

To my earthly father:

*Though you are the person who hurt me most on earth,
you are the one I long to see most in heaven.*

*May our heavenly Father grant that we meet again
as healed brothers in Christ.*

Your son, Francis

The Rock of Roseville
725 Vernon St., Roseville, CA
95678 U.S.A.

www.rockofroseville.com
www.francisanfuso.com

Copyright (c) 2008 The Rock of Roseville.
Second Edition, 2010
Cover design by Hans Bennewitz

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by the Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-0-9791957-4-7



acknowledgments

We are each the sum total of those who have invested in our lives.

Many hearts and minds have seen this book to its completion, and to all I am indebted. I pray always your labor is not in vain and that I may be a good steward of the abundant grace I have received.

As this book is being birthed, I want to first give thanks for my praying, intercessory mother. Her persistent entreaty before the Throne of Grace is why I and my four brothers and sisters are Christ-followers today. As she would often describe her passion to pray in a thick New York accent, "I'm praying my brains out!" Thank you Mom for pouring out your mother's heart on our behalf and lifting our names before God each day.

Whatever hope I have of seeing my father again is largely based on the persistence of my mother's prayers. As all of her children and spouses are still actively pursuing their relationship with Jesus for now more than 35 years, then perhaps prior to my father's untimely death he allowed God to come into his life as well. It took me half a lifetime to even want this.

There are also so many people who helped make this book a reality, and to whom I give my heart-felt thanks:

To my beautiful wife, Suzie, who heard all that is written here during its many stages of painful development. You have been my friend and counselor throughout the healing process. I am who I am because of you.

To my godly daughters, Deborah and Havilah, who are now wives and mothers in their own right. Thank you for your gracious hearts in forgiving me the many times I have asked, and covering the times I didn't with your love. I am so very proud of you both!

To Natalie Eiferd for guiding the manuscript structure through its initial phase, and to Stephanie VanTassell who finished the process, getting the book to the printer. Both have been faithful Creative Assistants for whom I am eternally grateful.

The principal editor of *Father Wounds* was Tamara Johnston. Her invaluable insights have made the book far more readable and relatable to a broader audience.

Lydia Birks has been a diligent Pastoral Assistant and proofreader.

Hans Bennewitz did a marvelous job on the cover art and layout.

I want to especially express my appreciation to the Rock Interns who read and dialogued each chapter as it was being birthed. You were the face of the many wounded sons and daughters who will find healing within these pages.

Lastly, each word of this book was painstakingly recorded, often many times over, for the audio book. The two warriors who fought to finish this excruciating process were Tass Souza and Caitlin LeBaron. I fear the sound of my voice may prompt them to write the sequel to this book entitled, “Pastor Wounds.”

But, most of all, thanks be to God, for “whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father...” (James 1:17a)

It is Your perfect love that completes me.

Francis Anfuso
francis@rockofroseville.com



contents

Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	9
Prologue	10
Chapter 1—The Wounded Heart	12
Chapter 2—The Abandoned Child	28
Chapter 3—The Neglected Child.....	50
Chapter 4—The Fearful Child.....	68
Chapter 5—The Embittered Child.....	90
Chapter 6—The Abused Child.....	106
Chapter 7—The Spoiled Child.....	124
Chapter 8—The Performance-Driven Child	144
Chapter 9—The Adult Child.....	166
Chapter 10—Mother Wounds	180
Chapter 11—Reclaiming Your Childhood.....	198
Chapter 12—The Search For Fathers	222
Appendix.....	239
Recommendations	246
Endnotes	248



introduction

Someone said that the best books are written in a man's flesh before they make their way to paper. If that's true, then you're in for a great read.

Francis Anfuso and his twin brother, Joseph, were born barely a year before their father was elected to the first of his five terms in the United States Congress. From the outside young Francis appeared to be a child of privilege. In reality, however, he was an emotionally abandoned, spiritually impoverished, virtually fatherless, fearful little boy. And as one might expect, by the time he reached his teens he was isolated and bitter, a soul on the run from pain that seemed to run faster.

Thankfully there was a third runner in the race, and in 1972 the grace of God overtook both Francis and his pain. He had run from one father right into the arms of Another. One might expect a "happily ever after" at this point in the story, but that's not really how life works, and it certainly isn't how Francis Anfuso works. He's too keen, too inquisitive for simple endings and gift-wrapped solutions. Far from ending his journey, meeting Jesus started the 23-year old on a bigger one.

He began digging into God's Word, asking questions, finding answers, then asking more questions. In fact, to this day, Francis can generate more questions on any given subject than anyone else I've ever known. That's why you're going to find this book so valuable. You see, my priceless friend hasn't been afraid to question himself, to shine the light of truth into the shadows of his own soul, even when it meant discovering more wounds that needed healing.

Thankfully, Francis' fearless searching has yielded far more gold than grief.

—George Brantley, Senior Pastor at *The Rock of Gainesville*

prologue

*I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong
as the need for a father's protection.*

—Sigmund Freud

I bear the scars of a forgettable father and a forgotten son.

As the wounds of a friend are faithful (Proverbs 27:6), so the wounds of a father can rob your faith and steal your soul. The assault on my childhood would prove to be the deepest wounding of my life.

Decades after my father's death, I am glad the once open sores have become the faint impressions of another life—even another person. The little, discarded boy is gone. He is vacuum-sealed in a tiny tomb of remembrance, buried beneath a mountain of “better” and not “bitter” recollections.

Even though my father missed the mark in a monumental way, I'm convinced he wanted to be a good dad. I sincerely hope we meet again.

As incomprehensible as my pain once was, so now is the joy of a healed heart. I have reclaimed much of my childhood. Once a prisoner of tormenting memories and an insatiable longing for a dad, my relationship with my Heavenly Father now furnishes all of the time and attention I need—affirming me, touching me, and showering me with every imaginable gift a son could want.

Now, many years after the battle for my childhood heart was fought and lost, I find myself an archeologist of sorts, carefully examining the remains of past emotions—the relics of relational ruins. At times, all I seem to uncover are the dead remnants of an irreplaceable past. At other more heartening moments, my excavations surface unparalleled revelations I will treasure for eternity and far exceed the value of the pain once inflicted.

As some of you read this book you will soon realize you too have an unclaimed lottery ticket from your childhood in the pocket closest to your heart. Though it will be unsettling to fully retrieve its priceless value, it will not be the sting of death that will trouble you, but the birth pangs of renewed hope.

It is the will of God that what was stolen from you will be restored, not just in your own life, but perhaps even for generations to come. May those yet to come rise up and call you blessed for your willingness to examine the inner chambers of your heartache.

My prayers go before you, as do the cries of other walking wounded who have traversed this well-worn ground before. Though history is cluttered with the cynical comments of many a broken son or daughter, we have the option of leaving our own epitaph. In time, may your final salutation to the father who wounded you be filled with the same mercy and grace you have received.

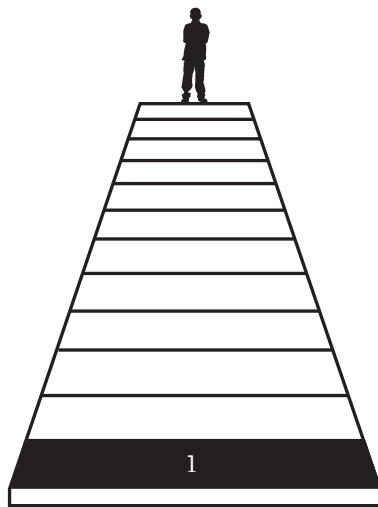
It behooves us all to "... be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Francis Anfuso

May 2008

www.francisanfuso.com

*un
si qu
e de
refin
u m
suff
e qu
gre
tinen
puzje
la a
ue es
des
ing
wen
regu
reine
l'alf
comp*



1

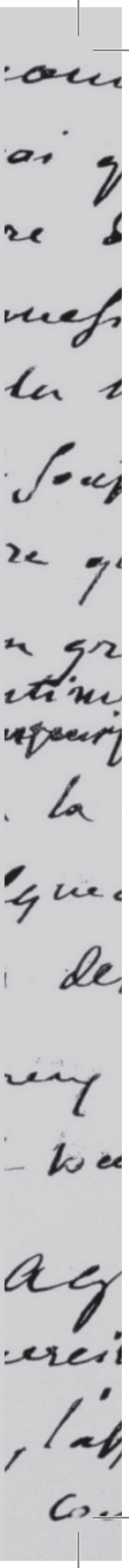
the wounded heart

Many years ago, there was a Jewish boy growing up in Germany. He adored his father and wanted to grow up to become just like him. The family's life revolved around their religious practices, and the boy's father faithfully took them every week to synagogue.

When the son was a teenager, his family moved to a town in Germany where there was no synagogue, only a Lutheran church. The church was the center of town life—all community leaders belonged to it. A few weeks later the boy's dad announced to the family that they were going to renounce their Jewish faith and join the Lutheran Church because it was good for business. The family was stunned by the father's lack of integrity, that he was willing to sacrifice principle for profit.

The father's insincere faith left the son bewildered and confused. Gradually, his deep disappointment turned into anger and then bitterness. An underlying rage would disturb the son for the rest of his life.

Eventually, the young man left Germany and went to study in England. As he simmered in resentment, he coined the now-infamous phrase, "Religion is the opiate of the people." He used to be filled with faith—now he reviled religion as the drug of the mindless masses. It was then that he formulated a godless philosophy that would ultimately oppress almost half of the world's people.



His name was Karl Marx, the founder of Communism.

Everyone Loved My Dad Except Me

My father's picture and obituary made the front page of the New York Times. Masses of Brooklyn residents lined the sidewalks in grief as a police motorcade escorted our family's funeral procession through his old neighborhood.

Shocked by the finality of his death, all I could do was sit huddled in a darkened limousine and wrestle with the tortured thoughts of abandonment and rejection. Unlike the grief-stricken people at the funeral, I was crying tears of confusion, not sadness.

Together as a grieving family, my mother, brothers, sisters and I spent what seemed like forever shaking hands with strangers. Thousands had stood in line for hours in the brutal January cold to express their condolences and then file past my father's open casket. But that cold was nothing compared to the coldness I felt toward him.

They were crying for someone I had never known.

My father, Victor L'Episcopo Anfuso, was an Italian immigrant who had lost his own father and come to America as a small child. His first job, at 10 years old, was as a shoeshine boy in lower Manhattan.

He lived with his single-parent family in a cramped Brooklyn apartment where he had no quiet place to study. Exercising incredible concentration, he would sit in a corner facing the wall, pounding the books. He refused to let his circumstances hold him back, and his driven, demanding personality propelled him from the bottom of the world to the top.

He worked his way through school, graduating near the top of both his college and law school classes. From there, he began a successful law practice that would lead to a position as a municipal judge and then to five terms as a United States Congressman. At the time of his death, he had been a New York State Supreme Court justice for five years. He was arguably the most well known Italian-American politician of his day.

You would have thought that all of these achievements in his political career would've been exciting for me as a kid. But the reality of being his son was nowhere near glamorous. My twin brother, Joseph, and I were rarely included in any of the dynamic dimensions of his life. Only for extraordinary occasions did we attend political functions.

From the beginning, it was pretty clear we weren't a priority.

Early in My Life, Late in His

As my father neared his mid-forties, his gaze was on Washington D.C., not on raising a family. So, when my mother announced she was pregnant for the fourth time, he insisted she have an abortion. She went but, as my mother told the story, returned home and gave whatever pills she had received to my father telling him to take them. A few months later, much to the disruption of his personal and political agenda, he became the father of twin boys.

When Joseph and I were born, my parents already had three older children: Victor, age 17; Diana, age 15; and Maria, age 5. Born late in his life, we were just a year old when my father was elected to the first of five, two-year terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

At the age of five, my brother and I were sent away for two months to summer camp. We would go for the next nine summers. Those times in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York were the only light in an increasingly bleak childhood.

But not even all of those summer memories were great. I remember lying in bed—barely five years old—as all of the lights in my camp cabin were turned out.

I felt completely alone.

There was no one to tuck me in.

No one whispered a loving, "Good night."

I would cry myself to sleep night after night and send letters home begging my family to visit me, signing them with a stick figure showing tears running down my cheeks.

But each night brought a little bit of heaven to earth. Cutting through the deafening silence came the sound of a scratchy phonograph record playing over distant loud speakers, “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

It was the soothing voice of Perry Como.

I listened to that same hope-filled song before going to sleep 60 times each summer for nine years—540 nights of my life. Looking back, I know it was God’s hand reaching down into the mangled life of an abandoned little boy and kissing him on the forehead. I didn’t realize then the significance of those four nightly minutes, but they really were cool water to my thirsty soul.

Why Does It Hurt?

Why are we wounded by the mistakes of our parents? Why did Karl Marx’s father’s decisions sabotage his son and have deadly consequences on mankind? Why did the coldness and disinterestedness of my father not seem “normal” but the warm truth of a simple song by Perry Como touch my heart?

The truth is, you and I are wired for perfect love. God is the Father we always wanted. He is the perfect Dad each of us desires and needs. Anything modeled by our earthly parents that misses the mark of God’s perfect, selfless love can create a “father wound.”

My dad might have overlooked me, but my God never forgot me. My Father in heaven reached out to me through the Perry Como recording and so many other times throughout my childhood. He never abandoned me, not even when I would openly deny Him.

There are all kind of parents. There are the kind who deeply wound their children: absentee, abusive, angry, authoritarian, controlling, destructive, fatherless, passive, and performance-driven. There are also many good parents.

All of us would have liked to have had an understanding, in-the-game, cheering-us-on father and mother. But most of us didn't. For the rest of my life, I'll always wish I had a dad who was a player in my life; who visited a school I attended; who was loving and caring, instead of angry and controlling.

As a pastor, I've seen the damage parents have inflicted on thousands of people I've met and cared for. I've seen firsthand the messed-up lives and broken hearts left in the wake of selfish parents. But it doesn't have to be like this. If you're hurting from these father wounds there really is hope. I know He can heal you because He's done a miraculous work in my own life. My pain and healing have brought out my life's passion: to let other people know that God can heal them of their father wounds, no matter how deep.

The Potential in Pain

Even if we don't see it, God knows the potential we have because of our pain. It can be the strength and power to motivate us for good. He can transform the worst experiences we've gone through to give us full, healed lives that are able to heal and help others. He also never meant for us to live out our lives with gaping holes in our hearts. The miracle thread suturing these emotional wounds is that whatever happens, no matter how horrible, it will work for our good if we love and follow God. The Bible promises, "And we know that all things work together for good

**THE TRUTH IS, YOU
AND I ARE WIRED FOR
PERFECT LOVE. GOD IS
THE FATHER WE ALWAYS
WANTED: THE PERFECT
DAD EACH OF US
DESIRES AND NEEDS.**

to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”¹

All the wounds in our lives have extraordinary value when we allow God to heal us. They become the doorways to His one-of-a kind destiny for our lives. God doesn’t just make all things work for our good—He allows all things to mold us into the people He created us to be.

Without suffering, we would only be shallow representations of who God intended. French philosopher Albert Camus wrote, “In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer.” I used to dread the emptiness of suffering, but now I honestly value the growth suffering has brought to my life. The long-term benefit of pain far outweighs the temporary grief it causes. All of history’s luminaries have been formed through the trials of life.

In the Old Testament, a man named Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. But he refused to let that destroy his life. He spent 13 years allowing God to heal his broken heart. So when Joseph finally saw his brothers, he was able to forgive them. Joseph saw his life from God’s perspective. He told his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”² Through his forgiveness, Joseph was able to rescue his family from famine and preserve their descendants for generations to come.

The healing hand of our Creator can redeem absolutely everything we have gone or ever will go through. Jesus intentionally allowed Himself to go through, and overcome, every temptation we

**THE HEALING HAND
OF OUR CREATOR CAN
REDEEM ABSOLUTELY
EVERYTHING WE HAVE
GONE OR EVER WILL
GO THROUGH.**

could ever experience so that we would know He understands each of our struggles. The Bible explains:

“Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, His brothers and sisters, so that He could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since He Himself has gone through suffering and temptation, He is able to help us when we are being tempted.”³

God isn't worried that my suffering will cripple me forever; He's fully confident that my struggles will help develop His character in my life. God even allows suffering to be so intense that we will do whatever it takes to get free. Freedom is part of our destiny—we were made for it.

And so is the passion to fight for freedom.

The same painful childhood memories that used to make me writhe now give me the passion to nurture and care for others. God now uses every hurt in my life to offer someone else hope. Before I was a Christian, I spent six months contemplating suicide every day; now I can share honestly and empathetically with people who feel hopeless and depressed.

Healing is For You

This is not unique to my life. God wants to heal you completely. He can use every sadness in your past to help someone in your present. Nothing is ever wasted in God's Kingdom.

