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Hi, my name is Nathaniel Tavares, and this is my story.

It was January 14th, 2014, and I was rudely awoken by my 6:00 a.m. alarm. I didn't want to get out of bed. The only thing that encouraged me to get out of bed was the fact of getting back to school and seeing all of my friends. On this day, it was quite weird because I had a twisted feeling in my stomach, and it just didn't seem right. But I went ahead, jumped in the shower, did the normal morning routine, and thankfully the stomach ache was gone. So, I went ahead, hugged mama, jumped on the bus, and headed to school.

When we got to school, it was quite a cold day. Staff was directing us into the gym, as we would usually go out to the field right before class. But then, as we got into the gym, I walked straight in, saw my friends at the bottom of the bleachers, and totally blew out of excitement because I hadn't seen them for now over a month. So, I went straight to them, sat on the very bottom of the bleachers, turned around, and we were having all kinds of great conversations about all the great things we were able to do over the winter break. Then, right as I was getting into my sentence of sharing some of the really cool blessings that I got to experience over that break, that was the instant that my life was changed forever.

It was like time was standing still, and I wasn't able to process anything. It was like the entire world was at a standstill, and nobody around me was there, really. It's almost as though I was alone. I felt a sensation that I was literally blowing out of the gym that day, past the bus stop where I was just dropped off about 8 to 10 minutes before that. Then, I heard a very loud ringing in my ears, and all kinds of people were screaming. So, immediately, my reaction was to get up and try to help anybody who I could possibly find, even though in that moment, I was also completely blinded. Zero vision, and all I had was my hearing and feeling to rely on.

It was also in that moment whenever a teacher had actually come up to my side, and she gently laid me back down, told me to relax, and she was saying, "Nathaniel, everything's going to be okay. Your mama's not here, but I'm going to be your mama for now." And that's when I felt this feeling of relaxation, as though literally nothing bad had happened. It was really just a time that maybe I just fell over and hit my head. That was another thought running through my head: I fell over, hit my head, knocked myself out, and now I can't go to school because the nurse is going to send me home. What wild thoughts to have in that particular situation.

Then, there came a point where I asked the teacher to take off my backpack. Again, like the wildest situation that this could potentially be happening in, but there was one textbook in my backpack, likely the math textbook, and it was poking me very angrily in my spine, and it was uncomfortable. Worst situation possible, and that's the only thing where I felt pain. So, I asked the teacher to take off my backpack, and as soon as she went to take it off, this is when I had the perception that I passed out. But she later told me this is whenever I had actually died.

I later found out that in that moment when I died, I was clinically considered dead for a total of 8 minutes. In that time, my world was completely black. Of course, there was no life to understand what was happening in the real world. Then, as soon as the first responders were able to declare the scene safe, the EMTs were able to enter. It was also in that time where I suddenly started to gasp for air again. The teacher had told me that throughout that 8 minutes, I was constantly choking on my own blood, and she would have to use her own hand to scoop it out of my mouth in hopes to prevent me from further choking on it.

Then, as soon as I started gasping for air again after that 8 minutes, I don't recall anything, but the EMTs had to cut off every bit of my clothes to understand where all I was injured, as I had just been hit by a 20-gauge shotgun from 10 feet in front of me. After they were able to assess as much of the injuries as possible, they quickly loaded me onto the stretcher, put me into the ambulance, and drove me over to the local hospital there in Roswell. Once we arrived at the hospital, the doctor said that my injuries were too severe to treat there at the local hospital. So, then I was loaded into the medevac where I was life-flighted over to Luk, at the level one UMC trauma center, and that's where the real journey began.

My healing was nothing short of miraculous, and I say that because we arrived at the trauma center around 10:00 that morning, and I was in the operating room until 11:00 that night. So, I had over 11, 12 hours in the operating room where

doctors were able to do a magnitude of miracles with God working through them to not only save my life but save a large majority of the quality of life that I would be able to have moving forward.

Specifically pertaining to my eyes, like I mentioned earlier, immediately as I was hit in the gym, I was completely blinded. Whenever I was in the operating room, that was one of the many concerns, was to, for one, stop the bleeding in my eyes as well as every other portion from the top of my head down to my waist. But the other thing was my heart. One of the lead pellets had actually nicked my heart to where it was causing some major internal bleeding compared to, again, the rest of my body. Once they were able to do an exploratory surgery to open me up and examine which of my organs were damaged in any sort of way, make those repairs, stop the bleeding, then the next concern was my brain.

