

**Y**ou are holding what we believe is a new beginning in print media for Maranatha. Each issue will feature a new testimony. It is our goal to show you the faces of our family and to tell their story. These stories will encourage you to fall more in love with Jesus. They will sometimes ask the tough questions and will point you to the truth. Opportunities will sometimes be presented of different ways that you can change this community and stories of how one person can make a difference. "i am maranatha!" asks the question, "How can I connect with others at Maranatha?"

Our desire is that the stories told will not only entertain you, but will change your life. If you, the reader, are not a part of Maranatha, please consider "i am maranatha!" as your invitation. If you are family, let's get re-acquainted!

We want to hear your voice. Please submit any feedback or if you have a testimony to share to [sue@realchurch.org](mailto:sue@realchurch.org) or the address below.

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# i am maranatha!

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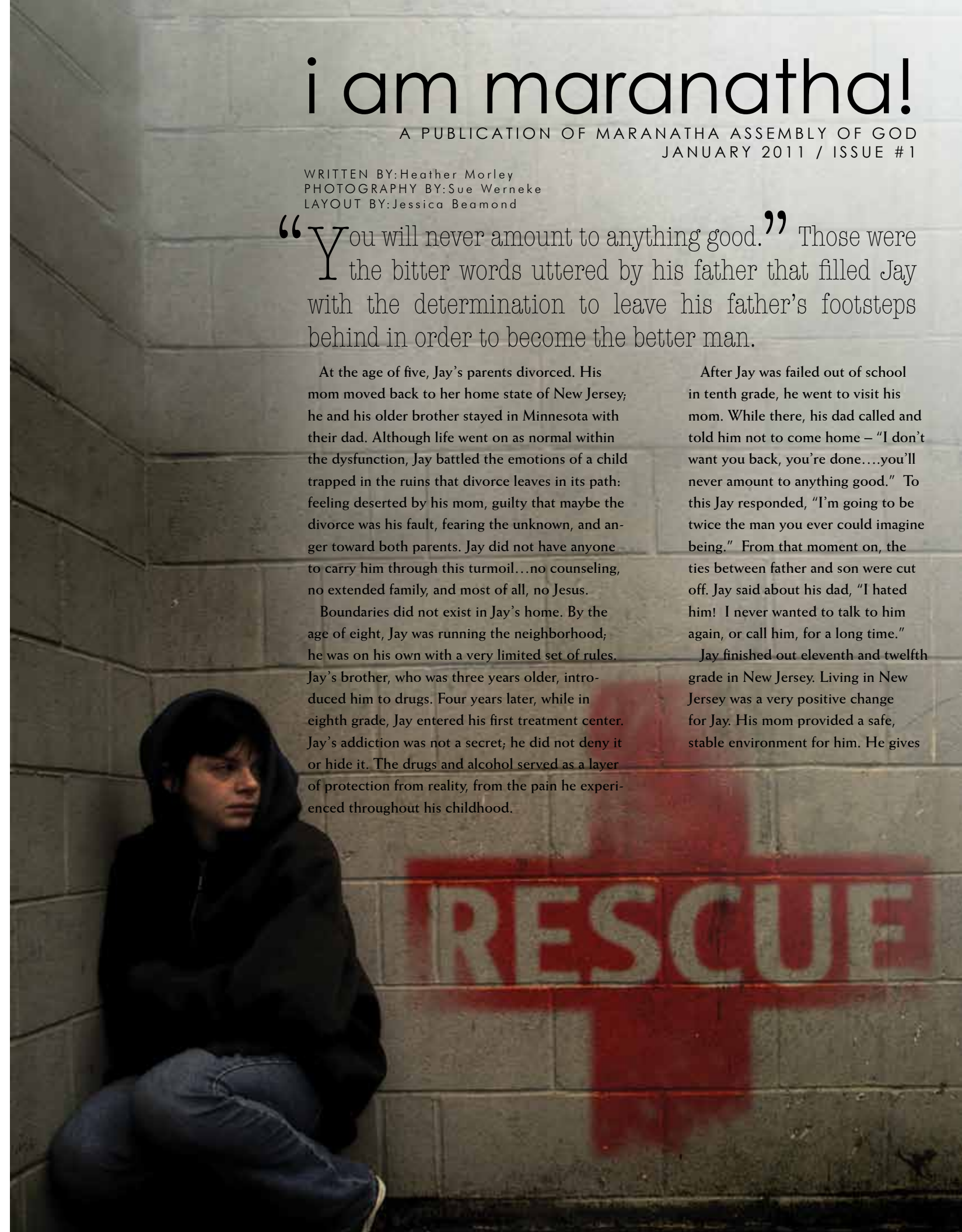
**“**You will never amount to anything good.” Those were the bitter words uttered by his father that filled Jay with the determination to leave his father's footsteps behind in order to become the better man.