I am absolutely convinced it's God's will for every person to take what the devil meant for evil and see it transformed into good. The way to reverse the

**THE WAY TO REVERSE
THE DAMAGE DONE IN
OUR CHILDHOOD IS TO
ALLOW GOD'S SPIRIT
AND TRUTH TO HEAL
OUR SOULS.**

damage done in our childhood is to allow God's Spirit and truth to heal our souls.

If I had wasted my life wallowing in the dysfunction of my childhood, I would never have experienced wholeness in my marriage and the happiness of raising healthy children. If I hadn't received God's healing, I would have passed on the same sorrow and pain to my own kids. Now I look forward to my children and grandchildren having a healthy start, not a mangled past. They'll have their own challenges, but hopefully not the baggage I was unwilling to unpack.

God wants to do so much healing in each of our lives. "To all who mourn in Israel, He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for His own glory."⁴

No one wants your ashes.

That is, no one except God.

He longs to exchange our miserable ashes for His magnificent beauty. Reclaiming your childhood is not a pipe dream. It's God's will for your life. If you can begin to wrap your arms around the possibility, God will make it a reality. He does it every day in countless lives.

The Absentee King

The Old Testament tells about a King of Judah named Hezekiah. Although he'd accomplished great things, later in his life he made a lot of foolish mistakes that would seriously cost him and his descendants.

Hezekiah had seen God do amazing things in his life. The Lord had rescued Hezekiah from an Assyrian king who wanted to destroy both him and his nation. The Lord had also healed Hezekiah of a fatal disease and blessed his life on innumerable levels. But instead of being humbled by God's kindness, Hezekiah was filled with pride. In his arrogance, he voluntarily took an ambassador from an enemy nation, Babylon, to see the treasury of Judah—the entire wealth of the nation.

It was a mistake that would eventually lead to the destruction of Judah and to atrocities happening to Hezekiah's descendents.

When the prophet Isaiah heard about Hezekiah's foolish decision, he went to the king and prophesied that all of the riches of Judah would be taken away to Babylon. Isaiah also said that Hezekiah's sons would become slaves and castrated into eunuchs. I can hardly think of a crueler outcome for disobedience than to see your own sons emasculated because of your poor choices.

But Hezekiah didn't see it that way. His response to hearing that his own prideful display would bring judgment on his sons was shocking—one of the most hurtful and selfish sentences ever spoken.

Hezekiah responded, "The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!... Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?"⁵

In essence, Hezekiah was saying, "As long as it doesn't affect me, it's fine. At least it's not going to happen when I'm around."

His reply was selfish and heartless—only caring about himself.

It's been said that "bad news gets halfway around the world before good news gets its pants on." If you and I have heard about Hezekiah's incredibly selfish response 2,500 years later, it seems safe to assume that everyone in Judah heard about it, too. Including his son Manasseh. Hezekiah should have been his sons' protector and defender. Instead, he was only worried about self-preservation.

The Violated Becomes the Violator

Manasseh lost complete respect for his father. When Hezekiah died and Manasseh began to reign as the king of Judah, he rejected everything his father stood for, including his father's commitment to God. He gave himself completely over to do evil.

A father wound perpetuated a tragic response.

The violated becomes the violator; the abused becomes the abuser. Hurt people, hurt people.

Manasseh brought all kinds of immorality to his people because of his own personal pain. “He [Manasseh] did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, imitating the detestable practices of the pagan nations whom the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He rebuilt the pagan shrines his father Hezekiah had destroyed. He constructed altars for the images of Baal and set up Asherah poles. He also bowed before all the stars of heaven and worshiped them.”⁶

And Manasseh’s violations didn’t end there. “He even built pagan altars in the temple of the Lord, the place where the Lord had said His name should be honored forever.”⁷

“Manasseh even sacrificed his own sons in the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and he consulted with mediums and psychics. He did much that was evil in the Lord’s sight, arousing His anger.”⁸

“But Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do even more evil than the pagan nations whom the Lord had destroyed when the Israelites entered the land.”⁹

Valley of Hinnom, when translated from Hebrew into Greek, is *Gehenna*, where the word “hell” originated. After several generations of idolatry in the Valley of Gehenna (hell) just outside of Jerusalem, it was eventually turned into a city dump that burned day and night!

A father wound had once again sabotaged a child, a family, even a nation.

The fires of hell continue to burn around the unhealed father wounds of our past. But God’s healing power can smother the smoldering pain in our hearts, so that even remembering is no longer painful. It may take years for the finished work to be accomplished, but God promises, “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust...”¹⁰

Manasseh’s story continues with the Lord speaking to him and his people, “but they ignored all his warnings. So the Lord sent the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon.”¹¹

We've all been led away from God by our wrong desires at some point. Hopefully we've also eventually woken up to the realization that we were enslaved to those pleasures. It was during this kind of low tide moment that the lights finally went on for Manasseh. "But while in deep distress, Manasseh sought the Lord his God and cried out humbly to the God of his ancestors."¹²

This is so powerful!

Manasseh had one shot left. One final, sane moment.
One last, clear thought.

"And when he [Manasseh] prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request for help. So the Lord let Manasseh return to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Manasseh had finally realized that the Lord alone is God!"¹³

God is so gracious! Do you realize that you can move the heart of God no matter what you've done? He is the God of the second, third, and fourth chance. "For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again..."¹⁴

What does it take for us to cry out humbly?

The Healed Become the Healers

I'm looking for a fight!

I want to tear down every stronghold in my life. I want to see God tear down every stronghold in your life, too. I want God to rip out by the roots every bondage and deception that's hurting our relationship with God and other people. I don't want to see anyone pass on wounds to others. I'll have to fight to make this happen, but it is so worth it!

2 Corinthians 10:4 encourages us in this essential battle, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." All of us are in the battle to pull down the strongholds in our minds—strongholds of fear, bitterness, selfishness, anger, lust, pride, depression, and unbelief. We can win when God is on our side.

In the Old Testament, even King Solomon, once considered the wisest man who ever lived, sabotaged his descendents because he refused to tear down the high places in his life, both natural and spiritual. The high places were spiritual altars Solomon erected to false gods where children were sacrificed. High places can still exist in our hearts where we either sacrifice our children's futures or regain the ground we once lost in our own lives.

“Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abominable idol of Moab, on the hill opposite Jerusalem, and for Molech the abominable idol of the Ammonites. And he did so for all of his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice...”¹⁵

**IT'S TIME TO RECLAIM
YOUR CHILDHOOD.**

King Solomon's son, Rehoboam, followed in his father's footsteps and “appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made.”¹⁶

Unless we tear down the high places in our hearts, we will pass on the bondages of our sin. The Bible explains how to overcome these spiritual strongholds in our lives, “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”¹⁷

It's time to regain your thought-life, both past and present.

It's time to recover from the wounds you suffered while growing up.

It's time to reclaim your childhood.

This is exactly what Manasseh did. After making a lifetime of horrible choices, he came to his senses. Manasseh was down, but not out.

“Manasseh also removed the foreign gods from the hills and the idol from the Lord’s temple. He tore down all the altars he had built on the hill where the temple stood and all the altars that were in Jerusalem, and he dumped them outside the city. Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings on it. He also encouraged the people of Judah to worship the Lord, the God of Israel.”¹⁸

If it wasn’t too late for Manasseh, it’s not too late for us.

The Perfect Parent

Because I suffered serious father wounds in my childhood, I’ve found so much comfort in these words, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.”¹⁹

I’ve claimed this verse for many years. God is different from our parents. He’s perfect—and perfectly able to meet all of our needs. He’s our Everlasting Father, head-over-heels in love with every one of us.

None of us had parents who were capable of loving us every moment of our lives. I’ve had to forgive my natural father a thousand times, even though he’s been dead 40 years.

But the work’s been done.

I’ve released him.

And although I used to hate him, now I really look forward to seeing him again. I sincerely hope to see him walking toward me when I get to heaven. I can’t wait until we meet again.

I have very few happy memories of my natural father, but the more God has healed me, the more I treasure them. I can finally stop focusing on the sad memories and instead remember the few times my father was the dad I wanted him to be.

I remember being a little boy watching TV with my dad. As we sat together, he would run his big, warm hands across my back. I can still sense how cared-for those hands made me feel. For those few moments I knew he did love me. He did care, although he was usually too busy or distracted to show it.

It took Manasseh decades to reclaim his childhood.

But he did. It was possible for him, and it is for you, too.

No matter how much pain you've gone through, it's possible for God to repair all that's happened.

Let God heal your father wounds.

It's time to reclaim your childhood.

Right now, forgive the parent who hurt you. Release the parent who abandoned you, neglected you, instilled fear in you, embittered you, abused you, didn't discipline you, or didn't believe in you.

Forgive the parent who didn't make you feel safe, didn't keep promises, didn't protect you, didn't play with you, didn't hold you, or didn't make you feel special and secure.

By releasing them, you are not putting a stamp of approval on the negative things your parents did.

But, it's time to release them. It's time to forgive. It's time to heal.

**NO MATTER HOW MUCH
PAIN YOU'VE GONE
THROUGH, IT'S POSSIBLE
FOR GOD TO REPAIR
ALL THAT'S HAPPENED.**

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe what your father was like growing up. Could you use the words absentee, abusive, angry, authoritarian, controlling, destructive, fatherless, passive, performance-driven, in-the-game?

How did this affect you and your relationship with your dad?

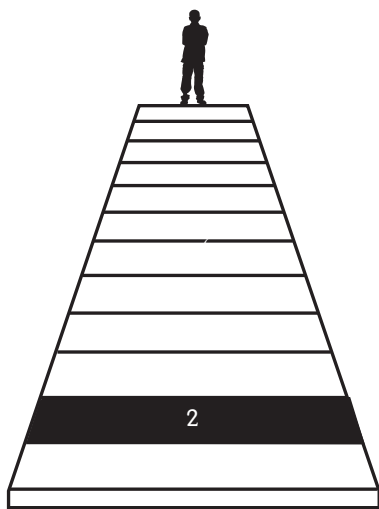
2. Describe what your mother was like growing up. Could you use the words absentee, abusive, angry, authoritarian, controlling, destructive, fatherless, passive, performance-driven, in-the-game?

How did this affect you and your relationship with your mom?

3. As you've explored the wounds of your childhood, how has the Lord's healing of some of those wounded areas affected you?

4. As you've experienced the Lord's healing in certain areas of your childhood wounding, have you been willing to minister to others? If so, how has that affected your life and the people you've reached out to?

sun
si qu
e de
refin
u m
souff
e qu
gre
tinen
peurje
la C
me es
des
my
we
regre
reine
l'alf
comp



2

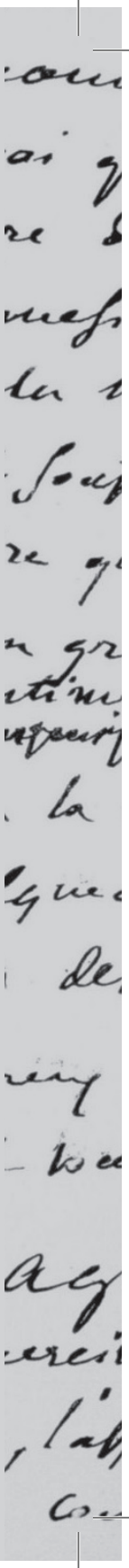
the abandoned child

Life, misfortunes, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are battlefields which have their heroes; obscure heroes, sometimes greater than the illustrious heroes.

—Victor Hugo

Kathleen Maddox ran away from home when she was 15 years old. Her mother was strict, overbearing, and cold. When Kathleen's father would try to be affectionate toward his wife, she would push him away, telling him he was "vulgar." After years of suffocating under her mother's control, Kathleen had enough and ran away.

Now that she was finally free, she could do whatever she wanted. She drank too much and had promiscuous sex. When she was only 16, Kathleen found out she was pregnant. She ended up having a son who never knew his father or had a real father figure. Kathleen was a terrible mother. She would leave her son and disappear for days or weeks at a time. Eventually, she was convicted of armed robbery and was sentenced to five years in prison.



Her son was then sent to live with distant relatives who didn't even really want him. His new dad called him a sissy and dressed him like a girl for his first day of school, saying he wanted to teach the little boy to act like a man.¹

A few years later, when Kathleen was paroled, her son came to live with her again. But she kept living her life without any concern for her young, impressionable child. She would drown herself in alcohol every day and sometimes sell her body for money to buy more. Before long she lost custody of her son. He would spend years being shuffled through reform schools. But the schools weren't any better for him—in one school, both older boys and guards sadistically sexually abused him. When he had the chance, he ran away.

At 18, he was a legal adult, so he was released into society to fend for himself. For the next 15 years, he was in and out of prison for stealing cars, pimping, and transporting prostitutes from one state to another—he also got extra time for assaulting and sodomizing other inmates.

After he was paroled, he gathered a group of about 50 college graduates, pushers, pimps, and Satanists. Over the next two years, they would see him as a mentor, lover, father figure, and even Christ-incarnate.

Together, they went on one of the most horrific crime sprees of the 20th century. He led a chain of barbaric, highly publicized crimes, including two-dozen murders and ritualistic killings. His followers have now been in prison for over thirty years and will probably never be paroled.

Charles Milles Manson was an abandoned and rejected child born to an oppressed mother—a child who was so filled with rage that he grew up to lead a sadistic gang of other abandoned rejects to strike terror into an entire nation.

Prisons are filled with people who were abandoned or rejected by their parents. Bill Glass, a counselor who has worked with prisoners for 30 years said he has never met a prisoner who genuinely loved his dad.² He also learned that most prisoners on death row hated their fathers. There's got to be a connection.

My “Prison” Years

It’s hard to imagine that Charles Manson and I had anything in common, but the truth is we did—I was also abandoned and rejected by a parent.

When we were 11, my twin brother, Joseph, and I were sent away to a Catholic boarding school. We would never again live at home. From then until I graduated high school, I lived in an oppressively strict, religious environment. We weren’t allowed to talk in the classrooms, hallways, or dormitory. There were never any caring words or guidance—no one to look to as a parent. I felt completely lost and isolated. I would see my mother when I went home on some weekends, but my father never came to the school, not even for my graduation. Being abandoned in this rigid, lifeless school system was the most crushing experience of my life. I hated every minute of it and looked for ways to rebel. Joseph and I set the record for demerits.

By the time I was 15, still in the middle of my horrible religious school experience, I decided that if there was a God, I hated His guts. Most of the time God seemed to be as absent from my life as my father, so I blamed Him equally for my miserable condition.

When I was a freshman in college, my peers reminisced about their high school experiences. They would talk about dances and parties and going home to their families every night. I realized my high school experience was anything but normal and far from right.

I had missed out on a lot and it made me furious. I went back to my old boarding school looking for one of the leaders to punch out. I wanted to hold someone responsible for my pain—to yell at them for the

**MOST OF THE TIME GOD
SEEMED TO BE AS
ABSENT FROM MY LIFE AS
MY FATHER, SO I BLAMED
HIM EQUALLY FOR MY
MISERABLE CONDITION.**

injustice in my life. But when I got there, I found out that the boarding school had been closed down and the leaders were long gone. My graduating class had been the last year.

Great Expectations

My father gave me two personal gifts I can remember. One was a dinner menu from the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. The mayor of New York hosted a dinner to honor the original seven NASA astronauts. My dad, the head of a congressional sub-committee focusing on space exploration, was invited to the dinner. He had each astronaut autograph the menu. Above their signatures my dad wrote, “we hope you will become one of us.”

I have processed this encouraging sentence now for over forty years. Maybe he had pure motives—maybe it was just the dream of a hopeful father. But, at the time, I saw it as another of my dad’s expectations I would never fulfill. It sounded like, “You know, son, I’m really counting on you to invent the cure for cancer. And if you don’t, I’m going to be really, really disappointed.”

When I was a teenager, I couldn’t have cared less about my father’s political accomplishments—I just wanted his love and acceptance. But I didn’t get them, and that rejection made my anger fester into rage. I continually failed to meet his unachievable expectations. Anytime I saw him, he would interrogate me about my life until it became obvious I was an embarrassment to him.

The truth is my father was an excessively dominant and critical person, and I never lived up to his expectations of me. Ironically, I’m now convinced he never measured up to his own expectations of himself.

As far as I can remember, he had only one even remotely fatherly conversation with Joseph and me. It was during his five-year tenure as a New York State Supreme Court Justice and we were about 16. Our fireside chat lasted all of one minute. He sternly called us into his room and said, “If you have sex with a girl under 18, it’s statutory rape, and you’ll go to jail.” That was it. No explanation, no conversation, end of discussion.

Frankly, because my dad didn't care about me, I didn't care about him, and the animosity I felt toward him lasted for years after his death.

The dean of the university I attended was my father's personal friend and had awarded him an honorary doctorate. A few years after my father died, during the Vietnam War, I led a band of anti-war protestors to take over this dean's office.