One of the pellets had infiltrated the front of my face and went directly into the center of my brain. This was causing major swelling in my brain to the point where they had to remove a large portion of my skull here in order to prevent my brain from quite literally exploding internally. It was such an urgent situation to the point where if they didn't do it within the next minute or two, my life was then again over. But it was because of the way God was working through each and every piece of medical staff, medical equipment, and through the medical staff who was there with me that day, that miracles were happening over and over and over again.

After the 11, 12 hours in the operating room, I was finally declared stable to the point where I was transferred over to the pediatric intensive care unit. Whenever they led me in there, there was this sign on my bed that said, "Do not lower bed as it will cause a lowering of the heart rate." What they're really meaning by that is the fact that in the case anybody did in fact lower my bed, my heart would stop, and we would be in the same process that we were in from the start.

My body was so swollen to the point where I was completely purple, inflated in a sense, and all you could see was my face and a small portion of the tops of my shoulders that weren't covered by bandages. But the pieces that weren't covered were full of tiny speckles of blood everywhere where over thousands of pellets had entered my body. So, throughout the next week, I was in what's called a medical sedation, and while I was medically sedated, I had countless amounts of dreams.

This was also a point when doctors were trying to analyze on the outside world what exactly these injuries would do to me long term. So, this consisted of things

like he may not be able to walk again, talk again, he may not be able to eat by himself again, like he is literally going to become a baby, and there would be so much help that he needs to relearn everything, literally everything, as if he was literally born as an infant. It was crazy because, again, on the outside world, everybody was questioning what was possible. I mean, the fact that I was even alive was a miracle alone, and the fact that there was so much damage to my body, everything was unpredictable. We didn't know if I was even going to wake up out of the medical sedation, much less be able to do all the other things that the doctors were saying I may not be able to do.

The craziest thing while in this medical sedation was I was in my own world at the same time. What I mean by that is I had so, so many dreams, like to the point where I may not even remember them all, but thankfully, I remember the most important ones. To give a little more context into what exactly those dreams were about, there was one specific moment where we were in a helicopter, and we were flying over this large city. I mean, it was so large, like something I had never even seen before. As we were flying over a particular area, I saw this huge billboard with so many lights, and it was almost as though they were featuring something really, really awesome. I was like, "What in the world is over there on that billboard?" As I looked further, it was my face, and I'm like, "How in the world am I on a billboard?"

What the billboard had was not only my face, but it was my face being featured on an NBA 2K video game for that year. I'm like, "What in the world, all of a sudden, I'm this NBA Allstar, like how is this possible? It's literally a dream coming true." The craziest thing is, as we were in this helicopter too, I was in this military uniform, right, like I had just been recruited into the army, and we were serving a mission wherever that particular place was in that city. As we started descending, I kept looking at that billboard, just amazed at what was literally in front of me, my face being featured on a video game, crazy.

Then, as we landed, we landed in this ginormous parking lot, and they sent me straight into the building. As soon as I stepped through the doors, I was in complete and utter silence because of how amazing the inside of this building looked. I mean, this was lined with black, beautiful marble, and gold linings throughout each piece of marble. They sat me in this ginormous chair, and granted, this was an NBA stadium, the most grand stadium you could ever see. As they sat me in that large chair, they began to start sizing my finger for a gold championship ring. I was like, "No way, I am seriously an NBA champion." Like who would have thought, and you know, sports was my thing back in the real world, right? I was used to playing baseball, basketball, and football all year

round. In this dream, the fact that I was literally an NBA champion was like a whole other world because it was literally my dreams coming true, but yet again in the dream.

The dream scenes began to shift quite quickly, and after I was fitted for this NBA championship ring, the scenes shifted into something that looked like a very peaceful field. In this field, it was kind of like lots of flowers, and green grass, and really amazing trees that were just starting to sprout, like in the spring. The air was so fresh, and everything just felt so peaceful. As I started walking through this field, I saw this little white figure just prancing around laughing, and I'm like, who in the world is that? As I walk up a little further, I notice it was my niece.

Back in the real world, a few months before this incident, my niece was stillborn, and it was at the time the most heartbreaking thing I had ever experienced in my life. I was 12 years old in all of this time frame, and having to experience the loss of a niece was like the loss of life itself. So, back into the dream, the fact that I was able to see her alive and dancing and happy and seriously so full of life was a whole other experience within itself. That's what brought me so much more peace, knowing that she's happy where she's at, and she's safe, and she's living in every way possible.

