. I did some of the stunt surfing for my character, which was really fun! The movie has a great team of actors and a great story (I'm a little biased, ha ha!), and I think it's going to be a really positive film.

I have also had the privilege of being invited to speak in front of congregations and groups of all sizes to share my story. I've been to churches, community events, business conferences, schools, and other sorts of events. Though speaking isn't quite my forte yet, I have had moments of really feeling comfortable on the stage, sharing my heart during my Q&A sessions. It's something I'm definitely considering doing more of in the future, but for now I'm going to focus on surfing!

On the Board

As far as surfing goes, I began competing full-time on the Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP) circuit in 2008. The ASP has two tiers of competition: the Star Series and the World Tour. I primarily surf the Star Series, with the goal of qualifying for the World Tour—which is comprised of the top seventeen female surfers in the world. So far, I have come *really close* to qualifying and have placed in the top twenty every year.

Now that I'm a pro surfer, it's definitely important that I be a serious professional athlete. As I began taking my training to the next level, talking to the experts, and learning more about the human body, I began to get serious about my nutrition in addition to my fitness. My family has always been pretty healthy eaters, or so I thought! I have spent a lot of time in the past few years soaking up information about how our bodies were designed by God to function and about how to help them do that in a world of processed foods, which can lead to problems and diseases. I have since developed a habit of eating that suits my body's needs, and I would encourage you all to do the same.

Aside from having a good nutritional diet, I have been doing a lot of physical training. As you can

imagine, this is highly important for any professional athlete. In my case, since I have only one arm, I needed to work on my spinal alignment first, getting “straight, then strong!” My trainers and I have worked out a program for me to help my spine stay in alignment, and they’ve developed specific exercises to help me in my surfing.

I also work with a few surf coaches who focus specifically on my technique, maneuvers, overall performance, and competition strategy. I love the constant challenge to improve and push my limits. It’s critical for me to be doing that because the other women surfers are really good these days, and we all have to continue to raise the bar!

With My God

Spiritually, I’d be bummed if I couldn’t report growth in the past few years. I have definitely been growing—and not always by choice! Sometimes in life you get forced into a new thing, and it demands spiritual growth, and that’s okay. It’s great, in fact!

The Bible speaks about this in James 1:2–4: “My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need.”

Another good passage is Romans 5:3–5: “We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.”

One of the challenges I’ve faced, honestly, is being bold about sharing the gospel. I’ve been committed to giving glory to God at all times, but it’s a little harder to be direct with your family, friends, or strangers about their relationships with God (or lack thereof). But one of the primary things God has called us to do as followers of him is to spread his love by helping people meet Jesus and become his disciples.

A lot of my friends have moved away and gone off to college or work. As a result, I’ve kind of lost that tight support group of Christian friends I had while in junior high and high school. It’s been a weird transition because it’s easy to rely on others (your friends and family) for spiritual accountability and encouragement. It’s definitely been a test for my faith in some ways, because when you don’t have that safety group, you have to step out and be bold in your faith on your own. “Lone” it is a lot different than when you have that close group of Christian friends around you. And it has made me really need to understand what I believe and why.

I would like to encourage everyone never to be afraid to follow Jesus. Prayerfully live your life, dig deep into God’s Word, and strap on your surf leash, because you’re headed for a life of adventure in Jesus. He’ll accomplish more than you could ever ask for or even imagine through your life!

Aloha
Bethany

God Has a Plan!

I didn't plan on losing my left arm in a shark attack on October 31, 2003. I didn't plan on having to learn to surf all over again, and I certainly didn't plan on becoming famous. I never thought I'd write a book, or throw out the first pitch at a New York Yankees baseball game, or talk to people all over the world who have lost limbs in wars and accidents.

One thing I did plan on doing was whatever God wanted me to do. I wanted my plan to be his plan no matter what. In fact, one of my favorite verses, Jeremiah 29:11, talks about the plans God has for those who follow him. God put his plan into action in my life in a dramatic way, yet I'm thrilled to have any opportunity to tell people about him because sometimes God uses us in small ways too.

Maybe you've had something happen in your life you didn't plan on: Your parents divorced or someone you loved died. Maybe you've gotten sick or injured or lost your home to a natural disaster such as a hurricane. Guess what? It's all part of God's plan, and he'll use you through it if you're willing.

