

JERRY JENKINS PRESENTS



Saving Grayson

a novel

Bestselling author of *War Room*

Chris Fabry

“Poetic. Profound. Painful at times. *Saving Grayson* is a captivating story not just read but experienced, immersing me in Gray’s turmoil of trying to grasp life, only to find it slipping through a sieve of unforeseen circumstances. Chris Fabry is a masterful storyteller, capturing my attention from the first page to the very last. His thought-provoking message is clear: Even in the cruelest situations, even when we are not all that deserving, grace and mercy can be granted.”

T. I. LOWE, bestselling author of *Under the Magnolias*

“*Saving Grayson* has more spellbinding twists and turns than the scenic mountain roads of Chris Fabry’s native West Virginia. It’s a story of betrayal and love, sacrifice and selfishness, anger and release. It’s a portrait of the transforming power and very essence of forgiveness. I wept as I neared the conclusion of this novel, one I will remember for the remainder of my days.”

JEFF CROSBY, author of *The Language of the Soul*

“Our friend Chris Fabry does a remarkable job of blending fiction, mystery, well-developed characters, and the message of God’s love into an enjoyable, poignant novel. *Saving Grayson* has humor, heart, and a large dose of reality as the characters unpack the truth that God’s love isn’t earned—it’s a gift we receive. Thanks for taking us on this engaging journey with Grayson, Chris!”

ALEX AND STEPHEN KENDRICK, writers and directors of *War Room* and *Courageous*

“Chris has penned a tender and moving story about a man’s struggle to mend a broken heart. Told through the cracked lens of a failing memory, Gray finds an unexpected remedy through the healing of selfless love and the transformational power of forgiveness.”

CHARLES MARTIN, *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author

“From the first haunting line of *Saving Grayson*, master storyteller Chris Fabry mesmerizes with the tale of a man at war with the

ticking clock of his own fragile mind. Employing the epitome of his prodigious evocative skills, the Christy Hall of Fame novelist takes us on a heartrending journey of pain and ultimately hope, redemption, and forgiveness.”

JERRY B. JENKINS, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Chris Fabry’s *Saving Grayson* is a heartbreakingly honest tale of life with Alzheimer’s disease. With masterful storytelling, Fabry takes readers on an emotion-filled journey, navigating marriage and family, love and sacrifice, forgiveness and acceptance. One can’t help but cheer for the protagonist while at the same time identify with those who love him. Despite a topic that often brings fear and uncertainty, the pages of *Saving Grayson* are filled with brilliant nuggets of warmth, humor, and hope.”

MICHELLE SHOCKLEE, award-winning author of *Count the Nights by Stars*

“Fabry’s signature style shines as he draws readers into the story of Grayson Hayes’s last-ditch effort to unravel his tangled memories and make peace with his past. *Saving Grayson* is a stunning testament to the power of love and how a shift in perspective can monumentally alter the human capacity for compassion and forgiveness. This redemptive tale reminds us that the most beautiful stories we have to offer are the ones we write with our lives.”

AMANDA COX, award-winning author of *The Edge of Belonging* and *The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery*

“This poignant and imaginative story lets the reader peek inside the mind and musings of Grayson Hayes as Alzheimer’s disease slowly erases a lifetime of memories. *Saving Grayson* is an intriguing, bittersweet story, made all the more memorable by Chris Fabry’s masterful use of language. I truly loved this book!”

DEBORAH BARR, author of *Grace for the Unexpected Journey: A 60-Day Devotional for Alzheimer’s and Other Dementia Caregivers* and coauthor of *Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade: The 5 Love Languages and the Alzheimer’s Journey*

“The world of an aging writer comes full circle, from haunting guilt to the freedom of forgiveness, from lost loves to found family, from mystery to discovery, in this tender story of a man at once losing his memory and finding himself. Readers seeking a story alive with faith and hope will relish journeying along with Grayson Hayes.”

