

## My spiritual journey

This was quite difficult to write as this is a topic I have not thought about in a long time. I tried to come up with a timeline or a set of events. I wrote, rewrote, and trashed a few edits of this talk.

As I reflected, I realized that spirituality tended to be the common theme of my life no matter what stage of life, denomination, or lack of faith that I found myself in. That is what I will talk about this evening.

I have found myself surrounded by spirituality and religion a good portion of my life. I was raised with a deep religious and biblical foundation as a Jehovah's Witness. I continued in this path and with this set of traditions until my teens.

Around 5 years old, while being taught the story of David and Goliath, my parents brought out an orange and some grapes to be props for the stones used by David.

While reading along with Bible story, I got the impulse to get up and chuck an orange and the grapes at my mother. Like David, I had great aim. Before my spanking, when asked why I did this, I was told I calmly said "If David can save Israel, I can too if I practice".

As an adolescent, I always had questions about religion but found strength and comfort in the everyday and beautiful. I would spend hours and hours outside

being thankful for spiders, birds, trees, and anything I believed to be beautiful and “wonderfully made”. I knew “Someone” was there but at times I wasn’t sure who and what that had to do with me.

As a teen, I gave birth to Darriell. She was a whooping 3 pounds and was born premature. She was kept in the NICU for a long time. At this point, I was at a religious crossroad. I did not, at this point, believe all I was raised on, but in the same instance, that was all I felt I had. In a twist that humbles me today, the elders and other Witnesses took turns visiting the NICU and staying with me while Darriell was inpatient. The same applied when she was readmitted into the pediatric ICU a short time later. I remember the faces and the quiet moments of someone sitting with me more than the scripture.

I dabbled in a little bit of many things; Holiness, Islam, attending a few Jehovah’s Witness meetings to appease my family, and I eventually fell into the category that is spoken with dread by many a Christian: One of the nones – N-O-N-E-S.

Events during the NONE phase in my 20s often brought me to my knees. A lifechanging mental health diagnosis of bipolar disorder, physical deterioration due to not caring for myself, as well as a disconnection from community left me tired and worn in a way that is indescribable. During this time, spiritual flashes of

light would peak through and give me enough defiance to keep moving forward. By the time I had Khalil, I was moving forward. To what, I didn't know. But I just kept moving. I fed my spirit as I could with books, reflections, meditation, and prayers. Also, people. People and community helped me mend so many wounds. Friends I made from alternate faiths and lifestyles are my close supports, even a decade later.

Towards my later 20s, I was online checking out some dating sites. Now for anyone that has online dated at all, it is a rarity to see full sentences with -0- grammatical errors, to see a lack of expletives, and to have someone write something of meaning. And to top it all off, this man was wearing a nice suit in his picture and was cute, in my opinion. This online Casanova ended up being Matthew.

This new chapter in my life was a whirlwind of spirituality, light after the dark, and unexplainable change. Our first date was Feb 2013 and we were married in May 2014. We explored religion and spirituality together. As a foursome, Darriell, Khalil, Matthew and I found our spiritual and religious home... St. David's. While first attending St. David's in spring 2013, within a few weeks Khalil was admitted into Chippenham Pediatric ICU for fluid on his brain. The stay ended up spreading

over the course of multiple visits and about two weeks. Without question the pastoral care team, Pastor Elizabeth, and Deacon Bill swooped in and gave us, a new family to the church, connection we so badly needed.

What impresses me the most is the humanity. We are not a typical family: a blended interracial family that deals with disability on different levels. And we are still welcome and loved.

As we have expanded our journey to meet other people in the Episcopal church movement and of other faiths and denominations, I feel my cup finally has a way to fill when I start to get dry and weary. A card with a pretty picture and beautiful note, a cup of coffee, a lifechanging experience like Cursillo, and the laughs at adult forum have kept me in connection with my Higher power, my faith, and myself. Sadly through this journey of life, I often lost connection with myself, with Britt, which had the greatest impact.

As mentioned at the beginning, my journey through all of life has the thread of spirituality in common. Brene Brown, my social work She-ro, gives a beautiful definition of spirituality in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*. She defines spirituality as

*“recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives”.*

To me, this is not the most theological or fancy definition of spirituality. For me it describes my journey. I would not be standing and most importantly moving forward, without the connection, love, or compassion I have been blessed with from others. One of my good friends from D.C. text me this weekend to remind me that “We are all in this together”. I am so thankful he sent this to me. It reminded me of what has made me whole and kept me moving forward no matter what life has thrown at me. I am reminded that my journey is not solo. It is a collective affair filled with beauty, grace, love, compassion, and astonishing amounts of the essence of human spirit and faith.