

“I love this book! The compelling stories of God’s intervention into unlikely lives inspired me, encouraged me, and motivated me to continue sharing His message of grace with others. It’s a book of hope and promise, of unexpected encounters and transformed lives, of Divine appointments and extraordinary outcomes. Let God use it to soften your heart toward Him and others.”

Lee Strobel, Bestselling Author of *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Grace*

“‘Irresistible grace’ is a theological expression high on the ladder of abstraction, but *Compelled* makes the reality clear with seven stories that many readers will find irresistible.”

Marvin Olasky, Executive Editor of News & Global, *Christianity Today*

“*Compelled* is a gripping, powerful, faith-inspiring page-turner that showcases how God uses all things, no matter how hopeless they may seem, for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.”

Ginger Hubbard, Bestselling Author of *Don’t Make Me Count to Three* and *I Can’t Believe You Just Said That*

“There’s nothing like stories of God’s transforming power at work to inspire, encourage, and challenge us! In *Compelled*, Paul and Sarah Hastings have gathered a thrilling collection of real-life testimonies that showcase the redeeming work of Jesus. Read these incredible stories and be reminded that no situation is too tough, no life too broken, for His grace to redeem and restore.”

Andy Bannister, Director of Solas Centre for Public Christianity (Scotland)

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ORDINARY PEOPLE
EXTRAORDINARY GOD

PAUL & SARAH HASTINGS
WITH ELLIE PAYNE

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Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England

info@10ofthose.com

www.10ofthose.com

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*Dedicated to our parents:
Pat & Ganya Hastings
Ken & Julie Axmann
Jon & Lory Payne
who taught us to love Christian testimonies*

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INTRODUCTION:
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If you ask a child about their favorite part of the Bible you'll never hear them mention the 23rd Psalm, or Paul's letter to the Romans, or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Instead, you'll hear them clamor for the story of Noah's Ark, Moses and the Red Sea, David and Goliath, or Daniel and the Lion's Den.

Jesus Himself was a masterful storyteller, using parables to convey spiritual truths to His audience. Case in point, the entire Bible begins as a story in Genesis, "In the beginning..."

For me, stories were a formative part of my life, especially Christian biographies. I remember saving my money as a child so I could buy illustrated books about missionary pioneers like David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor. I paid \$1.50 for each title, knowing I could resell them for \$0.50 and buy even more biographies.

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Eventually, I discovered more modern testimonies like *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, and *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson. The stories always jumped off the pages, whether they involved smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain or trekking into Africa to shine the light of the gospel.

But the common thread behind all of these stories was Jesus.

The God who became a man, just so He could die for a broken world and make all things new. It was greater than any stage play and wilder than any science fiction novel. But most incredibly... it was a *true* story.

A story that has compelled millions of ordinary people to exhibit extraordinary faith. To leave behind their comfortable lives and minister to lepers. To contract malaria and typhoid so that others may know Him. To risk life and limb and even walk into the Roman Colosseum facing certain death.

In 2018, my wife and I harnessed this lifelong passion for stories and launched the *Compelled* podcast; a quest to uncover some of the most powerful testimonies of lives that have been transformed by Jesus.

Through the podcast, we've met believers from every age, background, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status who have seen God work in remarkable ways. The seven stories you now hold in your hand are just a handful of those unique encounters.

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You'll meet a mother who was falsely accused of murder and sentenced to life in prison; you'll travel deep into the jungles of New Guinea and live with a tribe of Stone Age cannibals; and you'll fall into a blazing inferno wrought by the devastation of September 11, 2001.

But in each of these true stories, you'll come face to face with the One who can set captives free, give sight to the blind, and make dead hearts alive.

Our prayer is that these stories would reassure you of the incredible power of Christ and kindle fresh affection in your heart for the Author of your own story.

—*Paul Hastings*

“For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.”

2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (CSB)



1

FALSELY ACCUSED AND SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON

HANNAH OVERTON

Hannah sat in the courtroom, stunned and trembling, as the hum of voices rose to a fever pitch. But nothing could drown out the one word still echoing in her mind after the crack of the gavel: *Guilty*.