LISA WINGATE, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*

“Chris Fabry is one of my favorite novelists (and people). What makes a great story isn’t just the plot, it’s the characters who linger with you, like real people you know, or wish you knew, or are glad you don’t. Two weeks after finishing *Saving Grayson*, I’m still thinking about the characters. Chris tells an engaging and important story with a powerful ending. I’m delighted to recommend this book!”

RANDY ALCORN, bestselling author of *Courageous* and *Heaven*



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FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY[®]

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Saving Grayson is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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*We are all under the same mental calamity;
we have all forgotten our names.
We have all forgotten what we really are.*

G. K. CHESTERTON



PART 1

Page 1, Yellow Legal Pad

I keep telling them I'm fine. I keep saying there's nothing wrong. But by the way they look at me and the stirring I feel, I believe we're both right. There's nothing wrong and everything wrong at the same time.

My life is a muddy river, and the river is a story, and the water is the words inside. All we are is rivers and creeks and streams, and where we meet is the confluence of our stories, the way we intersect with one another and flow toward something bigger to find meaning and purpose and, above all, love.

I'm trying to get this out. I don't know if it's right.

Think about your life as a river. And you are being carried toward the rocks and white water.

I have to focus on what I know and what I can do with what I know. That's why I write it down. So here's what I know.

She died at the river. Someone killed her.

CHAPTER 1

GRAYSON EVERETT HAYES sat in a lawn chair in his garage, bathed in flickering fluorescence, slathered in sweat, wearing nothing but his boxers—a yellow legal pad in one hand and a nail gun in the other. He couldn't remember why.

The sweat was not just the result of the oppressive desert heat. Gray had awakened with the recurring fear that he was not the man he wanted to be and had failed at the most important things in life. And the fear compounded because he could not remember what the important things were. That had awakened him and opened his pores.

Gray's gray-speckled, sandy brown hair stuck up in the back, like the comb of a chicken. His piercing blue eyes and weathered face made strangers stop, thinking they might have just seen someone from the movies. Innocent eyes and a boyish look often belied the confusion inside, making many judge him as someone who seemed to know the answers to life's questions. Just over six feet tall, with broad shoulders, his belly slightly spilling over the elastic in his shorts, he sat staring at his hands.

Grayson was in the deepest kind of trouble, with a heart that could not rest. His was an isolated heart, not simply from those around him, but from himself as well. And he hated the distance.

The dream that woke him felt like a sign, something real that life, or God, was speaking to him. His subconscious was working on it, and he tried every day to pull the words from inside and get them onto the legal pad so he could know the truth from one day to the next and remember.

Her screams and the jumbled mess of his life had made him sit up in bed, grab the pad, and wander toward the door in the dark. He cracked his toe on a box that shouldn't have been there, and he cursed and hopped.

Stay quiet. In the dim light of the clock on the nightstand, Lotty lay with her eyes closed, chest rising and falling. She seemed so exhausted these days.

A whimper from the corner. Rustling. Paws on metal.

Dubose scratched at the kennel, and Gray reached to still him. Could dogs see in the dark? The animal settled, and Gray went to the garage.

In the harsh light he opened a leather binder, flipped to the last page he had written on in the legal pad, and willed the story to return. Dreams and reality merged, and he used them each day to decipher his life.

He studied the words, and it came to him that the dream was not the only reason he was awake. He stood and patted the vintage VW bus as he would an old friend. From a large toolbox, he retrieved a DeWalt nailer, turned out the lights, and felt his way back to the lawn chair.

Gray awoke to Lotty's frantic voice. His neck hurt, and he slowly straightened to discover where he was. Strange. He wiped his brow with the back of his hand and stared at the power tool.

His dream felt more real than not at times, but the sweat running down the back of his leg and the fear in Lotty's voice convinced him he was awake.

Light leaked around the garage door and through a side window. A yellow glow surrounded an overgrown agave.