The dean wasn't there, but in the heat of rebellion, I climbed through his outside office window and audaciously sat behind his desk. Secretaries scurried and called security. My father was dead, but my hatred for him was alive and burning. In my heart it wasn't the dean's office I was desecrating—it was my father's. I was climbing through my dad's window and defiantly sitting in his chair.

He was dead, but the anger was still seething.

How many other senseless acts of violence and anger have occurred because the innocent victims reminded the perpetrators of people who hurt them? How many abandoned sons and daughters have taken retribution on someone who was just at the wrong place at the wrong time?

Goodbye For Now

My father had helped countless people during his 61 years. As I stood in line and greeted hundreds of people at his funeral, I heard story after story about his efforts on behalf of the known and unknown. So why had I, his own son, gotten so little of the love and attention he gave everyone else?

Years later my older brother told me, "Dad didn't consider you a person he could relate to until you were 18."

He died 56 days before my 18th birthday.

I will never forget the pained look on my father's face the day he died. I was home for Christmas break during my first year of college. As he left our home on that final morning, he was a tired, frustrated, embittered man. He probably died the same way, late that night, lying on the

floor of a hotel bathroom. He had grown up without a father himself, and I have to think that maybe the haunting emptiness of his own abandonment had been the deepest regret of his unfulfilled life.

Just two hours before our father's fatal heart attack, my twin brother and I cried out in tears of frustration, "I wish he would drop dead!" It hurts to say it now, but when we found out he had died, part of us was glad.

Growing up, I thought of my father as "...one of those people who would be enormously improved by death."³ Now four decades later, I would give anything to see him just one more time, to say all of the things that need to be said, to ask forgiveness for my part. I'm convinced he would ask my forgiveness, too, and it's a conviction I cherish.

**MY DEEP DESIRE TO
BE RECONCILED WITH
BOTH MY NATURAL AND
HEAVENLY FATHERS
IS GOD-GIVEN. IT'S A
PASSION GOD NOT ONLY
CREATED IN ME, BUT ONE
HE DESPERATELY WANTS
TO FULFILL.**

My deep desire to be reconciled with both my natural and heavenly fathers is God-given. It's a passion God not only created in me, but one He desperately wants to fulfill. My heavenly Father, more than any other person in the universe, wants to restore "...the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..."⁴ I am committed to this being fulfilled in my life.

Abandonment Dysfunctions

When I look at some of today's famous that are fatherless, I wonder how much of their personal dysfunctional behavior can be traced back to abandonment. Could it be that moral deformity has corrupted their gifted lives because of father wounds?

Kurt Cobain, the lead singer, songwriter, and guitarist of Nirvana, grew up being shuffled around among his divorced parents, family, and friends. He said his parents' divorce made him unable to ever feel loved

or secure. He began smoking marijuana at 11, moved on to heroin at 19, and was addicted by 23. Cobain died tragically at 27 when he shot himself in the head, leaving behind his wife and infant daughter.

Rapper Tupac Shakur was gunned down in a drive-by shooting in 1996. His brutal death personified the violence he wrote about in his music. When asked why he was involved in drugs, shootings, and prison time, Shakur expressed his emotional abandonment stating, “I blame my father, ‘cause he left me. My real father was a Black Panther. But when I was growing up, I never knew who my real father was. My stepfather was a gangster, a straight-up street hustler. I know for a fact if I had a father, I’d have some discipline. Your mother can’t calm you down the way a man can. Your mother can’t reassure you the way a man can. Your mother can’t show you where your manhood was. You need a man to teach you how to be a man.”⁵

Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who wrote, “God is dead,” was deeply wounded at age five by the loss of his much loved, sickly father. Child psychologists say that the most devastating impact from a father’s death occurs when the child is between three and five years old. When a father dies or is suddenly torn from a child’s life during this time, the child isn’t able to understand the father’s sudden absence or replace him with other relationships.

When Pastor Karl Ludwig Nietzsche died, his young son was emotionally lost. For the rest of his life, Nietzsche went in search of a father. Throughout his years as an ardent atheist, Nietzsche seemed to equate his father’s physical weakness with his Christianity. He mistakenly thought his dad was feeble because his dad’s religion was feeble.

Ironically, Nietzsche was himself often sickly and bedridden. For many years he was so ill his sister had to take care of him. But he never made the connection that the weakness of a person’s physical condition was not a reflection of his or her spiritual strength. Maybe his hurt went so deep that he just couldn’t see that truth.

As a young child Nietzsche had faith in God, but as he got older it faded until, as a troubled adult, he completely lost his faith. An abandoned child had once again been wounded by the loss of a father.

It seems that parental abandonment wounds can sow seeds of hopelessness, anger, bitterness, and self-hatred deep into the hearts and minds of famous men and women—and even in you and me.

Dying For a Hug

There's a story told about a young sailor who called his parents after his release from military service. He asked them if he could bring a friend home with him. The son confided, "Mom, my friend was pretty badly wounded in battle. He has only one leg, one arm, and one eye."

After a long pause the mother reluctantly said, "Of course, son, he can stay with us a little while." But her voice carried the message that they didn't want to be burdened very long with such a severely physically challenged person.

Two days later they got the news that their son had jumped to his death from a hotel window. When his body arrived home for burial it had only one leg, one arm, and one eye. His mother was heartbroken. For the rest of her life, she often cried, "Why didn't I speak more carefully, more lovingly? If I could only take back those selfish words, 'He can stay with us a little while.' But it's too late now!"

Having been emotionally abandoned and rejected by his parents, a wounded son felt there was nothing left to live for.

That sailor wasn't alone in feeling hopeless. Since 1937, more than 1,300 people have jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge. Only 16 have survived.

One survivor, John Kevin Hines, was 19 years old when he jumped. As Hines leapt, he wanted to scream, but because of the force of the descent, he couldn't. He later said that the moment he jumped he knew he had made a mistake. Deep down, he really didn't want to die.

After his horrific and excruciatingly painful 220-foot crash into a wall of icy water, John was fished out by a nearby boat and rushed to the hospital. He spent a month there recovering from a broken ankle and two shattered vertebrae. He found out the hard way that hitting the water at that speed would be a gruesome way to die.

Earlier that day, Hines sat on the bus, crying on his way to the bridge. He decided that if anyone asked him what was wrong, he wouldn't jump. But no one did. One woman approached him, but all she wanted was for him to take her picture. He did, but she never asked why he looked so sad. Minutes later he jumped.

It's been said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. When you're hurting, it sometimes doesn't seem like it could be only temporary—but I know from personal experience that it is.

My most desperate moments changed my life.

My hurt is now able to help other people. My past suicidal depression fuels me with a passion to reach out to others trapped in the same prison. I have only become the person I am today because of the victories gained after devastating defeats. Remove my struggles and you remove the most significant dimensions of who I have become.

Are you constantly living as a victim of your past? Or have you allowed your personal abandonment to run its full course—to make you the person you're meant to be? Have you opened your heart to the God who desperately wants to heal you and transform you to fulfill your destiny?

Jesus came to heal your abandoned heart. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has appointed Me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."⁶

**HAVE YOU OPENED
YOUR HEART TO THE
GOD WHO DESPERATELY
WANTS TO HEAL YOU
AND TRANSFORM YOU TO
FULFILL YOUR DESTINY?**

**OUR HEARTS WERE
DESIGNED TO BE FILLED
WITH THE SAFETY AND
SECURITY OF LOVING
PARENTS.**

Wounds of Abandonment

Abandonment is the ransacking of the soul. It invades the most protected parts of our heart and leaves them in tatters. Lack of emotional nurturing by a father or mother leaves a gaping hole in a child's heart. A parent's failing to provide for a child's emotional needs creates gnawing questions: "If my father doesn't care about me, am I really worth anything?" "If my mother doesn't want to be with me, why would anyone else?"

Abandoned sons and daughters feel discarded by the ones they had hoped would love them the most. Instead of having the security and stability God intended in a healthy parent-child relationship, the abandoned are left devalued, questioning their own worth and significance. The abandoned child will always attempt to fill this void, usually with emotional sedatives: cutting, drugs, alcohol, sexual/relational dysfunctions, and tragically, even suicide.

The abandoned person mistakenly thinks, "Anything crammed into my broken heart is better than nothing." But forcing something to fit where it was never intended only makes the hole bigger and even harder to fill. It bruises the soul around the edges, making a future "perfect fit" much more difficult.

Our hearts were designed to be filled with the safety and security of loving parents. When that happens, the deepest inner longing of a child is met.

Because my wife, Suzie, had a wonderful relationship with her parents, she has never questioned God's love for her. She is so stable in her emotional foundation that sometimes it's difficult for her to understand those who aren't. Suzie thinks, "Of course God likes me!" Why does she think that? I believe it's because she never questioned whether her dad or mom liked her. For her, it's an emotional "no-brainer."

I, on the other hand, have had significant difficulty believing God actually likes me. It was the defining question of my life. As long as it was left unsolved, I was tormented. But once this piece of my identity puzzle was in place, I was finally able to be at peace with who I am.

Abandoned Heroes

Moses was an abandoned child. The Egyptian pharaoh at the time of his birth issued a command to drown all male children born to Hebrew slaves in the Nile River. Desperate to protect her baby, Moses' mother sent him floating down the Nile in a basket, believing God would somehow intervene.

God did.

As Moses' sister watched, the pharaoh's daughter, who happened to be at the river that day, found the baby. She took him from the river and eventually adopted him. Moses grew up and was educated in the pharaoh's courts. But he knew he wasn't really one of them. One day Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses stepped in to save the Hebrew and killed the Egyptian, hiding his body in the sand.⁷

But sin can't stay hidden for long.

The pharaoh found out about the murder, and Moses was forced to escape to the Sinai Peninsula. He stayed there as a reclusive shepherd, alone and unknown for 40 years. But it was in that hidden, lonely time that God prepared him to lead a nation. Once Moses was ready, God brought him back to rescue His people. The man who couldn't even rescue himself became a rescuer.

God works best when we are fully stripped of all self-confidence. Only His will leads to blessings. He alone knows the infinite ramifications of every decision we make. Through God, an abandoned son took a nation who thought God had abandoned them and led them out of slavery. Moses' abandonment didn't just shape his life—it helped make him the man God destined him to be. Everything that happens to us, good or bad, will have positive consequences that stretch throughout eternity once we turn it all over to God to work with.

God chose the abandoned Moses to build Him a tabernacle in the wilderness.⁸ God used the abandoned Moses to lead His people for 40 years across a wilderness. Moses' own 40 years in the wild was the perfect preparation for the next 40. An abandoned son reclaimed his childhood and became a father to the fatherless.

For Moses, abandonment initially lured him into a greater dependence on himself. We usually think of self-reliance as a good thing, but when we depend too much on ourselves, we end up leaving God and other people out of the picture. And that's never a good thing.

For every abandoned person, trust becomes the major life issue. It would take 40 years in the desert, a burning bush, and multiple miracles for Moses to completely trust God. Even then, at the end of his life, the abandonment issue of trust seemed to resurface when Moses did things his own way, disobeying God.

Here's the scene: God tells Moses, "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, command the rock over there to pour out its water. You will get enough water from the rock to satisfy all the people and their livestock." So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So all the people and their livestock drank their fill. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust Me enough to demonstrate My holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!"⁹ Moses didn't trust God enough to do it the way He said to, and he suffered the consequences.

Unresolved abandonment will cost us as well. But once our abandoned hearts are healed, we'll have the amazing opportunity to rescue other people. Jesus guarantees we will be happier giving than receiving.¹⁰ I have spent many years now seeing this truth firsthand.

There is no way to overestimate the happiness of a healed heart.

Joseph, in the book of Genesis, was also abandoned. He was a favorite son who was sold into slavery by jealous brothers, and he was separated from his father for 20 years. But as a result, Joseph learned to depend

on God and not on other people. This led him down a path where he would eventually save his entire country from starvation.

Abandonment was once again the perfect preparation to lead a nation.

Even Paul, the mighty apostle, was abandoned by his fellow teachers of Hebrew law called Pharisees. This future New Testament author went alone into Arabia to meet with God.¹¹ A mighty epiphany occurred in his heart, and trust was reestablished with God. If we will reach out to Him, God knows how to meet us at our lowest moments. The byproduct of Paul's abandonment produced qualities of individuality, leadership, and perseverance in him that could not have been refined without his soul being forced to either meet God or die.

We can't stop our fathers from abandoning us, either willingly or otherwise, but we can choose what we do about it. We can allow God to take our pain and make it into something amazing. The Bible says, "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."¹²

We can't relive our childhood, but we can let God help us not be bitter about it.¹³

We need to be far more committed to our healing than to our pain.

All pain is temporary, but healing can last forever.

Father Legacies

In the previous chapter, we saw how King Hezekiah's self-absorption played a significant role in driving his son Manasseh into worshipping false gods and living

**THERE IS NO WAY TO
OVERESTIMATE THE
HAPPINESS OF A
HEALED HEART.**

in total depravity. Hezekiah went from being impressed with God to being impressed with himself, which cost him, his children, and his nation a terrible price.

I believe Manasseh hated his father and everything he stood for. Manasseh was so wounded from being emotionally abandoned that he tried to tear down everything Hezekiah had built. He spent decades turned away from God and everything good—he even sacrificed his own sons to false gods that were actually demons. Completely depraved, Manasseh was castrated and taken away like a caged animal, with a ring through his nose and chains on his feet.

**WE NEED TO BE FAR
MORE COMMITTED TO
OUR HEALING THAN TO
OUR PAIN.**

It was there, in a Babylonian prison, Manasseh finally came to his senses and cried out to God. Mercifully, God heard him and restored him as king over Israel. Because his heart was turned back to God, Manasseh tore down all of the altars he had built to false gods and lived the rest of his life healed and whole. But the damage to his son Amon had already been done. When Manasseh died after being king for 55 years, his 22-year-old son, Amon, became king.

The Bible tells us, “Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. He did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, just as his father Manasseh had done. He worshiped and sacrificed to all the idols his father had made.”¹⁴

Clearly, Amon had been deeply wounded by his father’s depravity. He had experienced the horror of knowing his father sacrificed his brothers to idols and demons. Now Amon passed on the curse and did the same thing.

Unless their hearts are healed and their spirits are rescued, abandoned children often become absentee parents. Manasseh got that healing, but Amon didn't. Look at the tragic difference it made: "But unlike his father, he [Amon] did not humble himself before the Lord. Instead, Amon sinned even more. At last Amon's own officials plotted against him and assassinated him in his palace."¹⁵ He was only 24.

But all hope was not lost.

Amon had an eight year-old son named Josiah, who remembered his godly grandfather, Manasseh. Fortunately, Josiah wasn't there to see Manasseh's decades of depravity. All Josiah knew was the transformed Manasseh. Josiah obviously liked his godly grandpa more than his own dad. How do we know that? Because he chose to follow his grandpa instead of his own dad by living a godly life.

This is a comeback story about a boy who had one of the worst fathers of all time. But the boy also had a courageous grandpa who turned away from his sinful life and back to God. It's about a grandpa who messed up—hugely—but finally came to his senses.

My hope is that we will all be able to see through every deception in our lives—all the things that blind us from the truth of who we're meant to be. And then, on the other side of our humility, future generations will receive the benefit of our healing.

Curses Are Meant To Be Broken

The Bible says that, "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn aside from doing what was right. During the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David. Then in the twelfth year, he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem, destroying all the pagan shrines, the Asherah poles, and the carved idols and cast images."¹⁶

When Josiah was 16-years old he began to seek God. He broke the curse! By the time he was 20, he was leading his nation to destroy

everything evil. To put this in perspective, that would be like a teenager becoming President of the United States and then helping put an end to violence in America. We are never too young to seek God. We are never too young to lead others. We are never too young to allow God to transform our lives.

The Bible says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”¹⁷

When Josiah was 26 years old, he began to repair the temple of the Lord. It would take Josiah 18 years to clean up his dad’s mess. But in the end, Josiah managed to restore what earlier kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

In the middle of restoring the temple, Josiah found the Book of the Law of the Lord as it had been given to Moses. It had been lost for years. “When the king [Josiah] heard what was written in the law, he tore his clothes in despair.”¹⁸

Josiah felt horrible because he realized he and his nation had not been doing what God’s law said they should do. But again God was merciful and sent a prophet to Josiah who said, “You were sorry and humbled yourself before God. You humbled yourself and tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. So I have indeed heard you, says the Lord.”¹⁹

Then King Josiah called all of the people to the temple, from the lowest class to the highest. “There the king read to them the entire book of the covenant that had been found in the Lord’s temple.”²⁰

A fatherless son began to father a nation.

Grandpa Manasseh was not too late for his grandson. Your fatherlessness doesn’t have to negatively shape your destiny, either. Suzie and I are both first generation Christians. We broke the curse of unbelief. Now our lives are a blessing to our future generations.