Willingness means letting God's plan become your own, whether it's losing an arm in a shark attack or simply listening to his voice.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Different Words, One Language

Surfers have their own language to describe the sport. For example, *sketched out* means being too scared to take off on a wave, *grommet* or *grom* is a young surfer, and *tubed* means riding deep inside the barrel of the wave. Skateboarders, stage actors, photographers, and computer whizzes have their own languages as well.

Christians have a special language too. Sure, we may use different words in our worship services, sing to different music. We use different translations of the Bible and may even worship at different times of the day. But our common language is our love for Jesus.

The Bible says that people will know we are followers of God by our love for one another. Sometimes we get so caught up in our daily lives and activities and what *I* need to do. We become self-centered, forgetting all about loving the people around us.

For you, this love might mean being nice to the girl who doesn't like you and talks behind your back, tolerating your younger brother or sister for a night so your parents can go on a date, handing out food and blankets at a homeless shelter, or befriending a person at school who has no friends. Some ways that I like to show love for others include encouraging people who have lost limbs, giving money to support missionaries, and talking to people about Jesus. What can you do to turn your religion into the language called *love*?

“All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.” (John 13:35)

The Big “What If”

It might be easy to ask myself, “What if I hadn’t gone surfing that Halloween morning?” Or, “What if I had been too scared to surf again?” The problem with these questions is that they keep me from asking the more important question, which is, “What does God want me to do?”

You probably do it too: “What if I hadn’t gone to that party and had those beers?” “What if I hadn’t made that nasty comment to my friend?” “What if I hadn’t skipped church to go to the mall?” “What if I had just spent time reading the Bible instead of sleeping in?”

It’s easy to get caught up in those “what if” questions. It’s easy to spend so much time in the past beating yourself up over some bad decisions, that you forget that God has work for you to do. He puts you where you are, he forgives you, and he has a plan for you. God tells us to put our faith in him in action (James 2:17). For me it means doing what God created me to do and love—surfing, using the opportunities God has given me to talk about him, helping others, and learning more about God and his plan for me.

If “what if” questions are stopping you, ask for God’s help in putting them behind you. Then grab hold of your faith, and get busy!

Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead! (James 2:26)

Decisions, Decisions

Are you good at making decisions? While you're a teenager, you have to make some of your first important ones—about your faith, your morals, your college plans. It can mean a lot of pressure from someone whose biggest decisions, up until a few years ago, centered around which pizza toppings to order.

So how do we make sure that our choices are the right ones? The most important way is to seek God's wisdom and direction. You can do that through prayer and studying the Bible. Another good thing to do is get as much information as you can. If you've got college questions, research schools and careers yourself, and don't be afraid to pick the brains of your guidance counselors and parents. Faith questions? First, search for the answers within your Bible. You can also get answers from a leader at your church or, again, your parents. Trusted adults have a lot of wisdom to offer.

Most importantly, don't forget to take your choices to God. He wants to hear you, and he wants to help. And he always makes the right decision.

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 1:18 NKJV)

Freedom

Got any bad habits you'd like to be free of? Like biting your nails, whining, or chewing on your hair? I have a bad habit of not looking people in the eye when I talk to them. I also leave stuff all over the floor of my bedroom, which makes me frustrated living in a messy bedroom. But it feels great when I pick up my room. And I'm a lot happier when I can actually find things.

Bad habits can be annoying, that's for sure. The worse the habit, the more it controls us. But isn't it great to be free of bad habits—when you stop chewing your hair or overeating or saying “like” all the time?

It also feels great to be free from sin. Just as you can break a bad habit, you can break the habit of sin. You can stop letting it control you by turning that sin over to Jesus. Jesus died to clear away our sinful hearts, to clean up the habit of sin we all are born with. It's not like you are never going to sin again; it's that sin doesn't control your life anymore.

Just as that messy bedroom habit has controlled me, sin controls all of us. Jesus, however, gives us freedom from a sinful heart. What a great habit to break!

We know that our old life died with Christ on the cross so that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we would not be slaves to sin. Anyone who has died is made free from sin's control. (Romans 6:6–7)

No Worries!

Have you ever seen Simba, Timon, and Pumba singing “Hakuna Matata” in *The Lion King*? Simba liked the idea of never having to worry about anything ever again. This seemed great after he thought he’d killed his dad, then abandoned his family and friends.