She was asleep when I came here.

Thoughts were like birds on a fence. Try to recall something, and they flew. He sat still.

"Gray?"

He almost answered. Lotty was inside. She didn't call for him often. She always seemed to know exactly where he was. Was it the connection the two had?

The patio door opened with a *kathunk*. She called again from the backyard, her voice leaking through the window's cracked weatherstripping. *She's rattled. Afraid. Angry?*

He closed his eyes and saw her long black hair. Milky white skin. Her smile. When she gave him that flash of white, the whole world seemed to come alive. Green eyes that seemed to look through him. They said he had a disease and that it had already taken so much. But it couldn't take her. It would never take Lotty.

She called again, and he took a breath to answer but noticed the nail gun. He set it on the floor and opened the legal pad, but it was still too dark to read. Light through the window. Behind him, boxes were stacked to the ceiling. Lotty's handwriting. Kitchen. Living Room. Dining Room. Beside the old van, tools hung on a pegboard, and a red tool chest stood in the corner next to fishing rods and a tackle box.

A diesel engine rumbled to a stop outside. Brakes squealed, and there came a release of air. And like a bird returning to its nest, Gray remembered. He picked up the nail gun and sat straight.

A dog barked. Dubose. Inside. He sniffed at the garage door and scratched.

Why was Lotty calling for him? Her knowledge of him was uncanny. He would take Dubose for a walk through the neighborhood, where all the houses seemed exactly alike, and just when he felt the fear encroaching, she would appear next to him, just drive up and he would get in the car.

He opened the pad to a fresh page and jotted a note about it. Had she called out for him? Was he forgetting? That bothered him most—not that others mistrusted his recall, but that he had begun to.

Distant memories returned with frightening specificity. Images from childhood. Batting averages. Even phone numbers returned without effort, like a flashing dashboard light. The past felt closer than the present, at least some of it. The rearview mirror was gigantic, and the windshield so small. Remembering something from the present, a name, the

reason he opened the refrigerator, or even why he was in the garage, was like picking up a toothpick with mittens.

Dubose barked.

He heard the front door open, metal on metal of the screen hitting the jamb.

“Hello,” Lotty said.

Who is she talking to?

He imagined her younger, her face bronzed by the sun. A smile so bright it could blind. The years had been kind to her, but there was something cruel about aging and all it did to the eyes and the smile.

He wiped his forehead again and stared at his bare legs.

Deep breath.

Lotty spoke again. “Thank you for being on time. I’m a little scattered—I can’t find my husband. Let me show you what we have. I hope you can fit it all.”

“I have plenty of room, ma’am.”

The garage door strained, the chain clacking. Gray shielded his eyes from the sunlight.

“Gray,” Lotty said, “I’ve been looking for you. What are you doing?”

He studied the stranger in jeans and T-shirt. A pack of Pall Malls in his pocket. Dirty baseball cap. Stained hands. A diesel truck idled at the end of the driveway in front of the realty sign that said *SALE PENDING*. A long trailer was hitched behind the truck. Was it big enough to hold the tools, the boxes, and the van?

T-Shirt Guy pulled leather gloves from his back pocket. “Good morning, sir.” An easy tone. Nonthreatening.

“What’s good about it?” Gray said.

The man glanced at Lotty. “Gray, give me that,” she said, her voice soft, like a mother to a fussy infant.

“No.”

“Gray, listen to—”

“Sometimes you have to take a stand.” He pointed the nail gun at T-Shirt Guy.

“Whoa, hang on,” the man said, stepping back, hands raised. “Come on, man.”

“Keep backing up,” Gray said.

“Hey, I’m only here because you hired me.”

“I didn’t hire you.”

“It’s okay,” Lotty said. “He’s just confused.”

“Not true. You are the confused ones.”

“Gray, please. Listen to me.”