Then again, the dream began to shift a little more, and this is when I began to experience the feeling of laying down, kind of as though I was in a hospital bed. There was a person who came up to my side, and he said, "Hey, Nathaniel, you want to go out and get some fresh air?" I was like, "Hey, let's do it." You know, it was hard for me to breathe, it felt like there was a lot of pressure on my chest. So, he placed me in a wheelchair, wheeled me outside, and it was yet again the most amazing sight I had ever seen before. It was really just an amazing sunset looking into life yet again. I mean, it looked as though it was a new day, and the most peaceful day ever. All that feeling of pressure on my chest, it felt like it was completely gone, and I could breathe in every single way, like not just your normal breaths either. I mean, it was so freeing, and so calm, and so much peace, like there was nothing greater that I had ever experienced before.

Then again, the dream shifted, and it was like I was rebuilding my body within itself, like I was in, in the oddest sense, it was almost like I was building a Lego version of myself. I was rebuilding myself in such a great way that I would be able to live the best life possible, right? I would be able to go out and impact so many people because not only was I doing great, I was able to multiply how I was feeling so that other people could feel great too.

Then, as dreams continued shifting multiple times, I'm telling you, I cannot remember how many dreams I had because they were all so great and just so much peace over and over, so many miracles. Then, when I thought the dream scene was shifting again, this is when I had literally come back to reality. I had woken up in the real world. It was during that time that I came back to the real world when I couldn't hear anything, and I definitely couldn't see anything. My world was completely black.

The craziest thing, though, was I still had all of those feelings of the dream. I felt so much peace and so much healing, no pain, and it was like, yet again, I was in a whole new world. Even though I couldn't see, it's not something that made me come to any fear or any type of worry or doubt. Then, I heard my brother come up to the side of me. I could hear straight through his voice, knowing that it was him, and he asked me the question, "Do you know what happened to you?" I sat there for a minute trying to think, and my first thought was that the school blew up. So, I told him, "The school blew up." His response was, "No, you were shot." That particular statement didn't come as much of a surprise to me because I knew something had happened, I just didn't know what exactly.

But where the true shock came in was whenever he told me who was behind the weapon. This was a kid who you thought would never hurt a soul. I mean, he was so smart that this was a kid you would think would go to an Ivy League and become something absolutely incredible and change the world for the better. Once I took quite a while to process who was behind the weapon and what they had actually done, yet again came flowing back that sense of peace.

One of the things that I am always built on, which serves as a big portion of the foundation of how I live, is forgiving people. The reason that I forgive people over and over again is because I know that anytime I'm in the wrong, because I know I'm not perfect, and I never will be, but it's because of God that I am forgiven, and I get the blessings of life while also knowing even when there's hardships, anytime the enemy comes back to steal, kill, destroy, to create any type of evil in my life, that God is always with me, and he's going to walk with me through it. I know that I'm forgiven, and if I have the blessing of being forgiven, then I too shall forgive.

I didn't know why exactly the shooter decided to take the gun to school that day and cause harm to other people, but one thing I did know is that the guy that I knew who was amazing and awesome, always with a smile on his face, and going to do something good in the future, he was still in there somewhere. So, I forgave

him, and I knew that in the future, if he is willing to give his life to God, then he too will experience all the blessings and be welcomed back into his kingdom.

Now, when it came to this point of forgiving, I also realized that yes, I may be completely blind moving forward, yes, I may experience significant pain, and who knows what other journeys were ahead through this healing process because I knew it was going to be a long time, whether it be a few weeks, few months, few years, or a few hundred years. By then, hopefully, I'll be back with the Lord because we know that life is not 300 years, not here on earth anyways, because in heaven, we have eternity with the Lord.

Now, with the healing from that point forward, it was like, I don't even know if miraculous is the right word because it was so much greater than that. Again, doctors were always telling me that he may not be able to walk again, talk again, eat again, this, that, and the other. Once I was back into this real world, every time they told me I couldn't do something, that very next hour, and at the very latest, very next day, I was doing it.

