

My Friend Luis

Episode 15 — “Raphael Returns”

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WAYNE: Hi, I'm Wayne Jacobsen, and this is My Friend Luis — the story of one of the most engaging men I've ever met, and of the friendship that developed between us. It has transformed both of our lives and left us in grateful awe at the adventure of life on this little planet.

We are on two parallel tracks now. One is the events that happened 35 years ago that we related in the last two episodes. The other is the telling and processing of the pain in Luis's life that resulted from those events. Over three weeks, this story spilled out with all its facets as the pain began to give way to healing. That's a great story all its own, and one still being brought to completion. In that process, we've had some amazing help — first from a dog who comforted Luis in the depths of his agony, and then with a most unexpected visit from Luis's childhood friend, that he had not seen in this form since he was 15 years old. You're about to meet him and hear what he said to Luis.

LUIS: Today, nobody really knows what happened on that day. You're the first person I told.

WAYNE: You told me the story. You said, "My family's never heard this." And it came out incredibly pain-filled, like you were living through it again. The trauma of your father's death would have been big enough. The trauma of fighting off the coyotes would have been more than most people would handle. And then come home and face the rejection of your family, who hasn't yet heard that story, who believes you were a coward and you abandoned your dad in the woods, and he died, and you were a horrible son. They still believe that.

LUIS: Throughout the years, I've been trying to tell the story, and when I start talking to them, they can't take it. They said, "Please stop. I don't want to hear it. It's too much to bear." I said, "No, no, no. You want to know what happened? This is what happened." But they just stand up and walk, and they don't want to listen. My mom said, "Stop, stop, stop. It's too painful. I don't want to hear it." So I said, okay, you know, you have to hear my part, right? That they thought I was a coward. And she apologized and said, "I'm sorry." So I stopped talking about it. And don't get me wrong — I love my mom. I love my brothers. Our relationship is not the greatest, but you know, I love them very much.

WAYNE: It's hard to have a relationship when you have this huge lie between you. You know what's true. They don't. And they've made judgments about you based on the lie — that you were a coward, that you ran away from your dad. It makes it difficult to love.

LUIS: Yeah. At that moment, yes. Now I can sit here and tell you that I don't care what they think anymore, based on the conversations we had, you know — they really helped.

WAYNE: There's also a legend you found out about that's grown up around that night.

LUIS: There's a legend that the man-dog — kind of like a werewolf — killing cattle or take kids from the village. They think that the only way you can survive that mountain, it's by making a deal with them. That area, they're very religious and very superstitious. It started by saying that I killed 50 coyotes. Then it went up to 250 coyotes. No, I killed only two, and I killed them because I had to. No, there's a lot of rumors, and everybody knows that you're not supposed to go out there because of that reasons. They started rumoring things because I couldn't talk.

WAYNE: You met people today who asked you if you're that guy.

LUIS: One time there was this elder that came in on a party — my niece's quinceañera. He was there and he started telling the story, and I was right there, and he looked at me and he goes like, "Oh, Luis, is that you?" I said, "Yep." He said, "Oh, can I continue?" I said, "Go ahead. I want to hear it." I heard it more from them, because I haven't been in Mexico. They think that I was a werewolf. They thought I was a dog man — half man, half dog. And that's the reason I survived, because I fought him off as a dog. Or they think I turned into something like a bear-like, or something stronger.

WAYNE: How people interpret events in our lives is fascinating. To some, Luis had to be a supernatural being to survive the night on the mountain. To others, he was a coward. The true story, however, had yet to be told.

Did you totally suppress this story, or were you still aware of it?

LUIS: Well, I was kind of aware of it. Every time I see something dark, or at night comes in, I start feeling kind of weird. Or if I see a coyote.

WAYNE: So why did you want to share that story after so many years?