At the age of five, Jay's parents divorced. His mom moved back to her home state of New Jersey; he and his older brother stayed in Minnesota with their dad. Although life went on as normal within the dysfunction, Jay battled the emotions of a child trapped in the ruins that divorce leaves in its path: feeling deserted by his mom, guilty that maybe the divorce was his fault, fearing the unknown, and anger toward both parents. Jay did not have anyone to carry him through this turmoil...no counseling, no extended family, and most of all, no Jesus.

Boundaries did not exist in Jay's home. By the age of eight, Jay was running the neighborhood; he was on his own with a very limited set of rules. Jay's brother, who was three years older, introduced him to drugs. Four years later, while in eighth grade, Jay entered his first treatment center. Jay's addiction was not a secret; he did not deny it or hide it. The drugs and alcohol served as a layer of protection from reality, from the pain he experienced throughout his childhood.

After Jay was failed out of school in tenth grade, he went to visit his mom. While there, his dad called and told him not to come home – "I don't want you back, you're done...you'll never amount to anything good." To this Jay responded, "I'm going to be twice the man you ever could imagine being." From that moment on, the ties between father and son were cut off. Jay said about his dad, "I hated him! I never wanted to talk to him again, or call him, for a long time."

Jay finished out eleventh and twelfth grade in New Jersey. Living in New Jersey was a very positive change for Jay. His mom provided a safe, stable environment for him. He gives





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his mom the credit that he made it through high school, he is indebted to her for pushing him, encouraging him, and believing in him.

Upon completion of high school, Jay went to a technical college for two years. His addictions raged on. Not only was Jay using drugs, but he was also selling them at college and at his place of employment. While living in New Jersey, however, Jay did attend church with his friends. He was seeking, but unfortunately did not know Who he was seeking; he did not understand what he was hearing in church, and thus, his questions went unanswered. Jay successfully completed technical college.

During this same time, Jay met his first wife. After realizing that she was pregnant, they moved back to Minnesota. Now that Jay was back in Minnesota and again surrounded by unhealthy influences, the addictions became stronger than ever. After being married less than a year, his wife left him. She took their son and moved back to New Jersey; she did not want to have anything to do with Jay and would not allow him to see their son, Alex.

Despair and devastation

overtook Jay. He had hit rock bottom; for him, this meant being homeless, jobless, angry, and constantly high. He was fired by his brother, who at the time was in treatment for his own alcohol problems. The business was being run by his brother's father-in-law who called Jay and said, "What are you going to do?" That simple phone call smacked Jay into reality. He entered a recovery program at Unity and devoted the next three months to getting himself clean – he lived and breathed the program.

After treatment, Jay still had no real knowledge of who Jesus was, he began seeking Him with more intensity. For years, he went with his second wife to the Catholic church. Jay stated, "I went, seeking, sitting, asking questions. I always had questions. Despite not getting any answers, certain things made sense because they connected with the twelve steps in AA. One time he turned to the person next to him and asked, "Why are we doing this? What is it all about?" This individual, who had been in the church for forty plus years, did not have an answer. Since nobody could satisfy his thirst for answers, he figured there had to be more, and he set out to find what he was missing.