Whatever your parents’ reputation was, it doesn’t have to be yours. Whatever your parents’ sin was, it doesn’t have to be yours.

Curses are meant to be broken.

Blessings are meant to be passed on.

When the Parentless Become Parents

After getting involved with drugs in college, I did everything I could to undermine authority because of my hatred for my father. I led anti-war protests, indulged in “free love,” and watched my college graduation from a hillside while smoking weed with one of my professors.

One consequence of my hedonistic lifestyle was that I got two girls pregnant. I refused one baby was mine and walked away. I demanded the other be aborted.

Little did I know, the cycle of abandonment had been passed down from my father to me.

He didn't consider me a person.

He couldn't be bothered by my life.

He rejected me.

I had done the same to my unborn children.

Today I wear a wristband everyday that says LIFE to remember my unborn sons. I don't wear it out of shame, but because I finally have the understanding and courage to acknowledge that they didn't just exist, they were my flesh and blood. For the rest of my life, I'll look forward to seeing them in heaven because I know God is gracious and can make things right.

Recently, a friend who had suffered many father wounds told me with infectious enthusiasm, “After a while, I stopped looking for a father and decided to be one.” That is exactly what Josiah did: “So Josiah removed all detestable idols from the entire land

**CURSES ARE MEANT TO
BE BROKEN. BLESSINGS
ARE MEANT TO BE
PASSED ON.**

46 | FATHER WOUNDS

of Israel and required everyone to worship the Lord their God. And throughout the rest of his lifetime, they did not turn away from the Lord, the God of their ancestors.”²¹

We were created to follow God all of the days of our lives and enjoy all the blessings that come as a result. If we choose to believe, we will see our children and grandchildren follow God, too. Josiah broke off the curse of his father. He began to follow the Word of God, and he led his nation back from the brink of destruction.

Josiah even restored the sacred ceremony called Passover, a time to remember how God had saved the children of Israel from centuries of slavery under the Egyptians. Because of Josiah’s obedience to God’s Word, the nation of Judah had a greater Passover than they did under any of the kings before him. He was healed from his father wounds so fully that he was able to lead a whole nation into loving God and turning around their lives. Like Josiah, we can be healed to the point that our hearts and lives are full of God’s goodness, even if the generations before us missed out.

You can look into someone’s eyes and see fatherlessness. There were many times in my life when you could have looked into my eyes and you would have clearly seen it.

Maybe sometimes you still can.

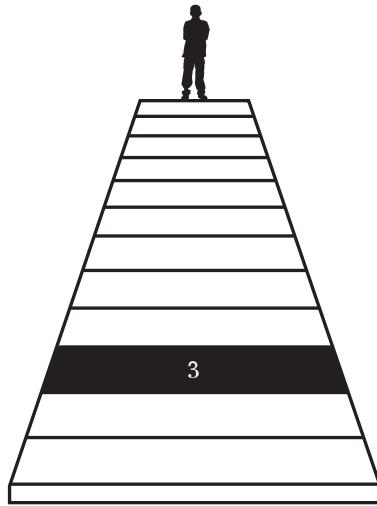
I will always wish I had had my dad’s approval. No amount of healing in my life will change the fact that he withheld it from me. All of the major challenges I’ve ever faced have been rooted in abandonment and rejection. But I refuse to pass on this curse to my children or grandchildren. So, every day I have to continue to learn how to listen, ask questions, and love as a father.

How I model or don’t model being a father will affect many lives. The Bible says, “The glory of children is their father.”²² This word, “glory,” in the original Hebrew language, means “an ornament we display.” Whether we like it or not, we reflect our fathers, both earthly and heavenly.

Reflect the loving heart of your Heavenly Father. Let others see how God can fill any void, heal any pain, and restore what enemies have stolen from our hearts. It is not just a possibility—it's God's destiny for your life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you experience rejection or abandonment by one or both of your parents during childhood? If so, how have these experiences impacted your life?
2. Do you think these experiences affect the way you think and relate to your Heavenly Father? Describe ways this affects your relationship with Him.
3. Do you think your mother or father, or both, experienced abandonment or rejection during their life? If so, how do you think that affected their life and their parenting?
4. Forgiveness is critical to becoming whole because unforgiveness keeps you “stuck” in the pain of the past. Are you willing to begin to forgive your father/mother for childhood wounding? If so, how do you think this decision will affect your healing from abandonment and rejection?
5. Do you have a willingness to ask God for a breakthrough in your areas of rejection and abandonment and begin to better reflect the loving heart of your Heavenly Father to others? If you are willing, how do you think this decision will affect your life and the lives around you?



3

the neglected child

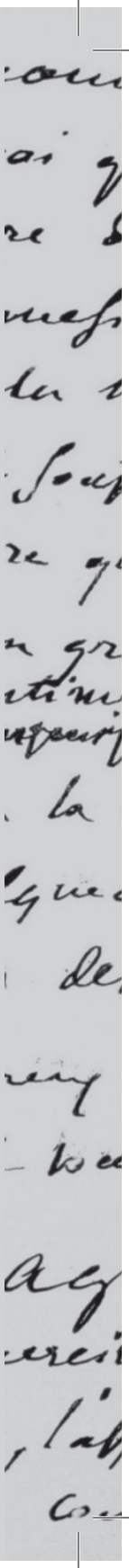
*What is a neglected child? He is a child not planned for, not wanted.
Neglect begins, therefore, before he is born.*

—Pearl Buck

Aileen's teenage parents separated months before she was born. Her father was a deranged child molester and spent time in two state mental hospitals. Aileen's mother claimed she and her older brother, Keith, were "crying, unhappy babies," and, unwilling to take care of them, she left them with their grandparents.

When Aileen was six she started a fire with her brother that left severe scarring on her face. Later in life, she claimed that Keith had sexually molested her as a child, but he died before her claims could be investigated. By 14, she gave birth to a baby boy and dropped out of school to become a teenage prostitute, traveling across the country selling her body to survive.

Over the next fifteen years, Aileen was arrested for disorderly conduct, drunk driving, firing a weapon from a moving vehicle, assault, armed robbery, forging checks, and auto theft. She was angry at the world—she carried a loaded gun in her purse, turned to a gay lover for comfort, and went looking for confrontations. She was once questioned by



police for slugging a man with a beer bottle; another time Aileen was arrested for assaulting a bartender by throwing a cue ball at him. She talked incessantly about the troubles in her life and her desire for revenge.

During a yearlong violent rampage she was suspected of murdering seven men, shooting them each as many as nine times. Tried and convicted for four of the murders, Aileen Wuornos was executed on October 9, 2002 by lethal injection.

Aileen was a neglected child—she had grown up unheard and overlooked, left to feel unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. After her conviction, Aileen screamed at the jury, “I was raped! I hope you get raped!”¹ She was called America’s “first female serial killer,” and Hollywood made a gruesome movie about her life called, “Monster.”

Like too many others, Aileen never recovered from the wounds of her childhood.

Pollster George Gallop says that “absentee fathers” are the number-one problem facing our society—and their children are the ones who pay. You can tell how integral to God’s plan a generation is by how much evil threatens to destroy its sons and daughters. In the Old Testament, Pharaoh had every male baby Israelite in Egypt killed so he wouldn’t have to deal with the Israelites, who he feared would become strong and overtake Egypt. But it didn’t work—Moses survived and became the savior of Israel.

Later, in the New Testament, King Herod had every first-born male baby killed in Bethlehem so he wouldn’t have to deal with Jesus, who he feared would become a greater king than he was. But again, evil lost out—Jesus survived and became the Savior of the world.

Today, one out of every three American babies in this generation has been aborted—over 50 million since abortion was legalized in 1973. Every three days, more African-Americans are killed by abortion than were lynched from 1882 to 1968.

How strategic must this generation be to God’s eternal plan that so many innocent children have been murdered, abandoned, or neglected?

Evil may be working to obliterate this fragile generation, but God's perfect plan cannot be aborted. God is raising up a family of sons and daughters out of the charred ashes of the unwanted, the unloved, and the uncared for.

Emotional Zombies

In the occult practice of voodoo, a zombie is described as a soulless dead body brought back to life again. Our 21st century Western society has been prolific in producing an assembly line of emotional zombies.

One of these zombies was Mark David Chapman, who got his 15 minutes of fame by killing ex-Beatle John Lennon. Chapman was raised by an unnurturing father who spent all of his time in front of the TV and none with his son.

According to Chapman, his father “never showed me love in any way, at least not emotionally. I don't think I ever hugged my father. He never told me he loved me. And he never said he was sorry. He just watched television all night long, from when dinner was finished through [Johnny] Carson.”²

Though not all are emotional zombies, the neglected aren't rare, and they come from every walk of life. A. A. Milne, the famous author of Winnie-the-Pooh, named the lead character in the series after his son, Christopher Robin. But his son wasn't impressed. He didn't want his name in lights, known to children throughout the world. All he wanted was his father's love and affection—something he would never receive.

When Christopher Robin died in his 70's, his obituary said that his father spent little time with him. He was too busy making other children laugh and smile.

**GOD IS RAISING UP A
FAMILY OF SONS AND
DAUGHTERS OUT OF
THE CHARRED ASHES
OF THE UNWANTED,
THE UNLOVED, AND
THE UNCARED FOR.**

A neglected son had his heart broken by a workaholic father. His cries were unheard; his needs were invisible.

Sometimes, father wounds are even disguised as so-called, “deeper understanding.” Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, had a weak father. As a child, Sigmund heard that his father had his hat knocked off after being called a “dirty Jew.” The young Freud was mortified—not because the incident had occurred, but because his father had responded so passively to such blatant anti-Semitism.

Assuming his father’s lack of courage and religious faith were in some way linked, Freud’s strong personality rejected not only his father’s weakness, but his father’s religion, too.

Freud would later allude to his father as being sexually perverted in some way, although he didn’t give any specifics. His father’s misrepresentation of genuine faith in his character and morals were something Freud was never able to get over, and it left him struggling with nothing to believe in.

Freud later wrote, “Psychoanalysis... daily demonstrates to us how youthful persons lose their religious belief as soon as the authority of the father breaks down.”³

A weak father is a poor representation of the character and moral strength of our Heavenly Father, who in reality is perfect in every way. When parents don’t fill their children with faith, they put those children in danger of becoming emotional or moral zombies.

Another influential atheist of the 20th century was French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. I was a fan of his writings during my atheistic college years. Sartre candidly wrote, “If one discards God the father, there has to be someone to invent values...life is nothing, it’s up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning you choose.”⁴

What is the breeding ground for such hollow, post-modern thought? Stanford Ph.D. Paul C. Vitz writes in his extraordinary study, *Faith of the Fatherless, The Psychology of Atheism*, “Sartre’s real father died (abandoned) him very early, his grandfather was cool and distant, and

his step-father took Jean's beloved mother away from him."⁵ A year after Sartre's mother married, the broken-hearted teenager came to the conclusion, "You know what? God doesn't exist."⁶

"We must conclude...that his father's absence was such a painful reality that Jean-Paul spent a lifetime trying to deny the loss and to build a philosophy in which the absence of a father and a God is the very starting place for the 'good' or 'authentic' life."⁷

Both Freud and Sartre are commonly referred to as Evangelical Atheists, "one[s] who not only believe there is no God or other supreme being, but [are] obsessed with convincing everyone around them to become an atheist too."⁸

I was also an Evangelical Atheist. From the ages of 15 to 22, I tried to convert anyone who would listen to my impassioned conviction that God did not exist. I would openly mock and ridicule Christians for what I perceived as their weak-minded, shallow beliefs. Sad to say, my animosity toward my own father was the catalyst for my hatred of God. My father's death when I was 17 only intensified the inner loathing I felt toward any and all father figures.

Vitz carefully studied what he called the "dead father" syndrome among prominent atheists. His conclusion was chilling. The most notable atheists lost their fathers at a very young age: Friedrich "God is Dead" Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Arthur Schopenhauer. The psychological pattern resulting from their father wounds can be seen throughout their lives.

More often than not, father wounds are the breeding ground for emotional and moral zombies. Absent, neglectful, and passive fathers can all contribute to

**SAD TO SAY, MY
ANIMOSITY TOWARD
MY OWN FATHER WAS
THE CATALYST FOR MY
HATRED OF GOD.**

their children's atheism. Just look at Freud, Voltaire, and H.G. Wells. When children can't believe in their fathers, it's hard for them to believe in anything else.

Other atheists were abused by or hated their fathers: Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Madalyn Murray O'Hair. We will examine their tragic lives in subsequent chapters.

Cure For the Crippled Heart

Everyone is crippled in some way. The battle of life wounds us all. If we truly want to experience the inner healing we so desperately need, we have to allow God to take His rightful place as our Savior and Father. The more we open our hearts to receive His love, the more our life's purpose will be revealed and the more our hidden deformities will be healed.

In the Old Testament, King David knew firsthand the rejection of being overlooked. God told the prophet Samuel to choose one of Jesse's sons to be King of Israel. Samuel asked Jesse to gather all of his sons, but David wasn't even presented as a possibility. "Then Samuel asked, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse replied. 'But he's out in the fields watching the sheep.' 'Send for him at once,' Samuel said."⁹ David was barely an afterthought to his family, but he was the one God destined to be king.

Some commentators suggest that David may have been an illegitimate child, as was intimated in Psalm 51:5, when David wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Whatever the case, he was the least esteemed of Jesse's children.

Not long after Samuel chose him, David shared his eagerness to face off with Goliath of Gath, a giant who openly mocked God and terrorized His people. But David's oldest brother caught wind of his courage and derided him.¹⁰ Family rejection is common throughout the Bible. Jesus' own brothers didn't even believe in Him until after He was raised from the dead.¹¹ If your family has rejected you, you're not alone. Jesus has been there, and He can heal your heart from that pain.

Although David defeated Goliath, he would later spend a decade hiding from the evil King Saul. When he was finally crowned the King of Israel, David remembered his promise to his close friend Jonathan. David had pledged to him that if anything happened, he would take care of Jonathan's descendants.¹² Here's how he fulfilled his commitment:

“One day David began wondering if anyone in Saul's family was still alive, for he had promised Jonathan [King Saul's son] that he would show kindness to them.”¹³ So King David called for one of Saul's servants.

“The king then asked him, ‘Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them in any way I can.’ Ziba [Saul's servant] replied, ‘Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive, but he is crippled.’”¹⁴

His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. He came in afraid to see David—as the last remaining descendant of Saul he could have been seen as a threat to David's throne. Mephibosheth bowed to David and said, “I am your servant.” But David said, “Don't be afraid! I've asked you to come so that I can be kind to you because of my vow to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the land that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you may live here with me at the palace!” Mephibosheth was stunned. “Should the king show such kindness to a dead dog like me?” he exclaimed.¹⁵

Compared to the God who spoke the universe into existence, we are all dead dogs—each crippled in more areas than we are willing to admit. Mephibosheth was crippled as a child when his nurse heard that Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, and his grandfather, Saul, had been killed on the same day in battle. His nurse grabbed him and started to run from the city. But as she ran she tripped and dropped Mephibosheth, seriously injuring him. For the rest of his life he would be crippled because of that fall.¹⁶

Mephibosheth's name means "dispeller of shame." This was meant to be his true identity. But in his wounded childhood, he viewed his challenging circumstances through a filter of shame. Through no fault of his own, he found himself being rejected as a child because both of his feet were useless and because he was the orphaned grandson of a deceased and troubled king.

What a jolt! One day, you're five years old, and everyone is smiling at you because you're the king's grandson. The next day, the smiles have been replaced by looks of pity. In that culture, the adults around Mephibosheth probably began to wonder if there was something wrong with him to deserve circumstances so tragic. His happy childhood was over, and Mephibosheth wallowed in shame.

**HE WANTS YOU TO BE AN
HEIR TO ALL HE HAS: HIS
BLESSINGS, HIS GIFTS,
ALL OF THE TREASURES
OF HEAVEN, AND MOST
IMPORTANTLY, HIS LOVE.**

But that wasn't the end of the story. Mephibosheth was still meant to be a "dispeller of shame." If he could overcome the lack of nurturing in his foundation, anyone could. King David was an honorable man, and he gave Mephibosheth back everything that had belonged to Saul and his family and moved him to a place of honor in the royal palace.

"And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly with David, as though he were one of his own sons...Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, moved to Jerusalem to live at the palace."¹⁷ Mephibosheth had at last become the son God intended him to be—a dispeller of shame—one fully accepted and loved.

Like David had for Mephibosheth, God has a place at His table for each of us. You may have been inwardly crippled for as long as you can remember. But, from God's point of view, you are his precious child. He wants you to be an heir to all He has: His

blessings, His gifts, all of the treasures of heaven, and most importantly, His love.