LUIS: This is one of the hardest things I've ever done. I thought I was fine, you know, as long as I suppress it and keep it down. To be honest with you, part of me wanted to always face that and say it. I don't know how I was going to react to really telling it. Sometimes I used to sit back at home and just think about it and crying. And I was like, no, no, no, because that will make me feel really exposed, without weapons. I suppressed that because I didn't want to feel that way. And something deep inside of me told me that I need to — like Captain Herrera told me once, "I want you to go out and defeat that mountain." Every time I see it, that mountain was a monument of my failure. That mountain represents a lot of things I couldn't do. I tried to do it. I tried. I really did.

WAYNE: I don't think many 15-year-old boys would survive what you survived that night. I look at it as a tremendous sense of courage, of sticking to the mission — which, you tried to save your dad's life; when that didn't work, you were going to save your dad's body, and have a body for your family to bury.

LUIS: Since I was a kid, I stopped talking about all this stuff, because people thought I was crazy anyways.

WAYNE: You used to tell the kids about Raphael, and they didn't believe you.

LUIS: No.

WAYNE: One day you tried to take them out and introduce them to Raphael, and it didn't work out so well.

LUIS: That was during recess. So what I did, I took them into this cornfield that it was like maybe a hundred yards away from the school, and I said, this should be far enough. So we got into a nice small clearing, and you see all of the kids — there were about 50 kids maybe there. I jumped on top of one of those rocks, and then I started screaming to Azael. And I screamed and screamed and screamed again. You know what? Recess went off, and he didn't show up. Man, I felt so humiliated. If they had any doubt that I was nuts, at that moment, you know, it was erased. I was completely nuts on their eyes. Some of them were calling me names, others were cursing me because they lost their lunch break. Even my brothers were there, and they looked at me and they just shook their head. No, they didn't say a thing. They just — they were really mad at me.

I stood there by myself. Instead of going back to the classroom, I actually ran up into the mountain. I was very disappointed and embarrassed — really embarrassed. I ran up into the mountain crying. Then I went and hid behind a tree, and when I hid behind that tree, I felt behind me and I heard the footsteps, and I knew it was him. So I turned around really angry, and I remember standing up, and I was trying to punch him, and I couldn't punch him. I couldn't. I just — I opened my arms, and he hugged me. And before I even said anything, he says to me, "I'm not here for them. I'm here for you." He reaches on a little pouch that he had and he says, "Here," and then he produces a piece of bread and a little bit of milk in a little container. And I ate, him telling me not to try that again — because, like you said before, I was trying to control the relationship. It doesn't work like that.

As I started talking to you, you're different. I started trusting you with these things, and you didn't judge me, or you didn't thought I was nuts. The night before I talked to you, my wife and I were talking, and she says, "Have you told Wayne the story about your dad?" I said no. I said, "He knows that he died. He died from a heart attack." He says, "But do you tell him all the process of it? What really happened?" And I said no. He says, "You know what? You should talk about it so you can heal from it." In my mind, I was like, heal from it? I mean, from what? I mean, it is what it is. And I just don't go back to that place, and that's it. But now I know why. There's a lot of healing that came from that, and a lot of stuff you said that really helped me process this better and seeing it from a different perspective.

Like for example, you mentioned the fact that, yeah, I gave my family a body to bury. That's true. If I wasn't there, or if I didn't even try, it would have been no body. Or if I would have killed myself at that moment too, would have been two bodies that were being, you know, maybe — I don't know — whatever they could find.

There was something else that you said. You said, "You know what? I want you to one day — you know, the final goal is this — that I want you to look back into that day and being able to celebrate it." And to me it was really, really hard to process that. In my mind, I was like, how could you celebrate something so horrific? But that's because I was looking at it from the first perspective, not looking at it from different angles. Based on the conversations I have with you, I can see more and more God's hand in it, versus him forgetting about me on that moment. I look back and I dwell on it, and I think, and I said, how did I survive that? I mean, is that because I had a gun? I had three or four bullets left.

WAYNE: One gun, 20 coyotes — and yeah, you had a lot of help, obviously, even though you weren't aware of it at the time.