As soon as they told me in my presence that I wouldn't be able to walk again, my nurse had come straight over to me, we got up, I carried my little IV thing with me, and I walked around the entire lobby of the intensive care unit. They told me that I wouldn't be able to eat again, and the very next day, I was chomping on some French fries. Like, French fries are the best, seriously, and the fact that I was able to eat them was insane. But this is where it came kind of crazy too because as I was eating these French fries, I noticed that my mouth didn't open very much, like literally all I could fit was a French fry, and it was kind of a bummer, right, because I was like, "Okay, where's the burger?"

But I realized that my jaw was actually locked shut, being that I had not moved it in now over 2 weeks. There were so many challenges, a lot that I didn't even realize were going to be a thing, but one thing I did know was through every single challenge, that I would be able to make it through it because God was with me every single step of the way.

One thing I later found out was one of the nights while I was medically sedated, there was an amazing pastor who came and spent an entire night with me, allowing my family to go back to the hotel room and get some rest. He did not sleep one second of that night because he spent every single second praying over me. As soon as I found that out, not only knowing that God's presence was with me, but that he sent many other people even outside of that amazing pastor to pray with me and live with me in faith was also the time that my faith

transformed into something completely new. So new, in fact, to where I knew that again, no matter the challenges, the struggles, any type of people or things of the world that tried to influence me in any type of negative way, that God was going to get me through it, and that's what ignited my Christian faith.

Now, moving forward a couple of weeks at this point, my healing was quite steady, it stabilized pretty well, I was on track for great things. This is when they loaded me back into an ambulance, and we headed all the way up to Dallas, Texas, to what's called the Baylor Rehab Center. This was a place where I was challenged with regaining a lot of my physical strength because of the fact that I was laying in a hospital bed for now at this point two and a half, maybe 3 weeks. I had lost a ton of the muscle throughout my body, and so this is where it was a little challenging for me to walk, just trying to muster up that strength to not only get out of the bed but also carry my steps.

Being the fact that I had lost all of the muscle and a lot of just my body overall, I had lost approximately 50 to 60 lbs just over that 2-3 week period. As soon as we arrived at the rehab center, this was quite an amazing transition from a hospital to a rehab center. The reason being was because on that entire trip over to Dallas in the ambulance, I was laying down, and thankfully, my dad was able to join me on that trip, but I continued messing with this weird little thing that I felt on my face the whole time. He was like, "What are you messing with?" And, oh, nothing, trying to put it off as though it was literally nothing, but I just kept playing with the top of my eyebrow.

As we arrived at the rehab center, I handed him what I had just literally pulled out of my face, and what it actually was, was a fragment of one of the lead pellets that was sticking out of the top of my eyebrow, and I didn't like it, so I took it out. So, whenever I handed it to him, he asked me, "What in the world is this?" And I told him, "I'm pretty sure it's a pellet." It was crazy because we just started laughing, like, "You seriously just pulled that out of your face." But that's what helped me to make a smooth physical and emotional transition into this rehab center because, yes, I did know I was challenged in a physical aspect of having to regain a lot of that muscle and put some weight back on during that time.

But there was also something that I didn't quite realize whenever I was in that rehab center, and that was because, I mean, the fact that my body had been impacted in so many types of ways. Again, there was the pellet at the center of my brain, multiple over a thousand pellets all throughout my body from the top of my head down to my waist. Specifically, with the one in my brain, this is where they told me I needed to undergo some type of mental rehabilitation, and I was

quite confused because I'm like, wait, are these people saying I'm not all there, like what are they implying by that? But then, once I grasped the concept of like, okay, that makes sense, so let's do it, that's when the next day, after a great night's rest, I went into my very first mental rehab session.

It was crazy because the very nice lady, she asked me the question, "Do you know who the president of the United States is?" Here we go, me always trying to make everything goofy, I told her, "George Lopez." I busted out laughing, but she didn't, she didn't think it was very funny, and I told her, "Just kidding." Because at the time, of course, the president was Barack Obama, so I did state that, and then we were like, "Okay, we're back on track." All she told me was, "That's pretty funny, don't do it again." So, as we went on, they realized the fact that thankfully, I didn't lose any memory, I was completely aware of my surroundings, and I was plenty capable of doing most everything on a mental type of level.