You will never again shrink when others look down on you. Like Mephibosheth, you are meant to be a dispeller of shame. When he accepted what David offered, his past was wiped clean, his present was established as David's child, and his future became bright. When you accept what God offers, your past is wiped clean, your present is established as God's child, and your future becomes bright.

God's rescue of our lives is just a prayer and a perspective away. Are you ready to accept and then freely give away His love for you to others? Will you live the new life He wants to give you? Will you embrace the promise, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"?¹⁸

The motto of the National Adoption Center states, "There are no unwanted children, just unfound families." It's the same with our Father God—He wants us to be a part of His family.

Perfect Love Comes In Imperfect Packages

Eddie O'Hare was the fast-talking lawyer in charge of gangster Al Capone's dog tracks nationwide. But Eddie had a problem—he loved his son more than money and power. His biggest concern was that his child would grow up to follow in his footsteps. So, Eddie decided in order for his son to have a life outside of crime, he needed to turn Capone over to the authorities. This loving father knew he was sealing his own death sentence, but he was willing to pay the price. Tragically, he was right—in retribution, Eddie was eventually shot and killed.

But because Eddie was willing to conquer his fear, his son, Butch, grew up fearless. Butch attended the Annapolis Naval Academy and became the Navy's top fighter pilot. At one point during World War II, Butch's plane was the only thing that could stop nine Japanese bombers from destroying the aircraft carrier Lexington and its hundreds of servicemen. Alone and unassisted, Butch attacked the bombers, shooting down five before his ammunition ran out and reinforcements arrived.

For his outstanding act of bravery, Butch was awarded the Congressional Metal of Honor. Sadly, Butch would be killed in battle later in the war. But Butch's heroism was not forgotten.

Years later, Chicago's airport was renamed in his honor: O'Hare International Airport. Butch O'Hare, the son of the man who was killed for turning in Al Capone, has America's busiest airport named after him.

Eddie's decision helped make his son a hero and saved countless lives. Eddie's decision also shows how even fathers who start out making bad choices can still be courageous, finish well, and model for their children how to live.

**ALTHOUGH IT'S SEEN
MUCH TOO RARELY,
SELFLESS LOVE IS
UNFORGETTABLE.**

Although it's seen much too rarely, selfless love is unforgettable. It gave a father the grit to turn in a vicious killer in order to save his son. And it gave a son the courage to fearlessly stand in the gap for a shipload of vulnerable soldiers.

Are we willing to nurture those around us, especially our own children, with this kind of selfless love? Are we prepared for the unique opportunities God is sending our way, for the supernatural curve balls God is hoping we will hit out of the park? We have to pay attention—these godsend might be disguised in the most unusual opportunities, but they can produce the most extraordinary results.

The Last Resort

The second-to-last stage of frostbite is pain.

But it's much better than the last stage.

That's when the pain stops. At that point, it's too late to save the frozen part of a person's body.

If you're going to help save someone's freezing limb, you'll need to do it while they can still feel pain. One of the best ways to help a frostbite victim is to open up your own coat and allow the freezing limb to be placed under your armpit—the warmest part of your body. It's the last resort when trying to warm a freezing extremity before it dies.

This selfless gesture is a final resort because it's painful for both parties. Placing a frozen hand or foot under your arm would bring obvious discomfort. And the pressure you would put on the endangered limb would be excruciating for the victim. The entire experience is the last thing either of you would want to go through, but it's the price that has to be paid in order to save the limb.

It's not too late to give God complete access to the frozen parts of your life. Like the frostbite victim, you'll feel pain. But through that pain, you will get the healing you need. Jesus is willing to embrace the frozen parts of your life if you are willing to allow Him to take your pain and sorrow. It is always our choice.

Recently, in one of the fathering classes I lead, a 19-year-old who grew up without a dad wrote, "I miss mostly being embraced completely in the physical by a dad. When I was little, I used to dream about being just hugged." She is a beautiful young lady who is allowing God to hug her heart, and consequently her deepest needs are being met.

Is it everything she ever wanted? No, but it's something huge. She knows God is healing her every day from her rejection. Would you place the most frozen parts of your life next to God's warm heart? If you can still feel the pain, then there is still time to be completely healed.

Out of the Arms of Death

Reta Sharp was a poor, somewhat illiterate, plain-looking girl with uncombed hair. There was nothing impressive or memorable about her. Only God knew what depth lay beneath the surface of her seemingly insignificant life.

But soon other people would find out, too.

One winter day, when she was 14 years old, Reta was playing with her 16-year-old friend Tony on a frozen pond. Suddenly, Tony fell through the ice. Reta tried to pull him out from the edge of the ice, but it gave way. Now they were both in the freezing water.

They tried unsuccessfully to get out, but nothing worked. They were desperate. Then Tony began to feel Reta's hands working her way down his legs until she found his feet. He had no idea what she was doing. All of a sudden, he felt himself being propelled out of the water as Reta pushed him upward, her extended arms underneath his feet. With her final surge of strength, she had pushed her friend out of the arms of death.

Moments later, Reta's head came to the surface. Her face was now blue. Her strength was gone. Unable to help, Tony watched Reta sink again beneath the freezing water. He himself barely made it home alive.

His friend Reta had given her life so that he could live. He never forgot her completely selfless sacrifice.

Jesus described this kind of perfect love: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."¹⁹

Do you know that's what Jesus did for you? He pushed you out of the arms of death and willingly gave His own life to do it. The Bible says that we were all dead in our sin but that because God loves us so much, He made us alive in Christ. When you let Jesus into your life, He makes it new and good and whole.

Unconditional love is saying, "There is nothing you could ever do that would make me stop loving you." That's what God is saying to you. He has always been head-over-heels in love with us, and nothing we do or have done will ever change that. Although God doesn't always love what we do, He always loves who He created us to be. Your parents may have neglected you, but God never will.

God will always love us: "The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you.'²⁰ The more you meditate on this truth, the more you'll be healed.

God's Boundless Heart

One of the best pictures of God's love for us is seen at the lowest moment of King David's life. David commits adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most loyal and trusted subjects, Uriah. The affair leaves Bathsheba pregnant. David then brings Uriah home from battle to sleep with Bathsheba, attempting to cover up his sin. But Uriah is an honorable man and refuses to enjoy the pleasure of his wife while other soldiers are still risking and giving their lives in battle.

He is everything David used to be.

In desperation, David sends Uriah, the faithful soldier, to die. In the heat of an unnecessary battle, staged just to kill him, Uriah gives his life to protect his King—the same King who has betrayed and deceived him.

After Uriah's death, David forgets about his sin and thinks God will do the same. But God can't ignore his treachery, deception, adultery and murder.

God sends Nathan the prophet to remind David of God's love and generosity toward him: "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!'"²¹

Here's God with no regret or venom. He's not saying, "What's wrong with you, you loser?"

All God can say is, "If you had needed more—more of anything—I would have given it to you."

What a heart! It's the heart of a loving, caring Father.

That's God's heart for you and me, too. God will give us anything we genuinely need for our good. And whatever we do or have done, God will never turn His back on us.

Desperate to be Touched

During my teenage years, I had a bitter root growing inside of me the size of Texas. It grew to the point where, by my mid-teens, I blamed God for all of my issues. I had spent most of my young life in an oppressive boarding school where I was left feeling discarded and alone. There was no one to talk to, no one to touch my abandoned life.

Around the age of 12 or 13, when I was feeling extremely lonely, I would tie a towel at the end of my bed before going to sleep. This indicated to the head prefect of the boys' dormitory that I wanted to be awakened to attend an early Catholic Mass. In the morning, as he walked down the aisles of endless beds, he would stop by my bed and wake me.

I didn't enjoy any part of the 45-minute, pre-dawn Mass. It was entirely in Latin, which I didn't understand, and it was one of the most boring experiences in my young life. But I was willing to be woken up in pitch-blackness at 5:30 in the morning, an hour before the other boys, and be subjected to unimaginable boredom because I was desperate for one thing.

I was desperate to be touched.

So that he wouldn't disturb the other sleeping students, the man waking me would shake me for a few seconds until he could tell I was awake. Those moments of tender touch were heaven sent, and the only act of kindness I would experience in any given day. At that time in my life, the brief touch made the excessively long Mass worth it.

Are you desperate to be touched by Jesus? Are you willing to revisit the coldest, darkest moments of your life, and with Jesus at your side, allow Him to touch and heal you? I am so glad I did. I have spent many years now partnering with God to heal my past. I can't relive it, but if I respond well, even years later, I can reclaim what was rightfully mine.

Bringing Dad Home

I was always amazed by my wife, Suzie's, relationship with her father. She thought the sun rose and set on her dad. He was a rough cattle rancher with a gruff voice who regularly took God's name in vain. But she called him "Daddy" her whole life.

Before Suzie became a Christian, she was once busted at the Canadian border for possession of marijuana. Although she was never prosecuted, she did spend the night in a felony cell.

About a week after the event, she called her parents back in California, never thinking they would have found out about her arrest. Her father answered the phone and, after some small talk, he mentioned he had heard from local police about what had happened in Canada.

Suzie was speechless.

Before she could think of anything to say, he quickly added, "But that's water under the bridge now, sweetheart—how are you doing?" What a comment! Her heart melted. Here she was, fully exposed, at one of the lowest moments in her life, and her father's response was unconditional love. Many dads would have chewed out their daughter for getting into trouble and making the family look bad. Many dads would have missed the moment, and instead of building a life-long bridge of assurance, they would have wounded a daughter in distress.

Suzie was totally embarrassed by her actions and ashamed her adored father had found out. But her dad's love for her had protected her, affirmed her, and nurtured her.

When I married Suzie 32 years ago I made the difficult decision to call her father, "Dad." It was more for my benefit than for his. His other son-in-law and two daughters-in-law called him by his first name, Pert. But I believe my awkward decision to call him "Dad" shaped our relationship.

Over the next decade, as he watched his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law all let Jesus into their lives, his heart softened until he let Him in, too.

A couple of weeks before he died, we brought him to stay in our home. This once burly man was now so frail he couldn't even walk up our gradually sloping driveway. When it was obvious he wasn't going to make it, I picked him up like a little boy. As I carried him into the house, I knew he was as humiliated as I was, but without help he literally would have fallen over. As we slowly made our way, I whispered, "It's okay, Dad. I'll carry you."

Sobbing together, I brought my dad into my home.

It was one of the worst and best moments of my life.

Today, you can bring your dad into your home.

You may have never met him.

Like me, you may have even hated him.

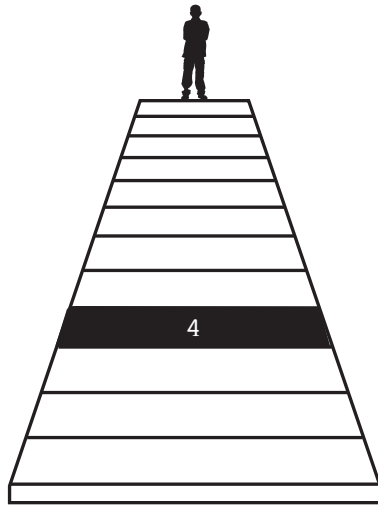
No matter what, it's time to forgive your dad.

It's time to begin the process of completely releasing him from everything he did and didn't do; everything he said and didn't say. Make a home in your heart for your dad, and you will begin to reclaim the childhood you never had—the one God always intended.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the ways you were nurtured (cared for) or neglected during childhood. In what ways have these experiences affected your life?
2. What are your typical responses to your father/mother wounds? In what ways have they affected you? Your relationships?
3. Describe a situation where one of your parents demonstrated unconditional love. How has that experience impacted your life?
4. In what areas of your life do you trust God will provide for you? In what areas do you struggle trusting God? How do you think this affects your life?
5. The author wrote, "If you can still feel the pain, then there is still time to be completely healed." Are you willing to place the most frozen parts of your heart next to the warmth of God's love? If so, what do you think that would look like in your life?

un
i qu
e de
refin
u m
lout
e que
gre
timen
pauze
la c
ve es
des
ing
wen
regu
reine
l'alf
comp



4

the fearful child

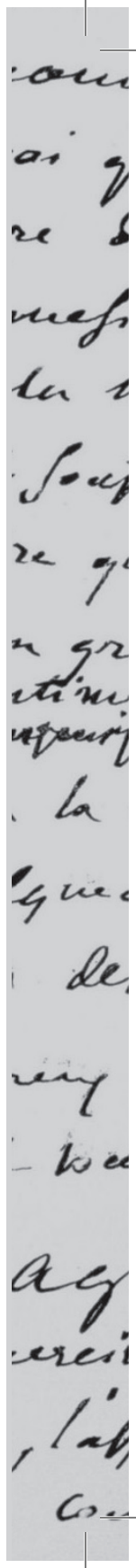
Obviously, some parents drill too much stranger–danger information into the child and it becomes a problem. The child becomes too fearful to do anything out in the world.

—Bonnie Slade

A 35-year-old woman lost her mother to cancer.

A few months later, she began to develop a severe and persistent sore throat. She became convinced that it was cancer. Since she had just watched her mother die a slow and agonizing death, she was terrified of dying the same way. Every day she would see her two children and worry about how they would go through life without their mother and grandmother. Finally, completely convinced she could not go through the pain and suffering her mother went through, she reasoned that she and her children would all be better off in heaven.

So she took a gun and shot her five-year-old daughter, her ten-year-old son, and finally herself. In her suicide note, she wrote about being extremely anxious about the cancer in her throat. But an autopsy revealed her throat condition was not cancer—it was just strep throat, a simple infection that could have been easily treated.



When I read this story, I wondered what happened to this woman that caused her to take such drastic action. Clearly, a huge stronghold of fear had taken hold of her life. I believe that if we could look back upon her life, we would see how as a child she learned to live in fear instead of freedom.

How many of us have lost our peace of mind due to inordinate fear—fear beyond reason? A wounding in our childhood becomes the breeding ground for worry; and when worry festers into fear, we wind up hurting ourselves and people around us. We need to let God heal us before a fearful heart results in a fear-filled life.

**WE NEED TO LET GOD
HEAL US BEFORE
A FEARFUL HEART
RESULTS IN A
FEAR-FILLED LIFE.**

Fear is a common burden. Ann Landers wrote a famous syndicated advice column for 45 years, and her articles were a regular feature in many newspapers across North America. She reported that each month she received more than 10,000 letters from anxious and inquiring readers. When asked what topic was most on people's minds, Landers said that she received more letters related to fear than to any other topic. Fear affects everyone, regardless of age, gender or background.

Sarah Winchester, the heir to the Winchester Rifle fortune, moved to San Jose, California after her husband died in 1918. Because of her grief and a longtime interest in Spiritism, Sarah went to a medium to contact her dead husband. The medium told her, "As long as you keep building your home, you will never face death."

Sarah bought an unfinished 17-room mansion and began to expand it. For the next 38 years the project continued until she died at the age of 85. It cost \$5 million during a time when workmen earned 50

cents a day. The mansion now has 150 rooms, 13 bathrooms, 2,000 doors, 47 fireplaces, and 10,000 windows.

Mrs. Winchester left enough building materials for the work on the house to have continued for another 80 years. Today, the Winchester Mystery House stands as more than just a tourist attraction. It is a silent witness to the bondage of fear in a person's life.

Mrs. Winchester's fear of death overtook her life. Unless we deal with our fears, they will shape and even destroy our destiny and the destinies of the people in our lives.

Several years ago, I mentioned Sarah Winchester's story in one of my messages. I didn't know it at the time, but that weekend Sarah Winchester's grandniece was attending one of the Sunday morning services. After the meeting, the grandniece approached me and shared that she felt my message had been written just for her, acknowledging that fear had been the primary family curse for generations.

God promises, "...the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom."¹ But it's a promise that only comes true for people who are courageous enough to believe it.

Inner Terror

There are so many diseases caused by worry, fear, anger, and immorality that a doctor friend once told me he believed, "If people would let Jesus Christ be Lord of their lives, He would immediately wipe out more than half of the difficulties, diseases, and sorrows of the human race."

In your own life, where did fear come in? Was it through an angry, un-whole parent or relative whose threats, intimidation, or abuse opened you to a life of fear and torment? Was there a specific traumatizing event that caused you to respond to your life in fear?

What is the root? Every fear, no matter how insignificant it seems, has a root cause, resulting in good or bad consequences. You will never be able to receive complete healing and freedom from fear until you first identify the source. Only by dealing with the root can you change the

results. Otherwise, you're only treating the symptoms of your fear.

Why should we allow something that happened years ago to hold us hostage today? Jesus promises that He can set us free: "The Spirit of the Lord... has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the down-trodden will be freed from their oppressors..."² If you believe His promise, take Him up on it right now. You can receive release from childhood fear. You can see what you've never seen before: freedom from your oppression.

FAITH IS THE ABILITY TO TRUST WHAT WE CAN'T SEE. IT FREES US FROM THE ENCLOSURES OF A LIFE OF FEAR.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of more than 30 feet. But the impala can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. It won't jump if it can't see where its feet will fall. It is deceived into thinking it's bound when it isn't.