LUIS: I was going to use those bullets on myself, because I couldn't handle it. I knew I was gone, and I knew there was nothing else I could do. The honorable thing to do here, so I don't have to endure all this psychological pain — not as much as the physical pain. The physical pain was more bearable than the psychological. The psychological pain was unbearable. It was horrible. It was like if your brain is going to explode.

WAYNE: The emotions when you were sharing this with me the first time were just like that night had happened the day before. All those emotions were as fresh as the day it happened. To be honest, I'm sitting there absolutely horrified by the story, but honored that you were letting me into the story — that you had never told anyone else about it, and now for the first time you're opening up. Which is why the emotions are so fresh, because you haven't processed. Trauma needs to be processed. It can't just be buried. In the time when the person is ready to process it, it takes someone that can really help you get through it. For those three weeks, man, I was honored to be there with you. And it wasn't just me — we had a little help from my dog Zoe.

LUIS: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

WAYNE: Every time you would lose it, I was just sitting there going, this is the strangest thing I've ever seen. Because there were times where you would just — head in hands, just sobbing and weeping at the pain of what you're going through, and the memory, and the guilt you felt. And Zoe would come from — literally, I don't know where, somewhere else in the house — she would come and sit right by you and lean against your leg and put her head in your lap. And then you would often just bend down and just hold her and just weep. And she was such a comfort to you. I just — I know she's kind of that way. She's very much drawn to pain. She's got so many people around her being in pain, and she likes to be near it, to help them if she can help. And there was one time when she laid her head in your lap, and I don't think you realize it. Your face was in your hands and you were just sobbing, and she was laying in your lap and you didn't grab her. And she turns around and she looks up at you with these eyes that were so penetrating and so tender.

She just looked at you, and then you open your eyes and you saw her, and you grabbed her and just held her again and hugged her in.

LUIS: And she was like — I don't want to go back to my dogs, for a reason, I guess. Believe it or not, he helped me through. Every time I was saying something, I felt as if I was going back, and I didn't want to go back. I don't want to go back in there.

WAYNE: That was an amazing moment, watching that whole process and what God provided — even in my dog, and our relationship, and my words, things I had on my heart to say to you that I feel like God gave me to say with you those three sessions. Very treasured memories for me. And I'm glad you've told a sanitized version of the story that we recorded the last two weeks. I mean, it wasn't to the detail that we talked about it — and rightfully so. The middle of that, when I had to leave town, the last thing I said to you was, "I think God wants to give you a way to celebrate it." I don't think that's something you have to do. I think that's something God teaches us. And it's not to celebrate the night or the horror of what happened. It's to celebrate how you got through it, and that you were successful in being able to find whatever resolution a 15-year-old boy could find with a dad dying of a heart attack and being attacked by coyotes. I think you did what the evening required of you with great courage, and that's what you honor. You don't honor what happened — because what happened was horrible — but how you endured it. And now God wanted to give you a way to celebrate that.

You've joked with me occasionally about, "I can't wait to introduce you to my friend."

LUIS: Oh, yeah.

WAYNE: I know you mean Raphael. You call him —

LUIS: Azael.

WAYNE: Azael, Raphael. You've always joked about, "Man, I can't wait for you guys to meet someday." I said, "Man, I'm in. I would love to meet someday." But did you ever expect to see him face-to-face again?

LUIS: No.

WAYNE: The last time you saw him was when he rescued you out of the tractor-trailer rig, that we told in episode five.

LUIS: That is correct.

WAYNE: You see him in dreams sometimes. I mean, you've learned things from him in your dreams.

LUIS: I do.

WAYNE: He's given you wisdom about things. You wake up with wisdom that comes in the form of Raphael in a dream.

LUIS: Right. Or things I'm going through, or things I need to do. The other time I saw him, I didn't know it was him — that's when I was eating the burritos with Jesus.