Now, the next session I went into was for physical therapy, and this is where it was quite challenging, right, because I still couldn't see anything whatsoever. It was almost like walking around with your eyes closed, plus a blindfold, plus some sunglasses, and who knows what else. So, I did a lot of feeling around, always trying to physically see where I'm going without literally visually seeing where I'm going. The physical therapist, there were two of them, in fact, and I remember them clear as day because they were so supportive in so many types of ways. They would grab my hand and take me around all of these different obstacles they had for me, and even when I felt the challenges of overcoming the literal physical obstacles that they put up for me to physically get around, I knew that yet again, there was a guardian angel somewhere working through them, within them, because they are the two that helped me physically get back to where I needed to be to return home.

So, now at this point, I've been in the rehab center for approximately 2 weeks, and during this time, I started messing with the top of my head here. I felt some type of liquid substance, and I'm like, what in the world is this? So, I told the doctor, help, I have brain juice leaking out of my head, and the doctor was like, Nathaniel, no, you don't, you're fine. So, the next day comes, the doctor walks in, and I'm like, "Doctor, there's still brain juice leaking out of my head." So, he looks further, and he's like, "Wow, Nathaniel, you should take my job because there is, in fact, brain juice leaking out of your head."

Once he examined just a little bit further, this is when they had to send me back into an ambulance over to the closest hospital, to where I had to undergo a procedure to not only close the incision that they had made on the top of my

head prior, that was now attempted to be held together by staples, but they also had to insert a ginormous needle into my spine in order to test and hopefully prevent any type of spinal infection. I can tell you, as soon as I woke up from that procedure, that was likely the worst pain I had ever experienced in my life. I couldn't sit up straight, any type of movement I made in any type of way was excruciating, and no matter how much pain medication they pumped into me or had me consume, it wasn't working.

So, yet again, loaded back into the ambulance, went straight back to the rehab center, and that's where I did a lot more recovery just from that surgical procedure alone. After a few days, I was thankfully able to come out of that pain and get straight back to some physical therapy, go through a few more sessions of mental rehab. At this point, we were also using this interesting little tool that would go into my mouth to pry it open, that way I could one day get back to eating a burger instead of just French fries.

Now, at this point, we were at such a stable period of time and such a stable point in my healing process to where I was already ready to be released. As soon as I was released, we got to go to this amazing place called the Ronald McDonald House, and we spent a couple of days there. Over that couple of days, it was truly an incredible experience that I will never ever forget. I say that because there were a few very influential people who I was able to come in contact with at that time. One was the head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, literally coming to visit me there at the rehab center, played catch with him to the greatest capacity that I could, right, but he brought me all of this merch of jerseys and footballs and just tons of fan gear from the team and signatures from multiple players.

The coolest part was not only that he was there, but we were gifted some tickets to go to the next Dallas Cowboys game as soon as I was ready to make that type of trip following the remainder of my healing journey. So, then after that amazing experience, the next morning, my mom got a call, and she said, "Here, Nathaniel, it's for you." As soon as I put the phone to my ear, he says, "Hey, this is your favorite player from the New York Yankees." I was in complete and utter silence because the fact that I was just talking on the phone with my favorite MLB player of all time was seriously like unreal. Nothing seemed real at this point because I'm like, how are these people able to not only contact me, but how do they know of this story, and how do they know what I need to hear? I knew that God put him there, God put him there to let me know and yet again reinforced the idea and the belief that he is with me through every single step.

There was only one thing left that we had to do, and that was to go into an outpatient clinic to where I could get an eye surgery that could potentially restore a small portion of my vision. The doctor's hopes were kind of mild, my hopes were through the roof, and I know that all of my family being there was going to make something miraculous happen. So, I was given the medication to put me to sleep, and it felt like a matter of 2 or 3 seconds, my eyes were right back open, and all I could do was smile and cry, and who knows what else came flying out because of the fact that I could see light out of my right eye, something I hadn't seen for now over 5 weeks.

It was crazy because my sister and my mom and my dad, who I hadn't seen visually in that five weeks, I could see them, and it was like I was meeting them again. It was like a whole new experience, and yet again another whole new world. After we went through some kind of debriefing discussions with the doctor, he told me that sadly, he wasn't able to restore vision in my left eye, but thankfully there was so much more hope for my right eye, not only then in that moment but also moving forward in future years with future medical advancements.