In his search for truth, Jay was led to Maranatha. Through conversations with Wendy, a friend who would later become his wife, Jay decided to check out Maranatha. Jay was in the final stages of his second divorce. He was completely lost, his mind could not focus, and yet somehow he found himself walking through the church doors on a warm Wednesday evening. Jay recalled, "I remember it to this day, perfectly. I'm standing there, and I'm like 'I'm here'... it's busy, it's Wednesday, just right before service...and PT walked through the crowd right to me. It was like the Red Sea, because everyone just stepped out of the way, and he came right to me." Pastor Travis talked to him briefly and prayed with him before going into the service. For a moment, Jay literally could not move his feet. Once he was able to, he went in to find out why God had brought him here.

It was on this first Wednesday that Jay came face to face with God. Jay said, "During worship, I was flat on my face, saying, 'Just take over, I'm yours.' I was just giving myself to the Lord." That was the turning point in Jay's life. Jay recalled, "I told God, 'I can't do anything right, so You're going to have to tell me what to do,' and that's where it started."

After surrendering his life to Jesus, Jay realized his need to forgive. In his mind, he wondered why he had to forgive his dad. He kept thinking, "I didn't give up on him, he gave up on me." Yet, he knew God wanted him to show his dad forgiveness. "I'm constantly forgiving him; I'm constantly the bigger person." Jay stated. Although forgiving his dad was tough, it paled in comparison to the difficulty of forgiving himself. In reference to his son, Jay said, "Forgiving myself for my lack of judgment, my lack of good decisions, my poor choices, was tough...I was choosing drugs and alcohol and women

**"I can't do anything right, so You're going to have to tell me what to do, and that's where it started."**

over him." His son, Alex, just turned nineteen in March, and Jay hasn't seen him in eighteen years. However, Jay's niece connected with Alex through Facebook last year and shared Jay's life story with him. Although Alex is not ready to see his dad yet, he does want to meet him someday. "Being able to forgive myself and be okay, knowing he's okay, is pretty cool. That was a tough one, and it's a tough one every day," stated Jay. He has found freedom in forgiveness. Jay said, "Forgiveness is so big, and it sets me free...less burdens you carry, less guilt, less shame. You have to have forgiveness, and it starts right here with you."

Since establishing a relationship with Christ, Jay has sought to be obedient and to surrender his will for the will of God. Using Philipians 4:13 as his basis, Jay stated, "Put Him first, and centered, not just first, but center Him." Like so many others, Jay thought, "I have to get myself straightened out before I can come to Him...I'm such a mess, it's never going to happen, never going to get straightened out...Well, now I know I wouldn't have without Him...I wouldn't be who I am today without Him."

Once Jay handed the reins of his life over to Jesus, things began to change. "I'm not living for stuff, for money, the next big house, because I had all that, and it was such a burden." Everything changed; his relationship with God, he was helping others, he was using gifts that were never realized.

One of the gifts that Jay is using to God's glory is that of leadership. For the past three years, Jay has been leading the Reaching Recovery program at Maranatha. Because of his life experiences, Jay is able to show compassion to those individuals struggling with addictions. Jay put it this way, "I can forgive them and can love them because I know the mercy of forgiveness and undeserved love."

Galatians 2:20 states, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." With Christ's strength, Jay was able to abandon the drugs and alcohol and embrace God's saving grace. Rather than holding onto his addictions, shame, guilt, and anger, Jay exchanged them for forgiveness, peace, love, and mercy. Jay did a 180. Once someone said to Jay, "I want what you have." This statement impacted Jay. He said, "For someone to see that I have something worth value meant a lot...meant that I was on the right track and that people could see Christ living through me. And that's what it's all about."