The last time we were together was on a Saturday morning. The next Friday was Good Friday. As all the Fridays, I have a youth group meeting with my kids on the church. After we finish talking and everything, I'm actually making my way to the car, and Pastor approached me and he says, "We have a vigil tonight. I need you to stay so you can be here and intercede on behalf of the youth." Part of me didn't want to do it, and I was like, really? I got to go home, and I got to prepare training for Saturdays. Okay, so I stayed. We're supposed to finish around 12. I was there and I was praying, and he stood up and he approached me and he says, "Hey, listen, I want you to lock up before you go." So I waited for everybody to leave, and I go back and turn off the lights. As I was going back to the front, I started crying. I don't know why, but I started crying. I just knelt on one of the chairs, and I started thanking the Lord for everything he has done for me. And I was there for a while.

I got up, I'm making my way to the last door. I closed it, and I noticed all the lights on the parking lot — they already turned off, which means it's past 12. I start making a turn off the building. All of a sudden, I start feeling like really weak. So there's a tent outside — to have outside services because of COVID. So I grabbed this pole and I hold myself there, and I looked down and I closed my eyes, and I started asking Jesus about it. Because before — I felt that before; I felt that weakness before, twice. So this will be like the third time. And then I said, "Lord, is this what I think it is?" All of a sudden I start feeling this strength, and in my mind I'm like, yes, it is. That's when I start seeing Azael, at first.

So I start feeling this strength, and I start feeling this strong — very strong. But I was facing towards the gate on the church, on the outside, and then the front — there's this platform that they made for preaching and for worshipping him. I felt this presence. He only carries that. At first I thought it was him, but he told me that it's not his — it's the presence of the Holy Spirit. It's not of him. "I don't emanate that. It's Holy Spirit, what you feel." I felt his presence, and I can hear him pacing back and forth on the platform. Physical footsteps, but I was facing the other direction. I felt really strong, so I just said, "If I turn around, am I going to see you? Are you going to be there?" All I heard from him was, "When you turn around, how would you view me?" I didn't respond. I just closed my eyes, and I know it's him. I know he's behind me. And I just closed my eyes and started remembering how he cared for me, how he took care of me, and how I saw him — like you and I. You know, not this mystical being, or he's not fluorescent, or he's not emanating this. No, no, no. It's the presence — it's always there, yes. But like a person, like you and me. And then I start seeing him how I saw him — like, you know, somebody taking care of me. So I start remembering all those moments I spent with him. All of a sudden, he says, "If you view me like that, then you can turn around and see me. Turn around." And when I turn around, I saw him.

Man, I was so ecstatic to see him. Don't think of it as seeing somebody like, hey, you're seeing an angel or mystic. No, no, no, no. A friend that you haven't seen for so long. A friend that really loves you. A friend that really has the best interest for you. A friend that you can call friend no matter what. A friend that he never leaves, you know — per se, I mean, a true friend. When he was there, I'm still holding on the pole. I turn around and I'm looking at him. And the way I felt at that moment, the way I can describe it, is like

this: just think of it of a rocket that is trying to take off, and it has all this energy, and it's about to explode. It's about to burst. But it's just there, idling. I want to scream. I want to do all these things. But then he started talking to me.

"You were raised in a place where the roads are made of dirt. And when it rains, it gets really muddy. But yet you learn to walk and not get really dirty. You were raised on a place where the roads are filled with potholes. But you learn to go around them, or you learn to jump over them. You were born in a place where all of the doors were being shut. But then you learn to open them. And when you couldn't open one door, you blew it off the hinges. You grew up in a place where they keep throwing rocks at you. Then you learn to bob and weave all those rocks. And when they couldn't stop you with those rocks, they start throwing more bigger rocks at you. And then you start grabbing those rocks they throw at you, and you use them to fill the potholes, so you don't step on water or step on the pothole." He says, "And then, when they couldn't stop you like that, they sent a meteor." He was talking about the night that my father died. "And when that meteor was coming in collision against you, you turned it as a tip of a spear. That tip of a spear was made out of tungsten." I don't know what tungsten was. I didn't know what that was. I had to look it up. "When that meteor collided with you, it broke in millions of pieces. And you picked up all those pieces and filled the potholes on the road." I looked them up. And it's this thing that you want to cry — but you're not, you don't cry because of pain. It's just that, I don't know, you can't control it.