T-Shirt Guy stopped in the driveway and shoved his thumbs in his pockets, as if he considered himself out of range. Gray stood and moved into the sunlight, still inside the garage. “Look at me,” he said. “I’m glistening. That’s a good word, isn’t it? *Glisten*.”

The man said, “I didn’t sign up for this, ma’am.”

“You got tools at home, pal?” Gray said.

Eyes darting. “Yes, sir.”

“Tools you’ve gathered throughout your life, right? Some you bought. Some were given to you. Some you borrowed and forgot to return?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“What if somebody backed up a truck to your house? Loaded up your tools and the van you’ve restored? Worked so hard you could taste it? Poured your heart and soul into? How would you feel?”

The man pulled off his cap and scratched his head.

“You wouldn’t like it at all, would you?”

“Unless I hired somebody to come get the tools.”

“I told you, I didn’t hire you.”

Gray pointed the nail gun at the garage wall. Air hissed from the compressor, and the nail shot into the drywall.

Lotty jumped back and put her hands to her mouth. T-Shirt Guy retreated farther. “Whoa, settle down, man!”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Gray said. “I got people telling me what to do all day long. It makes me nervous. And you don’t want me nervous.”

Dubose barked at the door.

“I’m not telling you what to do, sir. Please, put that down.”

“There you go again.” Gray pointed at the side wall again, the nail pinging as it punctured metal.

“This is getting out of hand, ma’am. I ought to call the cops.”

Lotty said, “Give us a minute.”

“Go ahead and call them,” Gray said. “They’ll be on my side.”

She held out a hand to Gray, her eyes pleading.

“I’m protecting what’s mine, Lotty.”

“You don’t want to hurt anybody. I know you.”

Gray clenched his teeth. “You don’t know what I want. You’re against me like the rest of them.”

He saw the pain on her face, but he couldn’t spike the feeling of betrayal. “This is not right, and you know it.”

“Give it to me,” she said.

Gray pointed the nail gun at the man. “This is not happening today. You can leave.”

The man pulled out his phone.

“Who are you calling?”

The man moved behind his truck. “Just checking where I’m supposed to be next.”

“Good. You’ll be early.”

Across the street, a man retrieved a newspaper from his driveway. Gray couldn’t remember his name.

“Nothing to see here!” Gray yelled, waving the gun. “Move along!”

The neighbor hurried to his house.

“Gray, we’ve talked about this,” Lotty said. “Remember? We’re moving. We can’t take everything with us.”

“Where are we moving?”

Lotty sighed as if the weight of the world had shifted onto her back. “You need to trust me. I’m not against you; I’m for you. You have to believe me.”

Lotty walked toward the truck and spoke to the man, her voice too low for Gray to hear. Dubose barked and scratched at the door, and Gray clenched his teeth again. He aimed at the mailbox.

T-Shirt Guy ducked behind his truck at the ping.

“You can’t take a man’s tools!” Gray yelled. “You can’t take what means the most! Get out of here!”

At more barking and scratching, Gray retreated into the garage and opened the door. Dubose bounced out, tail wagging, hair bristling as he ran to Lotty. He walked beside her as she returned to the garage.

Gray moved toward her. “You don’t understand. I don’t just see wrenches and hammers and saws. And that van is more than four wheels and a transmission.”

“You told me you trusted me.” Lotty was inches from his face, eyes searching his. “We agreed,” she said, pleading.

“No, we didn’t. And you saying that doesn’t make it so. The van stays. I’m almost finished with it. It almost started the other day. And the tools stay. My fishing gear. For crying out loud, Lotty, you’d sell my fishing gear?”

“Of course not. You can use your fishing gear when we move, remember? There’s a lake near . . .” She turned from him as if trying to muster the strength to lift something too unwieldy for one person. “We can go through the tools now and keep what you want.”

“I want it all. That ball-peen hammer was given to me by my father—the only thing I’ve got left that he touched. When I hold it, I feel his hands. Why would you want to take that from me?”