So, then we took a really nice trip back to Luk where I had to do some sort of post-op and post-medical treatment for now the past 5 weeks. That very next day, so we went to the hotel, had a great night's rest, and we went and seen my doctor that next morning. He told me that my healing has completely been miraculous, like something medicine can't even explain because not only was I alive, not only was I partially seeing now at who knows what type of visual reading, the fact that I could see anything, and the fact that I had a smile on my face every single day over that five weeks, he said they never seen it before, that I experienced war injuries that, you know, the brave men and women sadly have to come back with at times, but they sadly don't get to continue on with their lives. Yet, he knew no matter what medicine told me, that God had a purpose for me, and that's why I'm still here.

So, once we were done with that, it was finally time to return home. We could leave without having to ride in an ambulance, we could leave without having to have an IV inserted into either of my hands or feet or neck or who knows where else. It felt like a breakthrough. We were driving back into Roswell, we were way on the outskirts still, but we had stopped, and my parents and my sister and I, we got out of the car, and they told me, "Hey, you have some people here for you, we're going to get in a different vehicle, and then we're going to keep driving, and just so you know what this vehicle is, it's an awesome truck, you love these, this specific truck, and they're going to drive us all into Roswell." So, I was like, "Oh,

my gosh, that's really cool, the fact that we get to be in this new awesome truck and take it home with us, just so cool."

So, we kept on driving, and all of a sudden, I heard these sirens, and I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, were you going too fast, are we getting pulled over?" But no, it was actually all of the first responders that were with me that day escorting me back into Roswell. It was so crazy because as soon as I started hearing the sirens, they were like, "Okay, it's time to roll the windows down." I'm like, "Wait, what for, it's freezing." They were like, "Just wait." As soon as the window came down, all I could hear was clapping and shouting and singing and who knows what other amazing sounds that were coming from literally every single speck of physicalness around me. It was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people throughout the Roswell community welcoming me back home from the very point where we entered Roswell all the way to my front doorstep.

It was crazy because not only was I reflecting back on all of these amazing influential people that I've been surrounded with this whole time, but literally the entire town was there waiting for me to come back to see how great I was doing because of his goodness. There were people along the way, as time went on, who questioned not only questioning God's power but also questioning what I could do, but that was something that never failed to bring me some sort of question. However, one thing I knew, and I'll continue to say this each and every day of my life, is God is with me, and I'm going to make it through it.

Thankfully, as soon as we arrived home, it was really about getting reacclimated to the space, right, because at this point, now we were away from home for five weeks and three days. So, now home felt a little odd, but it felt amazing too, knowing that I was home without anybody having to stick me with a needle or who knows what other type of medical treatment, you know, wrap my head with gauze, or insert more staples, or who knows what else they were doing to me. But it was crazy because of the fact that not only did I continue to experience more influential people coming and visiting me while I was home, I also got to start attending church again.

It was crazy because as soon as I went back to church, I knew exactly who they were because the pastors were the exact ones who went to visit me in the hospital during those first few nights that I was there. From that point forward, I knew no matter who came across, who I came across, or what happened in the world, or what I was going through, I knew that that was my home church, and I would never consider any other church my home. The pastors and the rest of the church staff there, as well as all of the other fellow believers, brought that home

so much comfort, and I knew that not only going to church would I get to connect with these amazing people, but I got to strengthen my faith in the Lord and get to know him that much more.

Faith is such a powerful thing, and as I continued going through life, I mean, my faith only continued to get stronger because my family had experienced so many wild things even from that point forward. You know, sadly, my sister had to experience the crazy shooting that happened in Vegas back in 2017. Thankfully, her and her friends were not physically injured, despite all the other people who were sadly killed that day. But one thing is, they did have to witness everything from a visual perspective, which stays with them to this day. One thing I try to share not only with my sister but with her friends and with everybody else at that specific event, and even outside of that, all people throughout the world who experience any type of tragedy like that, whether it be a shooting of any sort, whether it be any type of other harm, stabbing, any type of crime that's committed against you, know that God is with you every single step.

As I say that, it makes me reflect back on my time of going back to school. You know, at this point, I was thankfully back home, still meeting influential people, especially there at church, but then I also realized that it's time for me to get back to education in some way, shape, or form. I mean, 3 months or so had passed, we were through summer break, and I was getting a lot of questions pertaining specifically to my education, like, do you want to be homeschooled, do you want to go back to school, which school do you want to go to? There were a few conversations we had with the superintendent at the time, as well as other people there throughout the school board. They were sharing with me the fact that I could go to any school of my choice, and they wanted to do whatever they possibly could to ensure that I felt safe.