So then he jumped down from the platform. He jumped like a person. And he opened his arms and he says, "Come here." I just run towards him, and I embrace him. And I don't know, if when people hear this, what they may think that you're feeling — but he embraced me with love. When I was a kid, I remember that my head hit by his stomach, and then more — when I was 15 — more like right here, under his chest; now my head is kind of like close to his chest. And I noticed — I said, "Wait, did you grew taller?" He just smiled. He didn't say anything. He just smiled, and we sit down on the platform.

And he started telling me why he was there. "Listen, the reason I'm here, it's about your dad." And he said, "Why did it take you so long to talk about it?" And I was like, "What do you mean, talk about it?" He says, "Why did you hold the healing process for so long? That's why I'm here — to bring you closure." I don't know what closure means. And then he says, "Did you know what your father was thinking the night he died? Do you know what he was thinking in his last moments?" I looked at him and I said, "No, no." "Did you know why he lasted that long?" He said he wasn't supposed to last this long. He was supposed to pass hours before that. "The reason he lasted long, it's because you inspired him." I said, "Me? How did I inspire him?" I said, "I failed." He says, "No, you didn't. You did not. You did not fail. You went above and beyond what anybody could have done." He says, "Why couldn't you bring him down?" I said, "Because he was heavy." I said, "Yes, but — well, was it because of the mountain?" "Well, yeah, that had to do with it." He says, "Well, because you couldn't move anymore. You couldn't see anything. You stay put. You defended him until morning. Your father was thinking also how proud he was of you. And he never told you that. At that moment, he wanted to tell you how proud he was of you, and that he felt safe with you."

And then he reminded me — because he told me, "I was there." He says, "Remember the time when you picked him up and he was about to pass? He involuntarily stretched his body." It was a body reaction, when he was about to pass, that he stretched. And I was holding him, and we were coming downhill, and he stretched forward. Of course, we were going to fall forward. He says, "And remember how you, on midair, turn your father away from you, and then you put your hand behind his head, and you shielded with your body. And when you hit the rock on your back and you thought your back was broken — your father wasn't expecting that. Your father was expecting to get hit on the head. He didn't feel that. He was about to die. At that moment, he was thinking, 'I'm in good hands. I don't rather be anywhere else, being held by my son.'"

So when he said that, I looked at him and I said, "Was he thinking that?" He said, "Yes, he was. And he was also thinking how much you motivate him. He saw you, how you were fighting for him. So he thought, 'I'm going to fight alongside my son. I want to fight for this too.' He tried very hard, but he couldn't. It was too much to bear. So he left a happy man, knowing that you were going to get him down the mountain, that you were going to get him in one piece. He was a man of the mountain. He knew those mountains. He knew the dangers of the night in the mountains. He knew about the coyotes, about all the predators, the mountain lions. He knew about all that. But he knew he was going to be fine, because you were with him." When he told me that, that would bring me a lot of comfort. That made me feel really, really, really good.

I said, "Hey, I've been telling people about you." And then he says, "Yeah, I know." And then I said, "How do you know?" He looked at me and he just said, "The podcast." And I said, "You know about the podcast?" He says, "I do." And I even asked him, "Are you okay with that?" He said, "Yeah, that's fine." I said, "Yeah, I'm doing it with my friend Wayne." And he says, "I know Wayne. He knows Zoe."