Faith is the ability to trust what we can't see. It frees us from the enclosures of a life of fear. The Bible says, "The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see."³

Sometimes when we're battling fear, the greatest gift God can give us is a push. A mother eagle spends weeks nurturing and tending to her offspring. When it's time for the young eagles to leave the nest, she will coax them toward the edge. Below their fragile lives is nothing but air. But despite their fears, the mother eagle knows when it is time for them to fly. All that's left for her to give is a maternal shove. It is the greatest gift she can give her children, a supreme act of love.

Faith adds wings to your feet; fear adds weights. Begin to believe that you are going to fly and not once again fall. Even now, receive this encouragement as a gentle shove of faith to face your fears and experience the joy of an overcoming life.

When the Golden Gate Bridge was first being built, 23 men fell hundreds of feet to their death. The cause: very few safety devices were in place. Each day men came to work wondering if they would be the next to die.

Before work began on the second section, it was decided that something drastic needed to be done to prevent further loss of life. The largest and most expensive net ever made was purchased and stretched out below the high-flying workers.

It proved to be an invaluable precaution. In the months that followed, ten men plunged from their positions. But each fell into the net, and none were injured. Not only did the net save ten lives, but an unforeseen benefit occurred, too—the work was completed in three-fourths the projected timeframe. Workmen, now relieved of their fear of falling, were able to work better and faster.

When we are able to trust in something greater than ourselves, we can experience the freedom from fear we have always wanted. If you want to find rest for your soul, put your trust in Jesus Christ, God's eternal safety net. He gave His life so that you and I could be truly free from fear.

Confronting Childhood Fears

I grew up with an unhealthy fear of the dark. Perhaps it was in some way connected to the absence of a healthy father, but when I was a small child, my bedroom was on the third floor of a hundred-year-old Victorian house in Brooklyn. High ceilings, long winding banisters, creaky stairs, and the silhouettes of tall trees outside blowing in the breeze made for many scary nights. I would pull the covers over my head, trying to ward off the monsters tormenting my vivid imagination. Later, even as an adult Christian, I dreaded being alone in the dark.

**MY HEAVENLY FATHER
KNEW MY NEED AND
EXACTLY HOW TO MEET
IT. I HAD TO FACE MY
FEARS AND TRUST HIM
FOR THE OUTCOME.**

Later in life, while traveling as an evangelist, I spoke at a church in Louisiana. The Deep South is known for critters of every shape and size. I have stood in front of open acreage late at night and been completely amazed at the sheer volume of insect sounds emanating from wooded areas or swamps in the South. I knew I never wanted to set foot in the woods at night, even before my host warned me they were unsafe. It seemed that every snake, spider, frog, cricket, and alligator was shouting at me, “Don’t even think about coming in here!”

While speaking at this particular church in Louisiana, I was lodged in a parsonage on their property. One night, I was walking around the empty house with all of the lights out, praying over the meetings we had been having. Because of my fear issue, I was having a real problem focusing. Most of my thoughts during my prayer walk were spent wondering what bugs and creepy things were walking with me.

Finally, I had enough. I determined to confront my fear. Some of the rooms in the house were unoccupied, and I had never been inside of them, even during the day. Now, as a direct assault against the darkness, I began to systematically open doors leading into these unfamiliar rooms.

Once inside, I decided to do the unthinkable. The rooms were so dark I was barely able to see the faint outline of furniture. Kneeling down by a bed, I slowly ran my hand along the floor underneath the bed covering. I kept my hand beneath the bed for a few minutes, refusing to take it out. It was excruciating! Every part of me wanted to pull my hand away, but I forced myself to continue. Suddenly, my prayers became much more intense.

Then I stood up in the dark room and opened a closet. Peering into its bleak emptiness, I placed one hand on top of a fully blackened shelf. In emotional agony, I held it there; seconds seemed to drag on for hours. I have to admit, on a couple of occasions when I thought I felt something touch me, I quickly pulled my hand away. But then, regaining my composure, I would put my hand back, trusting God for my safety. That night became a milestone in breaking the cycle of fear in my life.

My Heavenly Father knew my need and exactly how to meet it. I had to face my fears and trust Him for the outcome. God promises, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”⁴

During the darkest moments of your childhood, you were not alone. Even though situations happened that might have opened you to years of torment, God heard your cries for help and has always wanted to free you from the cruelty of your past.

Let now be the time for your healing to begin.

If a lamb is taken from its mother and placed at the other end of a large enclosure, within moments the lamb’s mother can distinguish its desperate cries from all of the other sounds. Even if there are thousands of bleating sheep between the mother and the distressed lamb, the mother can hear the lamb’s unique voice. Within minutes the mother is reunited with her baby lamb.

That’s the way it is with our Heavenly Father! He knows our fears, hears our cries, and is able to find and comfort each of us in our hour of need. The Bible promises, “He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart...”⁵

I’ve learned that I have to either face my fears or once again bow to their torment. It’s been said, “Courage is faith that has humbled itself before God.”

I want to humble myself. I want to walk in faith. I want to be free.

Healing from Childhood Fears

During the different stages of childhood, children may struggle with different fears. It is parents' responsibility to lovingly protect their children and help them confront those fears. Without this essential guidance, childhood insecurities can develop into lifetimes ruled by fear.

Babies, for example, may be startled by strangers and cling to their parents when they see someone they don't recognize. A parent's lack of protection at this vulnerable stage can cause a child to grow up feeling unsafe.

A child between the ages of four and six may struggle with fears of ghosts and monsters. When our twin daughters were growing up, we would pray over them every night. Even today, one of their favorite childhood memories is when we would stroke their heads and run our fingers through their hair as we prayed over them each night. So many nights, not wanting to wake them up, I would kneel at the door of their rooms and pray for every aspect of their lives and futures.

When a child is between seven and twelve years old, fears begin to reflect real-life situations, such as getting physically hurt or experiencing a natural disaster or tragic event. The greatest trauma of our daughters' young lives was when they were nine years old and a massive truck ran over our dog right in front of them. It took a lot of prayer, comfort and communication to soothe the anguish this heartbreaking event caused.

Childhood fears vary and can change with age or because of painful events in a person's life—our environment and experiences often shape our fears. To overcome our fears, we have to revisit the traumatic events of our past, allowing God to heal us from them. This is especially true of children of abuse, whether it was physical, emotional, or sexual. The best way to process their fears and pain is with capable Christian counselors who will prayerfully guide them through the healing process.

After counseling thousands of people over the past 35 years, I believe that at least one in four women and one out of every six men has experienced some form of sexual abuse. The U.S. Department of Justice reports the figure as even higher for women: one in three girls and one in seven boys are molested before the age of 18. In many cases, it

was male authority figures (e.g. fathers, grandfathers, older brothers, uncles, teachers) that were the perpetrators of these violating acts. By first acknowledging something abusive has taken place and then allowing God to set them free, over time these victims of abuse can find the healing they need.

Any wounding from a father figure can bruise your heart for decades. I've had to forgive father figures in my past, even some I hadn't seen for ages. They may have been gone, but the pain they caused me still needed to be healed. It was a festering sore, and unless it was cut out, it would have grown into a generational cancer. I desperately needed to let God remove the hurt from my heart. Every time I looked at that hurt and remembered what a particular father figure did and said, it was painful. But as I allowed God to touch my pain, I gradually became more whole.

In order to prevent our childhood fears from becoming adult strongholds in our lives, we have to confront them with the love and truth of God. Jesus promised, "...If you abide in My word [hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them], you are truly My disciples. And you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."⁶

Freedom From Fear

The Bible encourages us, "...that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it."⁷ Fear is a temptation common to all. And we each have to learn to confront it or it will consume us.

**IN ORDER TO PREVENT
OUR CHILDHOOD FEARS
FROM BECOMING ADULT
STRONGHOLDS IN OUR
LIVES, WE HAVE TO
CONFRONT THEM WITH
THE LOVE AND TRUTH
OF GOD.**

Here are four ways the Bible teaches that we can defeat fear:

1. Trust God Completely

The number-one cure for fear is to trust God. God wants us to say to Him, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”⁸ We can either prevent fear or cure it—but prevention is always better than a cure.

Trusting in God is that prevention. The Bible says, “...God has come to save me. I will trust in Him and not be afraid.” And Jesus promised, “We have been rescued from our enemies, so we can serve God without fear...”⁹

In his book, *God’s Psychiatry*, Charles L. Allen tells this story: “As World War II was drawing to a close, the Allied armies gathered up many hungry orphans. They were placed in camps where they were well fed. Despite excellent care, they slept poorly. They seemed nervous and afraid. Finally, a psychologist came up with the solution. Each child was given a piece of bread to hold after he was put to bed. This particular piece of bread was just to be held—not eaten. The piece of bread produced wonderful results. The children went to bed knowing instinctively they would have food to eat the next day. That guarantee gave the children a restful and contented sleep.”

Trust made the difference.

Trust overcomes fear.

Let trusting God make the difference in your life.

2. Face Your Fears

Facing your fears in one area will set off a chain reaction of victory in others. Being transparent will help you overcome an inordinate fear of intimacy. Standing up to those who threaten you can at times liberate your heart from the fear of man. (At other times, it may allow you to meet Jesus sooner than expected. Knowing the difference could be a matter of life and death.)

I have had my life threatened many times. Once, a hard-core biker with a foot-long knife strapped to his side angrily lifted me up by the collar of my shirt. I had been talking to his girlfriend, who was interested in hearing about Jesus.

He apparently was not.

As I was suspended in mid-air, the biker leaned forward and put his nose against mine saying, “I don’t want to have to do this to you.” He wasn’t the only one who felt that way—those were my thoughts exactly! By God’s grace, I wasn’t hurt. The biker’s girlfriend was concerned that her boyfriend might cut my head off, so she encouraged him to leave me alone. I walked away a little shaken, but without a scratch.

The Bible says, “Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers...”¹⁰ And, “O Lord, rescue me from evil people. Preserve me from those who are violent...”¹¹ I believe that God used that encounter not only to tell the girlfriend about Jesus, but to help me face my fear of harm, too. Although we shouldn’t necessarily initiate potentially dangerous communications, nonetheless, at times they will come our way.

The greatest breakthrough I ever had with freedom from fear of bodily harm came when I had helped a man who was a heroin addict and his wife to come to know God. Sadly, the man’s body was so battered, that he died a few months later. But during his last days, I spent many hours visiting with him and his family in the hospital.

After he died, the night before his memorial, I was completely exhausted and sound asleep. Around 3 a.m., my phone rang. I picked it up and heard a demonic voice screaming, “Francis, I’m going to kill you!” It was the man’s crazed uncle, who had been let out of prison. Lucky for me! After a minute of ranting expletives, unwilling to even explain why he wanted me dead, he abruptly hung up.

I had had my life threatened before during the day, but this was the first time I had ever been woken up from complete unconsciousness by a man who was totally capable of fulfilling his promise. My body

began to shake with fear—it was involuntary and uncontrollable. I went back to bed and my wife prayed for me. As I lay there, I realized I hadn't been ready for his phone call, and not just because I had been asleep. There was a part of me that was still ill equipped to face fear.

The Bible says, “Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes...”¹² Sudden fear had gotten the best of me, but I resolved I would confront it.

The next day at the nephew's memorial, I knew the deranged uncle would be there, so I stationed myself in the lobby of the funeral home by the front door. As soon as the uncle entered, I walked toward him and tried to shake his hand. Angry and cursing, he slapped my hand away and kept walking inside. Though he wasn't quite ready for a hug, I had overcome my fear and given a deathblow to the enemy of my peace. It was a huge victory for my soul.

I could have hidden in the crowd, skipped the event entirely, or placed the toughest guys I knew around me. But on that occasion, God had offered me the best of all possible options: confront your fears, and you will see that God is bigger than they are. Face the thing you fear most, and when you do, you will realize there is nothing left to fear.

In the Bible, Job lost all of his children and possessions in one day and then had his body racked with unbearable sores and open wounds. In the midst of all his pain, he admitted, “For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.”¹³ But Job, thank God, would not allow his brutal circumstances to overwhelm him. He courageously declared his conviction, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”¹⁴

**GOD HAD OFFERED
ME THE BEST OF ALL
POSSIBLE OPTIONS:
CONFRONT YOUR FEARS,
AND YOU WILL SEE THAT
GOD IS BIGGER THAN
THEY ARE.**

So many times when I've battled fear, I've been encouraged by reading the Old Testament Book of Job. Three thousand years after his death, Job stands as one of the greatest men of faith of all time. He faced and defeated the fears that could have destroyed his life and future and, in the end, God rewarded him greatly: "So the LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning."¹⁵

When we let God into our lives, He begins transforming our fears: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear], but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control."¹⁶

No good father wants his children to live in fear. So, imagine how much a perfect Heavenly Father wants us free from fear. God the Father will create situations in your life enabling you to conquer childhood fears and hurts by stepping out in faith. If you let God have control of your life, He will give you the grace and opportunities you need to overcome your childhood fears and hurts.

3. Give God Control of Your Life

Millions of people are afraid of flying, even though many of them know statistically they are safer in an airplane than driving a car. Researchers say a conscious fear of crashing is usually not the problem. At the root of their anxiety is the fear that once they leave the ground they will lose control of their lives. In a similar way, a person can know intellectually that God will take better care of their lives than they can, but they may still be afraid to turn over the control of their lives to Him.

Just as giving into fear will invariably lead to sin, fear will prevent us from doing what God wants us to do in our lives—thus the expression, "frozen or paralyzed by fear." And fear will not just affect our own lives—if we don't conquer our fears, we will pass them on to our children.

One of the kings of Israel in the Old Testament passed on a curse to his children: “He [Jeroboam] committed the same sins as his father before him, and his heart was not right with the Lord his God...”¹⁷ You have to break the curse of fear in your life, or the curse will break your heart and your children’s after you. Jesus encouraged us to take an active role in taking God-given authority over our fears when He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind (are tied to) on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose (break off) on earth will be loosed in heaven.”¹⁸

4. Let Love Be Your Guide

One of the most encouraging realities about our Creator is that “... God is love.”¹⁹ The eternal One who shaped and formed each of us doesn’t just act loving—He is the very essence of love. Love is how He motivates and directs our lives.

Since the Bible teaches, “there is no fear in love,”²⁰ then there is no fear in God. So, He will never use fear to direct our lives. If I sense God is encouraging me to do something and I am convinced the only reason I should not do it is because of fear, then I can be sure God actually wants me to do it. The Devil, who is trying to control me with fear, has overplayed his hand. I am now confident to confront my fear, and it has no power over me.

The Bible says, “...perfect love casts out fear.” An ongoing, intimate relationship with the God who is love will eventually drive all fear from our lives.

And that same verse concludes, “... he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”²¹ The amount of fear I allow in my life is a clear indicator of the extent of my relationship with God.

Why should I be afraid? If God isn’t afraid and I have a new life in Him, then I shouldn’t be afraid, either. The Author of life is the only true protector of my life.

Since God never guides our lives with fear, but rather with peace,²² if we are afraid to do something that He’s given us to do, then God is not directing us with fear—it’s the Devil trying to intimidate us. But

if it is really God's will for us to do something, then He will help us overcome our fear by guiding us with peace and love: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."²³

Healthy Fear

Not all fear is bad. In fact, some fear is not only good—it is essential.

You should fear driving a car around curves at high speeds. You should fear taking illegal drugs. I've buried many people who lacked that fear. You should fear inhaling flammable gas and putting a match to your mouth, attempting to become a human blowtorch. I knew a 15-year-old who did that, and it killed him instantly. He was one of my public high school students who used to laugh at the gospel. Perhaps a healthy fear of God could have caused him to be less flippant about his safety and even saved his life.

The Bible bluntly says, "Fear God."²⁴ In the original Greek language, this means we should, "be in awe, revere, be afraid, fear (exceedingly), and reverence God." Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."²⁵ God is not a bully who coerces us—He's an all-powerful protector who knows what's best for us, and so we should submit to His peaceful leading in our lives. I have done this gladly and without regret.

There are at least four benefits in fearing God:

1. You can experience supernatural growth.

"The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it grew in strength and numbers. The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit."²⁶

2. You can become completely pure.

"And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God."²⁷

3. You can learn to hate evil.

“All who fear the LORD will hate evil.”²⁸

4. You can live long and well.

“Fear of the LORD lengthens one’s life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.”²⁹

Jesus even warned, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”³⁰ The fear of God is essential for a healthy life, but it is always His desire to set us free from the fears that can destroy our lives.