Accused of murder, tried, convicted, and now sentenced to spend the rest of her life in prison.

God, how could You let this happen?

Hannah's heart pounded with fear and anguish, and she buried her face in the arms of her husband, Larry. Weeping uncontrollably, she closed stinging eyes on triumphant prosecutors, stone-faced jury members, and eager reporters snapping pictures.

Police officers surrounded Hannah, pulling her up and handcuffing her wrists behind her back. As she was led from the courtroom, hot tears rolled down Hannah's cheeks at the fresh realization that she would never again be allowed physical contact with her five precious children, the youngest only seven months and still nursing.

How is Larry going to explain to them when he goes back home... alone? How will he tell them that their mama isn't ever coming back?

Hannah's tears turned from heartbroken to bewildered.

Why, Lord? I've seen You work wonders for Your people so many times... I'm innocent, and all You had to do was reveal the truth! Why didn't You? Where were You?

One year earlier...

"I'm home!"

Hannah closed the front door behind her and knelt to receive the four grinning children racing down the hall, clamoring for hugs. She put her arms around all of them, then glanced back down the hallway. Peeking around the corner, she saw a pair of bright blue eyes, longingly watching the little group. Hannah smiled and held out an arm.

"You want hugs, Andrew?"

Around the corner bounded a little four-year-old boy, grinning from ear to ear and eyes sparkling. His tiny feet flew across the floor, and he wrapped his arms around Hannah.

“Love you... Mommy.”

Tears welled up in Hannah’s eyes as she heard the name “Mommy,” and she squeezed Andrew tightly.

Little Andrew had already experienced a great deal of hardship in his young life; he never knew his father, and his mother was a drug addict, which resulted in Andrew being born addicted to multiple substances. Due to his abusive home environment, Andrew was placed in foster care. When Hannah’s daughters met Andrew at church, Hannah’s tender heart had gone out to him.

Now, as Andrew ran off to play with the other kids, Hannah stood slowly, a hand on her pregnant belly and brushing at her eyes.

Thank the Lord he’s with us now... in a few months, the adoption will make him officially part of our forever family, just like he’s been praying for. It already feels like this is where he belongs...

“Mommy, my head hurts... and I feel cold.”

Hannah laid a hand on Andrew’s forehead as he stood looking up at her. It had been five months since Andrew moved in, and he was unusually listless this afternoon.

“All right, buddy... let’s get you to bed, and see if you feel better after some rest.”

Soon after, Andrew began vomiting, and pregnant Hannah sighed.

Must be a stomach bug...

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A few hours later, Hannah peeked into Andrew's room, to see the little boy curled up in the corner of his bed.

Good, he's asleep...

But as she looked again, Hannah's heart dropped to her feet. The rise and fall of Andrew's back was irregular; he wasn't breathing normally.

Hannah and Larry raced Andrew to the nearest urgent care, where they were quickly transferred to a nearby hospital. By the time they arrived, Andrew was in a coma.

Thousands of prayers were offered up for Andrew that day, by friends, family, and others, the most desperate pleas coming from Hannah and Larry, as their precious son faded. Doctors were running tests, but didn't have any immediate answers.

Please God, please, heal him, please...

Later that night, Hannah lifted her head from Larry's shoulder, rubbing her eyes. She glanced down at her phone to see a text from a friend, sharing a Scripture. Hannah read it eagerly, desperate for any encouragement or glimmer of hope.

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”

Psalm 37:5–6

Hannah dropped her phone back into her purse, confused.

What does that have to do with anything? God, I want You to heal my son... that verse means nothing to me right now.

An hour later, Hannah heard her phone buzz again. It was another text message from a different friend sharing a Scripture. For the second time on that nightmarish day, Psalm 37:5–6 appeared on Hannah’s phone screen.

God, what are You trying to tell me? This verse says nothing about healing or comfort...

A few minutes later, Hannah was startled as the door to the hospital room was flung open. Two police officers entered.

“Mrs. Overton?”

“Yes?”

“We’re sorry, ma’am, but you need to come with us. You’re wanted down at the station for questioning.”

Hannah blinked. “I don’t understand.”

The officer coolly replied, “We just need to get some facts straight.”