You know what he said about you? He says that he's there because he was placed there by design. Pieces of puzzle, he called them. He's there to help you grow, but you help him in the process as well. He says he loves your intentions behind your actions. He says, because your intentions were clean. And he reminded me of the widow who put in the two cents on offering, then the man that came in and put a lot of money in there. He says, and what — God's scoring system works that way, it's because he looks at the intention behind the action itself. It's like — is it — if somebody gives you two pennies with all of their heart, it's worth more than if somebody gives you \$2 million just to be recognized. He says that you're here for a reason. You were placed there. Everything was orchestrated by Holy Spirit. He says, "Why don't you listen to what Wayne had to say?" And when he said that, I knew what he was talking about — to remember that day, and being able to celebrate it, other than feel sad about it or mourn. And he says, "That's what I'm here for. Why don't you listen to him?" I looked at him and I was like, "What?" He says, "Yes." And then I look at him, said, "To celebrate it?" Then he says, "Yes. Being able to look back on it and look at it from a different perspective. Like he said, you gave your family a body to bury. Brought your father intact. You gave your father the satisfaction of his last moments with you. You fought with him. You fought for him. And he was very pleased. That's what you need to celebrate, and don't focus on anything else."

What he said, it really changed things and reinforced what you said. And he actually repeated what you say. When I heard him saying that, I told him, I said, "Oh yeah, Wayne said that." And he said, "I know, I know." That's when he said he knew you. From that encounter, that's pretty much what he said.

WAYNE: And you hadn't seen him in 30-plus years. Did he age at all?

LUIS: Not at all. Same thing. I touch his face different — it's kind of like, when I touch his face, like flesh, right? But it's more like porcelain type, like no pores. And then I grab his hair like this. And I said, "You haven't changed." And he looked at me. He says, "Neither do you." "What? Look, look — I have wrinkles and everything." He says, "That's not how I see you." Because he keeps calling me son.

We started walking towards the car. I was curious to see about his clothing. He always wore the same thing, you know — T-shirt, V-neck, looks like Hanes; pants, you know, like, like washed-out jeans, like Levi's. I'm not saying they're Levi's — they look like it. And also Converse shoes. I'm not saying they're Converse, but they look like. And he was wearing the same thing. Same thing. When we were walking towards the car, I wanted to see the tag on his T-shirt — see if it says Hanes or something. I wasn't going to go for his pants. That would look weird.

WAYNE: Yes, it would.

LUIS: So I reach over on the back of his T-shirt to see if it says — I don't know. And I said, "Wait, does this thing say made in heaven?" And he stopped, and he's smiling. He let me do it. He didn't say no — he didn't say anything. He even leaned over a little bit so I can do it easier. I went like that, and there's nothing on the back. And I said, "Does it say made in heaven? Or it was made in heaven, wasn't it? Where does this thing made?" He's smiling, and he laughs. And he thought it was funny. And he said — he says, "Doesn't matter. All I can tell you is that thing you see was made just to be here. That's it." I said — I said, "To blend in." He says, "To blend in."

But he doesn't really like talking a lot about certain things. Because, like, if I ask him, "Can you tell me about the kingdom of heaven?" — or he talked to me about heaven. One time — he didn't give me a vision, but he uses things from this earth. He used things from the earth, like using my senses. You know, like, he just says, "Okay," he says, "just to give you an idea of what the kingdom of heaven is." He said this: "We're going to use all of your five senses. Just remember the most beautiful smell that you have smell." He says, "You remember?" And I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, keep it on your heart. Imagine the most beautiful melody you have ever heard." He says, "You got it?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Keep it on your heart." Then he says, "The most beautiful thing you have touched, seen — using all of the senses, right? Do you have them all?" I said, "Yes, I do." He says, "Keep them on your heart. Now multiplied by the billions. And that's a cheap imitation of what heaven is."

So I was like, "Wait — no, what?" No, I was expecting for him to show me something. No — I said, "No, no, no, no, no." I said, "That's not how it works." And he says, "How do you know how it works? Based on what you think?" He looked at me and he says, "That's not how it works. I'm here to tell you all of the things that you need to see or need to know."

