

FICTION

# AN OVERCOMER'S CHOICE

by CHRIS FABRY

Two strangers in a restaurant.

A man sits at a table. An older woman, a veteran server, approaches and seems to be carrying a weight too heavy.

Barbara's heart fluttered. She turned and stared into his eyes. Of all the nerve, to track her down here.

Barbara gritted her teeth. "Did he send you here?"

The man sipped his coffee and put the mug down. "No, he didn't. In fact, he's been adamant that I not reach out to you or your granddaughter."

"Then why are you here?"

**I**F YOU SAW THE FILM *Overcomer*, you know the story of Hannah Scott and her coach, John Harrison. Both are struggling to discover their true identities. And so is a man in a nearby hospital, Thomas Hill. Those three hearts converge onscreen, and you're pulled into the plot of their intertwining storylines.

My purpose here is not to tell their story or reveal that intricate, surprising plot. Rather, I want to show how a story can surprise us with whispers of God's love.

One of the final scenes in the film takes place at a cemetery. At that graveside service, a pastor speaks words of comfort.

*"Jesus said ... , 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.'"*<sup>1</sup>

That man is Reverend Willy Parks, and he only shows up in the film in that scene. But in the novel based on the movie by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick, I was able to show readers material not included in the film. I think you may relate to Barbara's story.

Barbara works two jobs to make ends meet. She's often tired, worn out, and emotionally fatigued, which is one reason she gets frustrated with Hannah. In this scene at the restaurant from the novel, a fellow server tells Barbara that a man has asked to sit in her section. Intrigued, Barbara listens as the man explains why he is there.

*"As I drove by, something clicked inside. I got the impression that ... " He paused and folded strong hands on the table. "Do you believe the Lord speaks to people, Ms. Scott?"*

*"You're the pastor. You're asking me?"*

*He smiled. "I have a hard time with people saying the Lord told them this or that. My conversations are often one-sided, at least they seem that way."*

Barbara has believed in God all of her life. But with the pain and struggle she has experienced, God has felt distant, removed. She has a hard time believing, with many of her life circumstances, that God cares. She feels off the heavenly radar. And this pastor sitting in her section and bringing up personal issues with her, stepping over the spiritual line she has drawn in the sand, feels like too much. It touches that nerve she's tried to protect for so long.

**Here in the restaurant, Barbara is about to learn the truth that until you face these twin thieves, regret and guilt, you cannot have your broken heart healed.**





## What seemed like a chance meeting with Pastor Parks becomes divine design.

*“He’s resigned to having you hate him because of what he did.”*

What he did. Those words echo in her soul. Barbara has lived with the pain of a deep loss that has shaped her life. A loss caused by what he did. Her story is mine. It’s yours. We’ve all experienced injustice and pain and loss that has shackled us. And in some vulnerable moment, a memory sparks — a scent, a song, a blurry picture flashes when you least expect it — and the infraction returns, the nerve is touched, and you’re transported to a jarring memory. Whatever triggers that also brings regret and guilt like a flood. And here in the restaurant, Barbara is about to learn the truth that until you face these twin thieves, regret and guilt, you cannot have your broken heart healed. You cannot be freed from a prison you unknowingly embrace.

Barbara’s interaction with Hannah, the granddaughter she dearly loves, shows this truth. Throughout the film, we see Barbara’s frustration and anger bubble over. She lashes out at people who are trying to help. There is turmoil in this woman’s life, and the tension of her anger and bitterness drives the story.

This truth is difficult to accept. The tension we feel in these moments is not a curse, but a gift, a grace. The inner conflict when the past returns

provides an opportunity. We can choose to remain in the pain, to embrace the regret and guilt, or we can move toward freedom.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”<sup>2</sup>*

As I wrote the novel, *Overcomer*, I immersed myself in the first two chapters of Ephesians. Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick said this was the driving force behind their story. They wanted those who experienced the film to see the power of their true identity in Christ. And every day as I pored over those verses, I discovered anew that when you know who you really are and whose you really are, that truth transforms. That’s why Hannah’s story is so powerful. You are drawn into her struggle, her loneliness, her disconnection, and her clawing at life to add anything of value she can find. However, when she encounters the power of God’s forgiveness and realizes she can embrace who He says she is, the story takes on different flesh. She is being called to not only receive the identity God desires for her, but also to extend the grace she has received to others.

ISTOCKPHOTO

Barbara is in the crosshairs of grace in the restaurant, but she’s carrying baggage of the past. To her, grace is for others. Forgiveness seems like a fairy tale. Extending it feels like another loss, an impossible task.

What seemed like a chance meeting with Pastor Parks becomes divine design. Barbara eventually opens her heart enough to allow this man to tell his own story. He shows her the baggage he has carried.

*“Six years ago I lost someone dear to me. Feels like yesterday.”*

*Barbara put a hand on her hip. “Who?”*

*“My son.” He lifted his fork and pointed toward the chair. She looked at it, looked at him, then sat.*

*“There’s a little lake down the road from our house. On my day off, I used to take my son fishing. But being a pastor means you’re important. People call at all hours. Sometimes you’re not there when you said you would be.”*

Pastor Parks reveals a dramatic story of regret and guilt. Barbara is moved, and a nerve is exposed. Now she must respond. Will she default to regret and guilt and stay there, or will she choose freedom? There is a greater power available, the power of true identity in Christ. And like Barbara, you and I can choose to exercise faith and believe what God

says about us, or we can allow our feelings or the pain of the past to define us.

*“I think the reason God stopped me here was something different.”*

*“And what was that?” Barbara said.*

*“I think He brought me here to ask you to open your heart to the possibility that He’s walking with you through all this. Just like He walked with me.”*

Two strangers in a restaurant.

Two people in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness. One is bitter and angry. The other has received mercy and has done the hard work of extending it. One is bound. The other is free.

Which are you? ☹️

<sup>1</sup> John 11:25, NAS, 1977

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:3-4, ESV

*Excerpted passages used with permission: Overcomer, a novelization by Chris Fabry, based on the motion picture by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick, published by Tyndale House Publishers, 2019.*

CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books, including his novelization of the Kendrick Brothers film, *Overcomer*. If you have a dream to write, find encouragement at [heyyoucanwrite.com](http://heyyoucanwrite.com). He is also the host of Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio.