Lotty stared at the wall, her face twisted. “Gray, you hated your father.”

“I did not. Who told you that?”

“You did. You’ve told me the things he did to you.”

Gray grabbed his ear. He had clear memories of the past, but others were fuzzy, like a photo taken from a car at a high rate of speed. “Okay, he was a terrible father. But I love that hammer. And you don’t have a right to take it.”

“Who gave you the nail gun?” Lotty said.

He stared at it. “I think I bought it at Home Depot.”

“Give it to me. Do you want that man to call the police?”

“They’d be on my side.”

“Gray, *I’m* on your side. Why can’t you see that?”

“Because you hired some ne’er-do-well to take this and sell it to God knows who.”

“Do you want to give it to someone? Is that what you’re saying?”

His body tightened. “I can’t make you understand, and I don’t know why.”

“I’m trying, Gray.”

She put her hands over her face and dropped to her knees on the dirty concrete, shoulders shaking. Shame rose in him like a high tide. When any woman cried, he felt responsible, as if he had somehow contributed to her grief.

But maybe she was trying to get him to do something he didn't want to do. She was . . . what was the word? Manipulating him?

"Get up," he said. "The neighbors will see you."

She sobbed now, falling apart in front of God and everybody. He scratched the back of his head with the nail gun and saw her tears were real.

"Get him to leave and I'll give it to you."

Lotty approached the truck and leaned in. The man pulled the phone from his ear, shook his head, and waved her off. Gray aimed the nail gun at a back tire. He lowered the tool and, like an old dog looking for comfort, found the lawn chair and sat. Dubose settled and laid his head on Gray's leg. The truck pulled away.

When Lotty returned to the shadows of the garage, Gray surrendered the nail gun. She held it like it was a venomous snake. "How do you turn it off?"

Gray hit the power button on the compressor.

"I couldn't find you when I got up. You had me worried. Come inside. Get dressed and we'll have breakfast."

"Don't treat me like a child. I can wear what I want."

Someone shouted from the end of the driveway, and Gray could tell from the man's red face and the veins in his neck how he felt. Lotty went to talk with him, and Gray stared at his legal pad until she returned. She sat and faced him, her eyes rimmed with water.

"What was that about?" Gray said.

She appeared to force a smile. "He wanted to make sure we were okay."

"It's none of his business! You want me to go over there?"

She shook her head and touched his leg. "I know this is hard for you. It's hard for me. So let me explain it. We've sold the house. We need to move. And we don't have room for everything. The boxes are going into storage."

“What about my books? And my desk? You can’t take my desk.”

She swallowed hard. “I’m doing it so we can be together. Do you understand that?”

“You’re saying the truck is coming back.”

She started to answer, but he held up a hand. He looked into her eyes, trying for a connection he felt he had lost. “I love you more than life itself. I know that sounds like something I made up, but it’s true. And I know you’re trying the best you know how. But there’s something . . . If I let go of these things, it’s all going to leave. And it’s not fair of you to ask that of me.”

“I do understand,” she whispered.

“No, you’re just thinking I’m not going to remember any of this. But I will, in my own way. And there are things I have to do.”

“I know all this scares you.”

“I’m not scared. Well, maybe a little. But I’m going to prove how much I love you.”

“You don’t have to prove anything.”

“Yes, I do. And I have to prove it to her. I’m going to figure out a way.”

He saw something in her eyes, as if she were holding something back, like a reservoir ready to spill over and flood whatever lay below.

“Why can’t you just let me love you, Gray?” Lotty smiled sadly and patted his leg. “I’ll put on some coffee and get breakfast. Come in when you’re ready.”

When she was gone, Gray flipped to the last page of his legal pad, where he had jotted a few notes. When he entered the house, he heard Lotty talking in the kitchen and lingered at the door.

“I know; it was my fault. I’m so sorry. I’ll pay the extra fee.”