I’m sure you have worries and fears too. I know I do. I worry that I won’t do well in a surfing contest or that I’ll get hurt. I worry about my family and about my friends making bad choices. Maybe you worry about whether your outfit looks stupid, failing an algebra test, your mom and dad getting a divorce, or your grandma getting sick.

God tells us to hand over our worries to him because he’ll carry them for us (Matthew 11:28–29). It’s sort of like handing him a whole backpack full of rocks you’ve been carrying around for months. It’s not as if you immediately never worry again, but God takes the heavy burden of worry away so it doesn’t weigh you down. He wants to do this for you and eagerly waits for you to give him your burdens. Tell God you’re giving him everything you worry about. The more you get to know him through his Word, the easier it is to trust him. Because with God, there really are no worries.

Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Just a Thought

Ever notice how bad thoughts randomly pop into your mind? “I’m worthless.” “No one could ever love me.” “I should just give up; I’ll never make it.”

Or maybe you think something bad about someone else. Don’t worry. It happens to all of us. We just need to recognize where those thoughts come from and learn what to do when they come. Bad thoughts like these come straight from the devil, who’s trying to get you to sin. But you don’t have to let him get his way.

In my daily life, I have to disregard the thoughts that enter my mind that I know are not from God. The Bible tells us what to do when those thoughts pop up: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and *we take captive every thought* to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV).

How do we take our thoughts captive? First, by recognizing where negative thoughts come from—the devil. Second, by talking to God at that moment and asking him to redirect your thoughts. Another good thing to do is quote a scripture you have memorized or open the Bible and find a scripture that sets your mind in a better direction. The verse below is a great place to start.

Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. (Philippians 4:8)

World Vision

World Vision is a Christian relief and development organization that helps poor children and communities in about one hundred countries around the world. They offer food and water during international emergencies, such as the earthquake in Haiti; they help children who have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS crisis around the world; and they rescue children who are forced into the global sex trade or forced to fight in wars.

One of the best ways to get involved with World Vision is by sponsoring a child for \$35 a month. I've supported a child for years, and I'm working with World Vision to let people know about the organization and about the huge needs that are out there. For more information on World Vision, visit www.worldvision.org.

Extreme Christianity

Surfing is an extreme sport. It can be dangerous, especially in huge waves, but it is a thrilling experience. There are tons of other extreme sports too, such as snowboarding, rock climbing, and motocross.

Believe it or not, Christianity is extreme. Lots of people in the Bible were extreme in their quest to follow God, doing radical things in the name of faith (think Paul, Moses, and Jesus). One of the most extreme was Daniel. He risked his life for the convictions and purpose God gave him. First, as a young captive in Babylon, he obeyed God but defied the king by refusing to eat the royal food that God had asked his people not to eat. God spared his life when it easily could have been taken. As an old man, he defied a law that said no one could pray to anyone but the Babylonian king, or they would be put to death. Daniel prayed to God anyway and ended up being thrown in a den of hungry lions. But because Daniel obeyed God, God saved him by closing the mouths of the lions. That's extreme—Daniel risked his life out of obedience to God.

I want to be as extreme in my love and devotion for Jesus as I am on my surfboard. I want to follow God wherever he leads and do whatever he asks me to do because I trust him—whether it's talking about him on national television or being faithful to pray and spend time with him every day. I want to obey God no matter what the price.

My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O King. (Daniel 6:22)

[Water of Life](#)

I know water. I know about waves and surf and undertow and current and reef. My friends say I have salt water in my veins. But the water I surf in and the water I drink every day aren't enough.

The Bible has a great story about water. One day Jesus stopped at a well at midday. He talked to a Samaritan woman who was drawing water there. Jews never talked to Samaritans, and Jewish men would never talk to a Samaritan woman in those days, so what Jesus did was extreme. He told the woman that the water she was drawing would never quench the thirst she had in her soul. He said that only he could quench that thirst and that his Living Water would never run dry. The woman, whose life was desperate and full of sin, accepted Jesus' message. She'd still have to draw water every day to quench her physical thirst, but her spiritual thirst for God was quenched forever thanks to Jesus. Her life was changed eternally.

Are you filled with spiritual water or just physical water? If you don't have a relationship with God, your soul is thirsty for spiritual water; Jesus is the answer. Trust me. The water I surf in off the coast of Kauai, Hawaii, is beautiful and warm, but Jesus is the best Water ever. Trust him.

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

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