We kept walking towards the car, and I don't want to let go. I'm grabbing him. You know, you feel him. You know, if you touch his chest, you can feel his heart beating. Like a human — you hold his hand, and it's warm. I remember when I'd seen him fighting before.

WAYNE: Seen him fighting what?

LUIS: Well, one time I saw him kill the mountain lion with his bare hands. Yeah, when I was a kid. So I asked him, I said, "Listen, do you train? Is there like a gymnasium where angels go and fight?" Every time I use the word angels, he just looked at me kind of like, okay. He just said, "No. Everything needed, it's been given to us." I said, "So you're like hardwired." He said, "Yes." And I'm not saying I master boxing — you know, I'm really good at it. He looked at me. He says, "No, you're really good at boxing." I said, "You think so?" He says, "Oh, yeah, you are." And I said, "Yeah, in human standards, right?" And he says, "Of course, human standards." And I said, "Yeah, but you know how long it took me for me to get to the point I am?" He says, "I know." He says, "Everything worth having, it's going to cost you." I said, "You got it like for free." He says, "Yes — so I can use it not for me, but for you."

WAYNE: You kind of play around this angel thing, but you never actually talked to him about it. You have a sense that he wants you to treat him just like a human being in your life.

LUIS: He does not want to be treated as an angel, because there is a danger on it. Because humans have a tendency to start worshiping what they shouldn't. "First, everything I do is for Jesus' glory. It's not about me," he says. "It's about you and your relationship with him."

We got to the car, and I went on the passenger side and I opened the door. And he says, "What are you doing?" Because he knew what I was doing. And when I think something, he knows. I said, "Get in." He says, "No, I'm not." I said, "Oh, please do." I remember I grabbed him by hand, and I was like, "Come on, come on." And I was being playful, and he likes that. But when they're done with the mission, they don't do anything else. They owe you nothing. They love you very much, but they're done, and they stick to the mission. I grabbed his hand, and he had it by his side — I couldn't even move the hand. I knew that I wasn't supposed to. And then I asked him, I said, "Would you please come?" He says, "You should be inviting Holy Spirit to come. Not me. I'll be there."

So I closed the door and I said, "Oh, you have to go, huh?" He says, "Yeah." So I gave him another hug. And then I said, "Why can't I see you more often?" That's when he says — he says, "You'll see me whenever you need to see me." And he reminded me that he's there to take care of my needs, not my wants. When I asked, "Hey, I want to see you more often. Don't be stranger. I want my friends to meet you" — and I said, "I don't want anybody to think I'm nuts" — "I'm not here for them. I'm here for you. If necessary, I will make myself known," he says. "Other than that, don't worry about it. Close the door."

He started walking towards the street. I started the car really quick. By the time I — you know, you look in the reverse or something — and then I turned over. I even went around the block, see if I can see him. Yeah. And I was like, oh, what am I doing? And then I told you that I was trying to — I was walking purposely up in the mountain, just to see if I can see him. That's when you say, "Stop doing that. Stop

trying to control the relationship. You can't. That's not how it works." I learned my lesson. I was like, okay. So I stopped going on the mountain. So I stopped, you know, going places, like, to see if I can see him.

WAYNE: But now that you know the presence is not him — it's the Holy Spirit.

LUIS: Right.

WAYNE: That would change. It would begin to — when you sense that presence, not so much to look for him.

LUIS: Sometimes I feel him around. He's always there, but he's there only if necessary. "If you need to see me, you will see me. If I need to visit you, I will visit you," he says. "But don't try to control it."