God-Given Identity or Man-Made Conformity

In the Old Testament, when the children of Israel insisted on having a king instead of God Himself, the prophet Samuel gave them Saul. Initially, when Saul was called out, he was afraid and went into hiding:

“And finally Saul, son of Kish, was chosen from among them. But when they looked for him, he had disappeared! So they asked the LORD, ‘Where is he?’ And the LORD replied, ‘He is hiding among the baggage.’ So they found him and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else.”³¹

When God calls us to follow Him, we have to learn to reject our fears and come out from the baggage of our past. For some reason, Saul had fears about his own value and significance, and they would prove to be his undoing. Later in life, lacking an understanding of his inner, God-given value, “...Saul was afraid of him [David], and he was jealous because the LORD had left him and was now with David. David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the LORD was with him. When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him.”³²

Unless we accept our God-given identity, whether it's specifically our personality, our gifts, our calling, or even our sexual identity, we will succumb to our fearful nature and miss the high ground of God's will. Even though David had been overlooked and rejected by the father figures in his life—his father, older brothers, and King Saul—he learned to trust in his Heavenly Father's assessment of who he was. King Saul never did.

David overcame childhood fears and grew as a king who trusted God, but Saul feared the rejection of other people more than he embraced the acceptance of God. In complete fear and delusion, he "...set up a monument to himself..."³³ We set up monuments to ourselves when God's perfect plan for our lives becomes confused with our skewed perspective of who we are. If we stay like that, we'll eventually bow down to other people or influences and become people we'd never want to be.

But we don't have to stay stuck in fear and delusion: "Then Saul finally admitted to the prophet Samuel, 'Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the LORD's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded.'"³⁴

Bow down to God and allow Him to heal your childhood fears, and become the person you were meant to be.

Blind Faith

An 85-year-old woman was legally blind, but she still loved when it snowed because it reminded her of wonderful days in her childhood. So, one snowy winter afternoon she went for a walk down her driveway.

Going from tree to tree, she shook the fresh snow from the boughs. She was lost in her memories, and soon was surrounded by vague, unfamiliar shapes. Now she was concerned; she had gone too far into the woods.

She turned around and tried to start walking back toward her driveway. But, by now, she had lost her sense of direction. She began to get cold as the snow fell harder. Wiping tears away from her eyes, she said a panicked prayer, “God, please help me!” Abruptly, she stopped in her tracks. She stood perfectly still as a feeling of relief broke through her fear. Then she turned completely around and struck out in a new direction.

Finally, she came to a fence. It was a familiar boundary line. She followed the fence until she reached the gate of her property. “Thank You, God!” she exclaimed, having been safely returned to her home.

The next morning, the man who shoveled snow for her came rushing in to her house. He was extremely alarmed by the footprints he had seen on her property. He had followed her footprints, and they had led to the edge of a riverbank, right to where the drop-off was the steepest. If the woman had taken even one more step forward, it would have been her last. But that was where she had stopped and called out to God.

When facing your greatest fears, stop and call out to God. Stop giving in to fear! Stop worrying! Stop believing the worst! God wants to meet you at your point of greatest need, “For the angel of the LORD guards all who fear Him, and He rescues them.”³⁵

Grace to Get Us Through

On February 9, 1555, Thomas Hawks and six other devoted Christians were burned at the stake for their faith in Jesus Christ. Just before the death sentence was carried out, some of Hawks’ friends expressed their deep concern for him. How could he or anyone be able to endure the pain of being burned alive?

They asked that, if at all possible, as he was dying he give them a sign, some indication that the pain he was experiencing was endurable. Hawks promised he would, saying that if the pain he suffered was endurable, he would lift his hands toward heaven before dying.

When he was bound to the stake, Hawks poured out his soul in prayer to God. The fire was lit, and soon flames engulfed his entire frame. His body was completely consumed, down to his hands and fingers. All present thought he was dead.

Then suddenly, Hawks reached his outstretched hands over his head, even as the flames continued to consume him. In an action that seemed like great rejoicing, he clapped them together three times. Hawks then gave a final shout before sinking down into the fire.

Everyone there realized they had witnessed the miraculous grace of God—grace to overcome fear, grace to endure all things. God will give us each grace when we most need it, too.

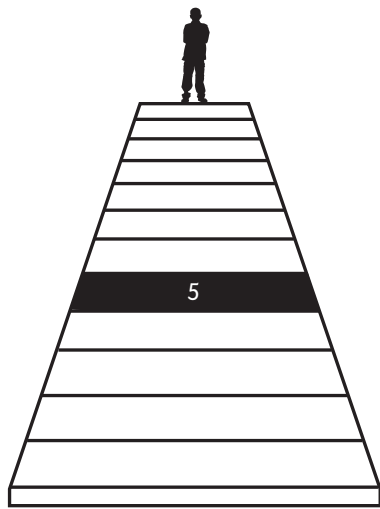
Although this graphic story may jar our senses with its rawness, it can also inspire us to be confident in God's provision during the lesser challenges we experience in our own lives. If God can get Thomas Hawks through that, He will get me through anything I might face.

The Bible promises Jesus' followers, "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."³⁶

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your significant childhood fears? What do you think were the root causes? Describe how they have affected your life.
2. To what extent have you received God's healing from your childhood fears? How does this currently affect your life?
3. In what ways do you think you allow your fears to impact your destiny and the destinies of those around you?
4. Do you think you have a healthy fear (reverence) for God? In what areas of your life do you have complete faith that He is there for you? In what areas do you struggle trusting Him? How does that affect your life?
5. In what ways have you faced your fears? How did your trust in God, or lack of it, affect you as you faced your fears? Describe your experiences.

*...un
...i qu
...e de
...refin
...u m
...souff
...e que
...gre
...tinen
...perip
...la
...ve
...des
...ing
...wen
...regu
...reie
...l'alf
...comp*



5

the embittered child

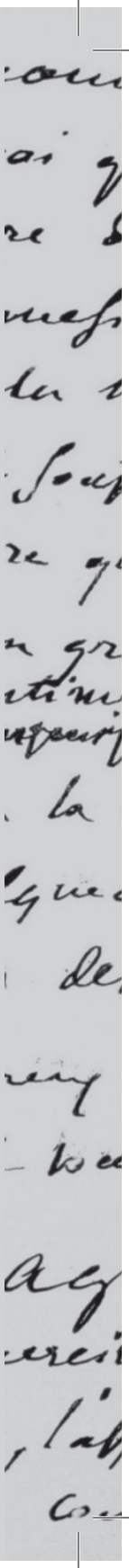
People can be more forgiving than you can imagine. But you have to forgive yourself. Let go of what's bitter and move on.

—Bill Cosby

Marguerite's husband died two months before the birth of their son. From three to five years old, the boy lived in an orphanage because his mother was either unwilling or unable to care for him. He felt abandoned and unwanted from a very young age. It would set the tone for the rest of his life.

His relationship with his mother was incredibly dysfunctional. She was the primary cause of many of his problems. Marguerite was a self-centered woman who always felt life had given her a raw deal. Those who knew her described her as domineering and quarrelsome. Money was her god, and although she made significant income from her real estate investments, she often claimed to be impoverished.

The boy was reunited with his mom and siblings at age 5, but the family moved 21 times in the first 17 years of his life. Lacking the roots and stability of a normal childhood, the troubled boy grew up feeling disconnected and nomadic, attending 12 different schools. His mother favored him over his brothers, frequently spoiling him. But as a single,



working mom, she left him alone at home for hours on end. Rejected and confused, he withdrew into an introverted world of reading and TV. The drifting home life combined with his temperamental personality left him with few friends, a pattern he would carry into adulthood.

As he grew older, he became the dominant head of the household, bossing his mother around and sometimes even hitting her in anger. A few times he also threatened other family members with a knife.

At 14, he was diagnosed as having a “personality pattern disturbance with schizoid features and passive-aggressive tendencies.” He was then recommended for continued psychiatric intervention and ordered to report periodically to the court. But even though he had this legal restraint and was placed on probation, his mother thought she knew better. With her emotionally unstable son in tow, she fled the jurisdiction of the court and moved over a thousand miles away, from New York to Texas.

At the age of 15, now an avid reader, he withdrew even further into himself. He became a Marxist, later writing, “I was looking for a key to my environment, and then I discovered socialist literature. I had to dig for my books in the back dusty shelves of libraries.”

Still trying to find his place in life, he joined the Marines at age 17 to get away from his mother’s controlling and destructive behavior. It was there he learned to be an expert marksman—a skill that would tragically define his entire life. He was dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Marines and attempted to defect to Russia, but he was denied citizenship and sent back to the United States.

He felt abandoned and rejection during every stage of his life—by his father, his mother, his peers, and now even his country. He allowed the pain to fester and the injustice done to him to overwhelm him. Now, he was a completely embittered soul with an inner rage that was a ticking time bomb.

On November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas, Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy.

Kennedy was respected, stable and successful. He epitomized everything Oswald was not. Oswald, in turn, hated everything Kennedy represented.

The Bible warns, “Each heart knows its own bitterness...”¹ and, “watch out that no bitter root of unbelief rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison.”²

Lee Harvey Oswald, a bitter child, wounded an entire nation.

Down, But Not Out

One of the greatest men who ever lived was an Old Testament legend. Joseph, the favorite son of the patriarch Jacob, had more reasons than most to become embittered by life. But, by the grace of God, he became better for it instead.

When Joseph was just a teenager, he was violently rejected by his older brothers and sold into slavery. The privileged life he had known as a child came abruptly to an end. Although his family had treated him horribly, he refused to become bitter. Beginning in his late teens and for the next eleven years, he would spend his life as a slave, eventually gaining the trust and confidence of his master, Potiphar.

Joseph was a good-looking young man, and Potiphar’s wife noticed. She repeatedly flirted with Joseph, but he was never swayed. Over time, her unwelcome sexual interest turned into an obsession. She became intent on either seducing or destroying him. One day, after Joseph denied her yet again, she falsely accused him of attacking her.

Enraged, Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison. Once again, Joseph experienced a painful and undeserved rejection. It would provide another reason for him to be overcome with bitterness. But Joseph chose to trust God in spite of his circumstances. He refused to allow injustice to contaminate his heart. As the Bible says, “Until the time came to fulfill His word, the Lord tested Joseph’s character.”³

Like Joseph, Jesus also experienced unjust persecution. And like Joseph, He responded well: “He (Jesus) did not retaliate when he was insulted. When He suffered, He did not threaten to get even. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.”⁴

Jesus knew that the burdens He had to bear were part of God’s plan. How many of us see the true value of the burdens that weigh us down? In my own life there have been a lot of times I haven’t. But the eternal significance of each God-ordained pressure in life is undeniable.

**ALL THROUGHOUT
JOSEPH’S LIFE, GOD
HAD A BIGGER PLAN: TO
HAVE ALL OF JOSEPH’S
SETBACKS WORK FOR HIS
LONG-TERM BENEFIT.**

A group of hikers traveling through a remote wilderness needed to cross a treacherous, rushing river. Their guide, relying on years of experience, told them to each pick up the heaviest boulder they could possibly carry and, holding it, walk across the turbulent waterway. The extra weight of the rock actually gave them a more sure footing. Their extra burden saved their lives.

God uses the same principle in each of our lives. During our most challenging times, we might feel as if we’re carrying a heavy burden. But if we’re willing to trust God and carry this additional load, we’ll arrive safely at our destination—God’s destiny for our lives. On the other hand, if we refuse to pick up the extra weight God asks us to carry, we’ll be more likely to get shaken and bruised, and we might never find the safety of His perfect will.

We see this principle in Joseph’s life, too. During his years in slavery and prison, he learned supernatural patience. Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears. And it’s not just important to God—it is a part of His nature and the result of His Spirit’s working in people’s lives.⁵

The Bible promises that patient endurance will result in long-term rewards: “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise...”⁶

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”⁷

All throughout Joseph’s life, God had a bigger plan: to have all of Joseph’s setbacks work for his long-term benefit. When Joseph was in prison, Egypt’s pharaoh had a dream that none of his ministers could interpret. But word reached Pharaoh that there was a prisoner who could tell the meaning of any dream.

Joseph was sent for, and God gave him the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream. He told Pharaoh that seven years of prosperity would be followed by seven years of the worst famine the world had ever seen. So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of storing food to ensure Egypt could survive. Suddenly, a former slave and prisoner was recognized as the wisest man in the kingdom. In essence, Joseph was promoted and became the Prime Minister of Egypt. Only Pharaoh had more authority than he did.

What an incredible twist of fate!

One moment Joseph is a slave and prisoner; the next he is running an entire nation. Our responses to the wounds of life are critical. They determine the level of character we will carry with us. Your wounds may have come from your father, mother, siblings, or some other authority figure in your life, but, like Joseph, it is possible for you to respond well in the face of incredible pain and rejection. There is no wound from your past that God cannot heal. If you will let Him take away your bitterness, your future

**YOUR WOUNDS MAY
HAVE COME FROM YOUR
FATHER, MOTHER,
SIBLINGS, OR SOME
OTHER AUTHORITY FIGURE
IN YOUR LIFE, BUT, LIKE
JOSEPH, IT IS POSSIBLE
FOR YOU TO RESPOND
WELL IN THE FACE OF
INCREDIBLE PAIN
AND REJECTION.**

will bring the healing and fulfillment your heart has been waiting for.

Bitter Root—Sweet Fruit

Years went by, and Joseph continued to receive Pharaoh's favor. He skillfully administrated the challenges he faced and eventually married and had children. Joseph named his first son, "Manasseh," saying, "God has made me forget all my troubles and the family of my father."⁸

Manasseh's Hebrew name means "forgetfulness." Joseph consciously chose to forget about his troubles and forgive those who had hurt him. We each have the same choice. We can choose, over time, to forget the many offenses life sends our way or obsessively dwell on them to our own detriment. In addition, by giving his son a Hebrew name, Joseph showed he remembered who he was and from whom he came.

When we reexamine our past, we have an opportunity to redefine it. It's clear from studying the life of Joseph that, rather than dwelling on the pain of his past, he chose to release his bitterness and hurt. It was a wise decision and one we can learn from. In each of our lives, God wants to redefine our past, help us to forgive others, and allow His Spirit to heal us.

In his book, *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis describes hell as a place where no one forgets anything. In conscious torment, hell's occupants endlessly recount every harsh word ever said to them and every wrong ever done. Hell is a place of eternal unforgiveness, where the pain and regret of life is continuously remembered.

**MAKE A CONSCIOUS
DECISION TO FOCUS ON
THE NEEDS OF THOSE
WHO HAVE HURT YOU
INSTEAD OF ON THEIR
OFFENSE.**

Heaven, in contrast, is portrayed as a place where all of the hurtful experiences in life are finally put to rest. The old and upsetting passes away—all things are new. In heaven, all is forgiven, forgotten, and therefore healed.

You can bring a little bit of heaven to earth every time you forgive someone who has hurt you. Make a conscious decision to focus on the needs of those who have hurt you instead of on their offense. Then you'll be following the pattern of Jesus, who daily focuses on our needs and not our many mistakes.

Joseph had a second son and named him "Ephraim" because he said, "God has made me fruitful in this land of my suffering."⁹ Ephraim's Hebrew name is significant, too. It means "fruitfulness."

If you and I can forget our past wounds, we will live fruitful, abundant lives, unscathed by even the most challenging of circumstances. On the other hand, if we are unwilling to forgive and forget, fruitfulness and fulfillment will stay out of reach. Before our lives can become fruitful, we have to forgive. It is always necessary for Manasseh (forgetfulness) to come before Ephraim (fruitfulness). The success of our future is linked to the healing of our past. If our hearts are barricaded with unforgiveness and bitterness, then healing can't get in.

We have to reclaim our childhood in order to claim our future inheritance.

Jesus is the One who intercedes for each of us.

He forgives us when we sin against Him.

He accepts us when we reject Him.

He feeds us when we are starving for His love.

He loves us when we can't even love ourselves.

He is the ultimate redeemer of our childhood and spiritual inheritance.

Time Doesn't Heal

Several years after Joseph became Prime Minister, his father, Jacob, found himself in the middle of a severe famine. If they did not get food, he and his family would die.

When Jacob heard there was grain available in the distant land of Egypt, he sent his sons to go buy food. The sons knew this was where they sold their brother Joseph into slavery 20 years earlier. No amount of time could erase the guilt and shame they must have felt for betraying their brother.

Time does not heal—only Jesus does!

Don't fight the Holy Spirit when He uses circumstances to bring up past hurts that still need to be healed. Frequently, as part of the healing process, we have to remember painful words and revisit bitter memories.

Joseph's brothers went to Egypt and unknowingly requested food from the same brother they had abused. Although his brothers didn't recognize him, Joseph knew them immediately. In our own lives, we may not initially recognize the great opportunities God has prepared for us, but if we use prayer and examine our life situations, we will see the unexpected links between our wounds and our healing. If we allow Him, God will bring all of our hurt full circle.

Jesus' entire ministry was about healing hurt people. Even when He was just beginning His ministry, He proclaimed, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because...He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."¹⁰

God's driving intention is to heal us.