Hannah clasped her hands to keep them from shaking as she sat in the stark interrogation room. A police officer dropped several medical papers on the table.

“Mrs. Overton, these are the results of Andrew’s tests. As you can see, an astonishing amount of sodium was found in his blood. Ma’am, have you ever tried to intentionally hurt Andrew?”

The officer looked knowingly at Hannah.

Hannah stared up at the officer, confused.

“Sir... my husband and I have never once tried to harm any of our children, including Andrew. Why are you asking?”

The officer looked at her grimly.
“Tests don’t lie, ma’am.”

Hours later, Andrew died—just 30 hours after they had arrived at the hospital. Hannah felt as though someone had reached in and crushed her heart. The little boy who had wandered into their lives and captured their love was gone. Hannah sat in silent shock, unable to process what had happened.

What she and everyone else wouldn’t find out until much later was that Andrew had suffered from a rare medical condition called hypernatremia, which results in high concentrations of sodium in the blood. Andrew had also been suffering from pica, an extremely rare, undiagnosed eating disorder, which gives victims an insatiable appetite, sometimes even causing them to crave non-food substances such as paint, glue, or baking soda.

On the day prior to his death, Andrew had most likely found and eaten a large quantity of table salt, which in addition to his body’s propensity to high sodium levels, caused him to die of salt poisoning.

At the time, however, all Hannah knew was that her baby boy had died. But her nightmare was about to become even worse... Shortly after Andrew’s passing, the District Attorney’s office began promoting their own theory as to the cause of his death.

Hannah's story began appearing all over the media and on every local newspaper headline.

“PREGNANT MOTHER MURDERS FOSTER SON... Hannah Overton force-fed four-year-old son 23 tablespoons of chili seasoning... purposely neglected to take him to ER sooner, hoping to cause his death... will stand trial...”

Hannah felt like her world had been turned upside down.

Why is everyone acting like I'm guilty? It's like they've already decided...

But there was one hope that Hannah clung to.

That bag of Andrew's vomit that they saved in the urgent care... once it's tested as evidence it'll prove my story.

But as months passed, the urgent care's bag of evidence could not be found.

And so, Hannah was put on trial for capital murder.

Months later, the week of the jury trial came, and nothing went in Hannah's favor. The media ate up every detail, the local community was divided, and depictions of Hannah as an abusive mother, murdering her son in cold blood, could be found all over the news.

Throughout the trial, it became increasingly clear that Hannah had not force-fed Andrew anything, as the story presented by the media and prosecutors suggested.

However, the prosecution doubled down, continuing to malign Hannah as guilty.

“Any loving mother,” the District Attorney pointed at Hannah, “would have sought medical help sooner. However, Mrs. Overton did not, because she wanted her foster son dead.”

The world’s leading nephrologist, a doctor specializing in salt-poisoning cases, was present at the trial, waiting to testify.

Hannah absently rocked her seven-month-old daughter in the car seat at her feet, as she scanned the crowded courtroom.

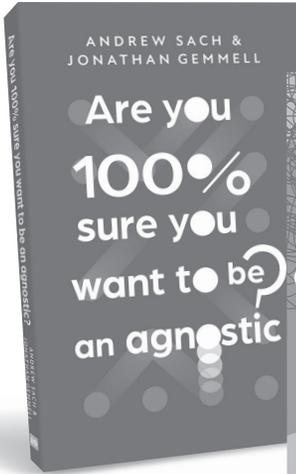
She whispered to Larry, “Why hasn’t Dr. Moritz been allowed to testify yet? He told me that if he’d been in my shoes, he would have done the same things we did. Surely he’ll clear up all the confusion the District Attorney is creating! But it’s been three days now, and he still hasn’t been called up to testify...”

Due to multiple delays and odd behavior on the part of the District Attorney, Dr. Moritz never ended up giving his crucial testimony to the jury. Similarly, another doctor who had previously known about Andrew’s eating disorder waited for five days to share his testimony with the court, but was never called up.

At last, after months of interrogations, deliberation, and media speculation, the verdict was to be given. Hannah, strained and exhausted, sat impatiently waiting for the

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