WAYNE: And I see that all over Scripture. I think when angels appear in Scripture — if Raphael is an angel, and you think he is, and I think he is, but I hold that loosely, because I was like, I don't know how else to explain it. I've never heard of an angel spending so much time with one individual as he has with you over years. I find that incredible. But I don't know how else to explain it. When angels appear in the Bible, no one's looking for them. No one's out hunting for an angel, or sitting on a mountain seeking an angel. All of a sudden, one is there. I just read through Acts, and there's a whole lot of times when angels with the early church are helping them negotiate some of the pain in the lives that they're experiencing from the culture. I just always think that our relationship with Jesus — and if there are angelic presences around to help us — is never one we control. We just recognize what God is doing rather than try to get something to happen. Because I've found those to always be fruitless in my own life. Whenever I'm trying to get God to do what I want to do, it just doesn't work. But when you're relaxed enough to recognize what he's doing, then he surprises you with insight or wisdom or someone in your life to help encourage it.

LUIS: I ask him why he doesn't visit as much anymore. He says now he's moving away so my relationship with Jesus can flourish. Because he said, "It's not about me."

WAYNE: There's no better place to end than right there. That's what this podcast is about — not angels, not miracles, but a relationship with Jesus that's available to all of us.

But there is one loose end I want to circle back to. Do you remember the words Raphael spoke to Luis that evening, about a door that wouldn't open and how Luis blew it off its hinges? He had no idea what that meant until a week after this last encounter. Raphael appeared to him again — in a dream this time, which also connects with Luis's heart. The story he told Luis in that dream added even more to this work of healing.

LUIS: He explained it to me in a dream — about the door that was being shut that no one could open, and then I blew the hinges off of it. He was referring to Captain Herrera's heart. How Captain didn't want to love anybody else because of the business he was in. One thing I knew about that unit was that you were supposed to be an orphan. You cannot have any ties here. You have to be single and orphaned in order to be part of that unit. It was a very special unit — very elite.

WAYNE: Because?

LUIS: The cartels will kill the families, yes. They call that "plata o plomo," which means lead or silver. If you said lead, then you're saying, I'm willing to die for what I do, for my duty. But if you said plata, that means that you're willing to be bought. And that offer came to Captain many — I mean many, many — times. He always sent the same answer: no.

WAYNE: So the cartel killed his wife and his children?

LUIS: The way they were killed — I mean, I don't even want to say that here on the podcast; it was so brutal. On top of that, they killed them right in front of him. The way he survived, it's a miracle. They left him for dead. He promised not to love again, or not to get involved with anybody again, because that was way too much pain to bear. So Captain didn't want nothing to do with me. He wanted nothing to do with anybody, actually.

What Azael told me was that — "You see, Captain Herrera," he says, "he doesn't suppose to take you under his wing. He wasn't supposed to love you. He wasn't. But you taught him how to love again. You taught him how to open his heart and let somebody in again." He says, "He died a happy man." I asked him, "Was it painful, the way he died?" He just told me, he says, "You don't need to know that. All I can tell you is this: when he died, he had two things on his hands. On his right hand, he had his rifle, and they had to pry it out his hand. And on his left, he had a picture of you, and they had to pry it out his hand."

He was a great man. An amazing man. Azael told me that he didn't want to love anybody and let anybody in. He said, "But when you came into his life, you worked your way into his heart. You blew the hinges off of his heart."

WAYNE: Who knows where the story goes from here? That's life, right? It rarely follows our plans, but unfolds in ways that we can never envision. I'm grateful to call Luis my friend, and so blessed that he wanted to share his story with you. If you ever get the chance to meet Luis, however, please don't ask him about the night his father died. He wanted to visit it one last time to tell the story, but he doesn't want to keep revisiting it for people who want more detail, or who want to relive it with him. And I think there's wisdom there.

Before we go, Luis and I have appreciated those of you who have written us from all across the world, letting us know how Luis's story of God's grace has opened doors in your heart to recognize how he has been at work around you, even if you were unaware of it at the time. That's what we hoped this story would do. And let me express my gratitude for those of you who have contributed toward Luis's work with young people here in Ventura County. You have no idea what an impact that is making. And if there are more of you who would like to help Luis and Maria in an ongoing way to share Jesus with young people in this community, you can visit our donation page at myfriendluis.com.

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