My choice was to go straight back to the school where all of this happened because I knew that not only was I going back to the school where I nearly lost my life, but I was also going back to the school where my life was saved. There was one thing that kept going through my mind, and that was the fact that just a month before it was time to return to school, we had to go into a courtroom with the very kid who nearly ended my life. This was the time that we also had to share all of our struggles, all of the bad experiences that we had now over the past 5 to 6 months, to testify as to why we believe the shooter should be held in custody for a set duration of time.

It was challenging because at that point, I was always trying to look at the positive in every way, shape, and form, and the fact that I was being asked to dive

back into every single negative thing that I experienced during that time, whether it was a mindset or a physical challenge or any type of potentially spiritual challenge that I was going through, this was something that wasn't of my element. I wasn't used to being against people and telling them of all the wrong they've done because, I mean, the fact that I was 12 years old, I hadn't done much wrong per se, but I knew I was still in the wrong in some areas of my life. So, how can I tell other people they're in the wrong whenever I feel like I've done wrong myself?

Once the sentencing was over, I had some closure. I still had some lingering questions, but I knew one day, whether it be a few years from now or once we're up in heaven, but I knew one day I'd find out the answers to the remainder of my questions. So, as I returned back to school, I still had some of those questions lingering in my brain. What if we're no longer safe here? What if I go back to school and something else bad happens again, not only to me but my fellow classmates? But then I realized, why in the world are you letting these questions run through your brain, Nathaniel? Pray to the Lord, and he'll answer your questions, and even if he doesn't answer them in that very moment, know that he is still with you, and everything is going to be okay.

So, that very morning, it was time to return back to school, suited up in my bulldog gear, and happily went back to school. No fear, no worry, no pain, no anger, nothing but ready to get back and see my friends and learn to grow my knowledge so that I could one day become something great. I did, in fact, do that. However, there were some challenges here and there, you know, especially when it came to the social realm of things. Before the incident happened, I mean, I was this crazy social kid, I would talk to anybody and everybody you could think of, the stranger on the corner of the road, the person that I claimed I had known for years even though I just met him 5 seconds ago in the grocery store. You know, I was so social in every type of element.

Now, when I returned back to school after this incident, it was a complete game changer because now I was entering school with very little vision. I mean, at this point, I'm still completely blind in my left eye, I had these ginormous Coke bottle glasses, I loved them because they made my eyes even bigger, which I thought was funny. But when it came again back to the social element, people were looking at me very differently. You know, they would see the different scars on my body, all of these little pellet marks, the big glasses, my face slightly disfigured. So, when it came to this point in my social life, I kind of tended to close myself in a box very unintentionally because now I couldn't see people's faces. So, somebody would come up and say, like, "Hey, Nathaniel, welcome back to

school," which I loved and very much appreciated, and I wanted to talk to them like for hours, but I couldn't tell who they were unless they told me who they were.

So, time went on, and this is even now entering into high school, to where I didn't have as many friends as I used to, but the friends that I did have, they knew how I operated, and they respected that to the point where they would come up to me and be like, "Hey, Nathaniel, my name is XYZ," and we would jump into hour-long conversations, half the time talking in class to where my teachers would be like, "Nathaniel, we need to quiet down a bit, okay, sorry." It was also throughout my time in high school when I realized this is telling me who my friends really are and how to approach social life moving forward.

You know, it was a challenge because now a few years had passed, I was still somewhat in this little self-isolation box, and it was hard to be social overall. But then I started becoming a little more comfortable with just going up and talking to people like I used to and seeing what kind of amazing conversations we could muster up in that moment. Little did I know, that's when I'd have some of the greatest conversations in my life because now I wasn't holding myself back, and even the doubts that I had placed on myself or the enemy tried to come in and throw in there, it was like flicking it out of the way and moving straight through any obstacle when it came to my social life so that I could continue being a voice for God.

Now, as we transition into my college life, I had felt this feeling that I have such a big calling, and at first, you know, I had entered college as a biochemistry premed major with aspirations of becoming a pediatric trauma surgeon, specifically back in the pediatric intensive care unit where I was now 6 to 7 years back. But I noticed within that first two years of my education in college that there was so much trouble and struggle and a small sense of fear, and I'm like, wait, fear is not of my element, and neither are these struggles, like what is going on here? I realized in this period of time that medicine was not where I was supposed to be, but I realized that I was studying the wrong thing because that is one specific area where I didn't allow God to influence me and truly listen to where he was guiding me.

