



## **Black Sheep Diary**

### **...confessions from the back of the pen**

I have always seen things a bit differently.

I was raised to think that seeing things through a different lens was good. God made us unique. God loves variety.

Ironically, when I felt called into ministry, I felt pressure to let go of the things that made me different in favor of conformity. I had to cut my hair. I had to stop smoking cigarettes and doing drugs. I had to clean up my language and read my Bible. Of course, many of these were necessary changes and part of an all-important spiritual transformation. But I over-corrected. Some of the best things that made me, well, me, were lost in that process: my creativity, my curiosity, and my humor, to name a few.

For too many years I felt like something was wrong with me because I didn't naturally fit the mold of what I thought a good pastor ought to be. I carried a double dose of shame: I felt bad that I didn't "fit in" as a pastor type and I also felt bad about having to hide my fullest, truest self to live up to that role. I felt like a black sheep in the back of the pen.

While in public I worked hard to present a respectable front, I did find a place where I could be my truest self: I wrote journals. In these private pages, I would pour my heart out to God. These confessions took the shape of poems, each one different from the next. I never imagined I would share them with others. They were too little and too much, all at once. Surely, I thought, I wasn't allowed to say these things— often irreverent and always raw— out loud.

It took friends inviting me into their vulnerable moments to give me the courage to share my own.

I witnessed a number of my close friends walk through challenges similar to ones I had also faced. With a good bit of hesitation, I shared poems I had written in the throes of those experiences. My friends expressed deep appreciation for what I shared, saying, "you've given me words for what my soul has been longing to say." I was shocked. I genuinely believed I was the only one who felt some of these things. This taught me something incredible: when I dared to show up as my true self, not only could I help others feel less alone, but it helped me feel less alone, too.

I am still a bit of a black sheep. The only difference is I'm not hiding. I now realize a black sheep is a good, worthy, beautiful thing to be. You, too, are good, worthy, and beautiful, just as you are.

In this collection, you will find 52 poems, one for every week of the year. If you are like me, you probably sit with your emotions for a bit, and this pacing gives you space to meditate on a piece for several days if you wish. My hope is that in these confessions you will find the words your soul has been wanting to say, and maybe they will give you the courage to show up as your truest self, raw edges and all.