So, after that first two years realizing that, I'm like, "Okay, I've got to do a lot of prayer and everything I can to truly hear where God is leading me to be." So, I ended up transferring to a different university, changed my major, that specific course of study didn't seem right either. One day after class, I had gotten a call, and it was this lady from a church over in Nashville, Tennessee. Never have I met

this lady, heard of her in my life, but she said she had seen my story online, and she wanted me to speak over Zoom to her entire church.

So, I took probably a good two weeks, laid a strong foundation of what this message needed to be to this church through hours and hours, if not days on end, of prayer through every single word that I wrote on that paper. After sharing that message and hearing the way that they reacted, I knew that that was my calling, that I had a message to share with the world, spread the good news, and help to change people's lives in a way that not only will their life become better, but it'll also lead them to the Lord.

So, that's when I declared my major of entrepreneurship and communications, and this is where I knew I needed to build something big, and it all started with sharing my word, my message, all coming from God's word in the church. So, at this point, I built a business, funny enough, called Nathaniel Speaks, and in this business, it was my mission to go to every school, every church, every business, anywhere where I could go to share my message so that together we can create a better world.

As I sat back thinking of all the good that this was going to bring, I realized, what would I go back and tell my 12-year-old self? Because through all those years from 12 now to about 21, I felt lost in the direction of where I was being called. So, telling my 12-year-old self today, I would tell him, "Understand that life is a process, and no matter the storm, no matter the hill, nor the valley, God will guide you every step of the way. Don't worry, don't fear, he is with you." Together, you will change the world.

Now, today, I go out and share that message, like I mentioned earlier, to schools, churches, businesses, anyone who's willing to hear it. In fact, it wasn't much long ago that I published my book titled, "In the Blink of an Eye," because it is literally in the blink of an eye when our lives can change for the better or for the worse. I even started up a program where not only do I get to share my message, but I also get to share resources with all of those schools and churches and businesses of how they can continue building stronger systems in order to keep people that much more safe.

The other cool thing that I'm proud to say I'm working on now is a podcast where I'm going to have the opportunity to speak to many different people, whether that be students or parents and guardians, teachers, any type of educator, anyone within the school system, health care professionals, mental health care professionals, law enforcement, first responders, the list goes on and on. But my

goal with this podcast is to start a conversation on how together we can keep everybody safe at school and at any type of events they attend, whether that be a church service or a concert or anywhere outside of their own home, and even inside of their home, where they can be completely safe to live the happiest life they can live.

My name is Nathaniel, and Jesus is enough.

Host:

Hey, thank you so much for joining us today and watching this testimony. We hope that it ministered to you. We hope that what was spoken today has just had an impact on your life, whether you know Jesus or this is your first time hearing about Jesus or hearing about what Jesus has done. We all have a story, and this story was just very impactful, and again, we just hope it ministered to you today.

If you don't have a relationship with Jesus, we want to give you that opportunity right now to say yes to Jesus. We believe that he is the way, the truth, and the life. I believe that he created you, and he created everyone, and everyone has a purpose. So today, right now, if you want to say yes to Jesus, I want you just to bow your head and just repeat after me. So, we're just going to say a simple prayer, okay? Say, "Dear Jesus, thank you so much for loving me, thank you so much for creating me, thank you so much for dying on that cross, thank you so much for being raised to life. I believe in you, I believe that you are Lord, I make you Lord of my life today. Thank you for forgiving me, and I believe today that I am a new creation. The old is gone, the new is here. Help me to live my life and to honor you. Again, I love you, and I want to say thank you so much. It's in Jesus' name I pray, amen."

See, it's simple as that, just confessing with your mouth and believing in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he's alive today. It's just as simple as just believing that, and he is Lord. I believe right now that everyone in heaven, the angels, everyone is just cheering you on right now. That's what the Bible says, that when someone comes to the Lord, that everyone in heaven rejoices. So, we rejoice with you today.

If you've watched this video and you, again, if you felt a tug on your heart, if you haven't served the Lord or anything, or if you have before and you kind of felt yourself slipping away, I want to encourage you to plug into a local church. There are people who want to welcome you and help you and disciple you into a way to

help you live a godly life. It's good for us to get around godly people, so I just want to encourage you in that today.

So, thanks again so much for joining us for watching this video. We pray that God just continues to move in your life. We pray for you, and we love you, and tune in next time for another powerful testimony. God bless.