Joseph had a choice: He could use his power to discipline or even destroy his brothers, or he could forgive them. If that situation had been the first time Joseph had considered forgiving the people who had hurt him, it's doubtful he would have responded well. But Joseph

had spent 20 years practicing forgiveness. It had become a regular part of his life.

Joseph had forgiven his brothers, but he needed to know if they had changed. Would they respond selfishly, as in the past, or would they finally respond well?

Joseph set up a test. He sent one of his brothers to prison. In order for him to be released, all of the other brothers had to be present—including the youngest, Benjamin. Benjamin was the only other child born to Joseph’s mother—Jacob’s favorite wife—Rachel. Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had the same bitterness and jealousy toward his brother Benjamin that they had had toward him. He was testing the character of their hearts.

When the remaining brothers returned and reported to their father what they had to do, Jacob refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt with his brothers. He was terrified that harm might come to Benjamin the way it came to Joseph. When he answered them, Jacob seemed bitter and pessimistic.¹¹

He was afraid that calamity had struck his life yet again. Jacob believed everything was against him. He saw the famine as another demonstration that everything was going wrong. The truth is that, in life, every famine and every calamity is a divine opportunity to see the work and goodness of God. The Bible asks, “What can separate us from the love of God?”¹² The answer is, “absolutely nothing!” In heaven the front-page headline always reads, “Everything Is Going Exactly As Planned!”

Contrary to what Jacob may have thought, God was going to use the famine to bring healing to three dimensions of Jacob’s life:

**UNLESS WE BEGIN TO
EMBRACE THE FAMINES
OF OUR CHILDHOOD AS
HEALING OPPORTUNITIES,
WE WILL MISS SOME OF
THE GREATEST MIRACLES
OF OUR LIVES.**

Jacob's family would be spared from certain starvation.

Jacob would be reunited with his lost son, Joseph.

Jacob's other sons would be set free from lingering guilt and shame.

God will use famines in each of our lives if we let Him.

Years ago, after experiencing long seasons of emotional famine, I finally began to fully embrace it. In the process, it became one of my favorite times with God. Why? Because famine produced in me what abundance never could. Unless we begin to embrace the famines of our childhood as healing opportunities, we will miss some of the greatest miracles of our lives.

God's healing my broken childhood was worth the pain of the process. It was worth the anguish that, at times, overwhelmed my soul. Without it, I would never have seen Jesus as my healer, my provider, and my deliverer, and that has made all the difference in my life. Not one of us chooses our childhood, but God promises to provide a way to experience the healing we need. I know He can meet every need because He met mine in my darkest hour.

Joseph accurately assessed all that had happened in his tumultuous life. He maturely chose to view his pain and suffering in light of God's infinite wisdom and foreknowledge. He shocked his terrified brothers with one of the most insightful statements ever uttered: "As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people."¹³

No rage. No vitriol. Just pure, unadulterated trust.

Reclaim Your Abundant Life

In the 1st century, peace and tranquility did not propel the early church to obey Christ's command to preach the gospel in every nation. Eight years after Jesus told the first disciples to go out into the world, they were still stuck in Jerusalem, trapped in "hibernation," when Jesus had clearly told them to go into "every nation."¹⁴

Finally, God blasted them out. It took persecution, not prosperity, to spread the gospel.

Don't pray for abundance—pray for obedience.

Don't pray for a different childhood—pray to become willing to go back into your past to rescue survivors, redeeming what others meant for evil.

Worldly abundance is a hollow substitute for the “abundant life” Jesus promised: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly [superabundant, superior, preeminent, beyond measure].”¹⁵

Jesus came to give you a superabundant life! Have you received it?

Jesus came to give you a superior life! Is that how you would describe your life—abundant, life beyond measure?

The patriarch Joseph lived this kind of “superior, superabundant, preeminent, beyond measure” life. He allowed his childhood wounds to be healed. I'm not sure a perfect childhood would have produced the same fire in Joseph's belly. He became the man he was because of the challenges he went through. Remove the challenges, and you change the man. Remove Joseph's heroic response, and we would probably never have heard of him.

We each have opportunities written into the script of our lives that would allow us to choose the heroic response. But they can only be seen by faith. We have to look for them with eyes of humility. If we only see those who have hurt us as reminders of past pain instead of doorways into a deeper healing, then we have missed the entire point of the journey.

Joseph remembered the dreams of his youth.¹⁶ Because he responded well, part of his childhood was reclaimed. He had dreamed as a boy that his father and brothers would in some way bow to his authority. The dream would now come true. They bowed in submission and were saved from starvation.¹⁷

Do you remember the dreams of your childhood, those God-given inspirations from your very foundation? Not so much what you wanted to do, but rather the inner sense of who you wanted to be. Even before we come to know God as His sons and daughters, He has known us and breathed into each one of us the inklings of His perfect plan. He has always planned to redeem every rejection, every imprisonment, every famine, and every misunderstanding.

Revisit your dreams and reclaim them!

Like Jacob and his sons, we cannot connect the dots before God opens our eyes, but we have to believe that He will. If we respond well, our lowest moments will become stairways to our highest insights, transforming us into who God intended us to be.

If we can hope for rain in the middle of a drought, then we can believe God will bless every area of our past. We need to stop reacting to our circumstances and trust God. We have to break through the drought of bitter disappointment and prepare to receive rain from above.

Trust God more than your perspective. Trust God more than your feelings. Trust God more than your fears. Trust God in your famines and in your pain. Trust God to resolve your past. Trust God for your future.

It is your destiny.

Charred, But Not Scarred

Life is filled with unexpected challenges. How we respond to them will define who we really are.

A group of college students had spent months building a float for their Homecoming weekend. Finally, the float was finished and ready for the judging. But the night before it was to be presented to the judges, vandals set it on fire and burned it down to the trailer. It was a devastating blow to the entire class.

Some of the Christian students went to their church to ask their pastor what they should do. They were angry and wanted to get even. But instead of joining in their anger, their pastor encouraged them with this verse from the Bible: “Don’t let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.”¹⁸

Taking their pastor’s advice, they decided to pick greenery and put it on the charred remains of their once-beautiful float. They made the choice that, even in the face of evil and destruction, they were not going to be discouraged.

The next day, when the awards were announced, their charred float won 2nd place. Even more than a plastic trophy, they had gained a priceless victory. They had conquered evil by doing good.

Hope for Your Heart

An embittered 17-year-old in New York City decided to end his life by leaping off a hotel roof. He had been abused and neglected by his father, and he felt it made no difference to anyone what happened to him. A New York City police officer came up to the roof and, after talking for a few minutes, said these life-changing words, “I’d be proud to have a son like you.” Gradually, the concerned cop convinced the teen to not take his life and to come down from the roof.

Holding to his promise, the bachelor police officer took the battered boy into his home and became his guardian. A short time later, having read about her son’s troubles in the paper, the boy’s biological mother contacted him. Fifteen years earlier she had lost custody of him, but she still loved him and very much wanted to be a part of his life.

**IT IS GOD’S LOVE FOR
US THAT MAKES LIFE
WORTH LIVING.**

The now hope-filled teen went to live with his mother and stepfather in Texas. Those simple words, "I'd be proud to have a son like you," changed his life. They offered him enough hope to keep on living.

Can you imagine Jesus saying these precious words to you? It is God's love for us that makes life worth living. Knowing God is honored to have me as His son has made up for the tragedy of having a natural father who was always disappointed with me.

Rejection and abandonment are chains around our hearts. They can make us bitter about our past, bound up in our present, and hopeless as we look toward our future. But Jesus came to set captives free. He promised, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹⁹

The truth is God has never abandoned you; He's never rejected you, and He's not ashamed to call you His son or daughter.

The truth is God keeps His promises.

The truth is everything will work out for your good if you love God and want to do His will.

The truth is your best days are ahead if you can trust God.

The truth is only found in trusting the Word of God.

The truth of God's Word will set you free if you believe it.

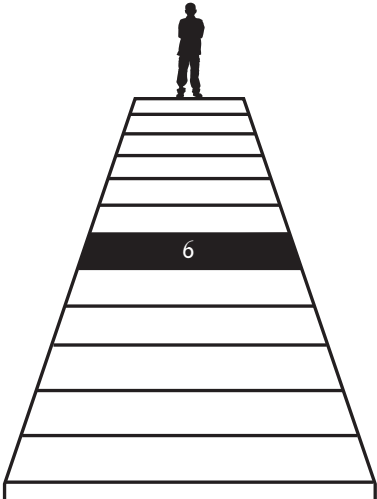
Today, you can trust God.

Today, let Jesus heal your abandoned, embittered, rejected, and broken heart.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe a life situation in which you felt you were treated unfairly and you responded with bitterness in your heart. How has this affected your life? Your relationships?
2. In what ways have you responded poorly to undeserved rejection? In what ways have you responded well? Describe the effects in your life.
3. In what ways have you chosen to barricade your heart with unforgiveness and bitterness? How has this affected you? Your relationships?
4. Have you been willing to ask God to heal your heart as you forgive those who have hurt you? If so, how has this impacted your ability to live an abundant life (John 10:10)?
5. As you've chosen to respond well to the hurts and pains in your life, describe how these choices have affected you. Your relationships?

sum
si qu
de
refin
u m
souff
a que
gre
tunen
peurpe
la c
me es
des
ny
wen
e gr
reie
l'alt
comp



6

the abused child

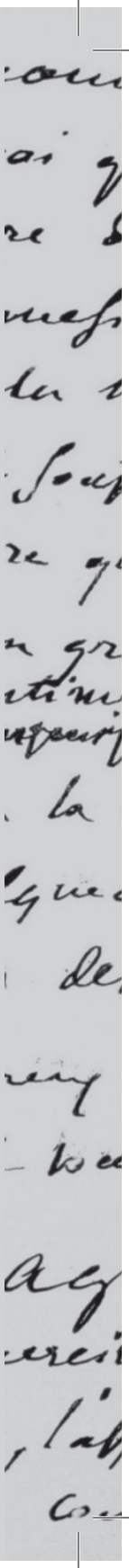
I was angry about the fact that my father would beat my mother on a daily basis, that my mother would take it in turn and beat on me. I was an abused child. I was mad about all those things, very bitter and very angry.

—Rick James

Whenever his father got drunk, he would beat him mercilessly. Once, the beating was so severe, his dad thought he had killed him. His mother had lost three children before he was born, so she spoiled him rotten and seemed to be incapable of disciplining him. His childhood was shaped between these extreme dysfunctions.

His father was described as, “authoritarian and selfish, showing little concern for the feelings of his much younger wife and little understanding of his children.”¹ He was a “hard, unsympathetic and short-tempered man.”²

When he was seven, his older brother couldn’t take the beatings any more and ran away from home. He wouldn’t return until their father had died. This left the young boy alone to receive the brunt of his father’s violent rages. His older half-sister said he “got his sound thrashing every day.”³ At age fourteen his father died; he would never find another father figure to replace him.



As a youth he took out his aggression on animals. He especially enjoyed shooting rats. He once beat a dog to impress a girlfriend—a habit he learned from his father. He was nicknamed “Wolf” and was well known for having a raging temper.

For a few years, his mother tried to push him towards church, but as a teen, he strongly rebelled. From then on, he never had a good thing to say about Christianity. His lack of personal identity caused him to be completely rigid about whatever he believed in at the time. Throughout his life, two atheist philosophers primarily influenced him: Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche.

He was a bright child but did poorly in school, eventually failing high school. When he finished his education, he was only semi-literate. Full of dreams but lacking the necessary skills to reach them, he was headed toward poverty, sleeping in parks and eating in soup kitchens. Destitute, he entered the army to end his financial problems.

Over time he became a master communicator and organizer. He used those skills to become the leader of his nation. A skilled manipulator and brutal tyrant, he led masses of young men into a war that would cost over 35 million lives. Many of his soldiers had lost their own fathers in a war twenty years earlier.

Adolph Hitler, an abused son, became the abusive father of a deceived nation and is widely regarded as the greatest tyrant of the 20th Century.

Russian dictator and revolutionist Joseph Stalin’s own upbringing wasn’t much different from Hitler’s. A friend of his described Stalin’s early years with his father in this way: “Undeserved and severe beatings made the boy as hard and heartless as the father was. Since all people in authority over others seemed to him to be like his father, there soon arose in him a vengeful feeling against all people standing above him.”⁴

Stalin’s father was an alcoholic who beat his wife. Joseph grew up hating his father and, subsequently, all authority. Although his mother pushed him toward priesthood in the Russian Orthodox Church, he became an atheist while attending seminary. Later, as the absolute

ruler of Russia, Stalin was responsible for the killing of 20 million people, including thousands of orthodox priests.

The world has never had a shortage of abused children.
And so it's also never lacked bullies.

Born into Greatness, Destined for Bondage

Former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was the son of extremely poor, landless Sunni Muslim peasants. When he was a child, his stepfather physically abused him.⁴ It was an injustice that Saddam passed on to his children and nation.

Hussein's two sons, Uday and Qusay, were every bit as brutal and tyrannical as their father. As president of the Iraqi National Olympic Committee, Uday would torture and abuse anyone who crossed him. He even constructed personal prisons, using them as dumping grounds for both political dissidents and underachieving athletes.

Once in prison, his victims were beaten with iron bars, caned on the soles of their feet, chained to walls, dragged on pavement until bloodied, and then dunked in sewage to guarantee the wounds became infected.

Uday once accused an Olympic committee security guard of stealing sports equipment.

He had the guard's hand cut off.

The missing equipment was later found.

Uday's first wife was described at the end of their three-month marriage as being, "half black and blue." His uncle (formerly Iraq's Interior Minister) had to have a leg amputated after Uday shot him at a family gathering. A former body double for Uday called him a sadist, saying, "I think Saddam's more human than Uday."⁵

Uday had a great teacher.

He grew up watching his father brutalize political opponents. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saddam's regime destroyed over 3,000 Kurdish villages. In the town of Halabja alone, an estimated 5,000 civilians were killed. Together, Saddam and Uday were responsible for killing more than 50 athletes and sports figures.

After the fall of the Iraqi dictator, Uday, age 39, and Qusay, age 37, were killed in a shoot-out with U.S. troops. Their abusive father was hanged for his crimes in late 2006.

His last words to those present were, "Go to hell!"

The size of a man is measured by the size of what makes him angry.

Stopping the Madness

My father was an abusive man—both verbally and physically.

When I was a boy my father would chase my brother and me around the house with his belt or slap us across the face. The last time he did that I was 15. By then he was older, and I was strong enough to restrain his hands. It was humiliating for him, but I'd had enough.

His verbal tongue-lashings felt no better. While assessing my grades or other areas of underachievement in my life, he regularly told me I would never amount to anything. His looks of disgust deeply wounded me and made me dread being around him. It took many years for me to be healed enough to think of him without feeling angry, abandoned, and rejected.

Since the beginning of time, the abused have abused.

But also, the healed have healed.

Past abuse only stops when we're desperate enough to go through the equally painful process of being healed. In order for this healing to start, we have to be willing to allow God and other wise people to touch our pain—to hear us, to question us, and to cry with us. It's not an easy process, but it's well worth it, and it's the only way a healthy future can be made from the death and devastation of our past.

If we refuse to face our past, we'll find ourselves inadvertently taking advantage of other vulnerable people. We will tragically perpetuate the anger, guilt, and shame produced by physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Concealed anger will eventually seep out.

It will surface either "under control" in a healthy environment or "out of control," bringing further pain to ourselves and those around us. But it will always come out.

Our healing begins when we choose to spend time in the presence of the Healer, the Creator of our hearts and minds. Since the time people first felt shame, we've had a tendency toward hiding. But God can penetrate our walls and bring the healing we so desperately need.

Abuse overwhelms our senses, distorts our perceptions, and keeps our hearts frozen in past pain until we're healed. With God's healing, we can escape the cycle of abuse.

Since my own healing began 35 years ago, the biggest happiness in my life has been helping other people be healed, too. It's completely worth it. Now, my ongoing healing has opened incredible doorways to a destiny I never could have imagined.

I have been healed.

I am still being healed.

And I expect to keep being healed until Jesus returns to make all things right.

**ABUSE OVERWHELMS
OUR SENSES, DISTORTS
OUR PERCEPTIONS,
AND KEEPS OUR HEARTS
FROZEN IN PAST PAIN
UNTIL WE'RE HEALED.
WITH GOD'S HEALING,
WE CAN ESCAPE THE
CYCLE OF ABUSE.**

Prey Become Predators

Abuse is “using something in an improper, illegal, or damaging way; to maltreat a person or animal physically, sexually, or psychologically.”⁶

The Internet is filled with lurid pictures of attractive, abused young women who, in the process of being preyed upon, have become predators themselves. Driven by lust, they seduce men into a visual addiction that can't be fulfilled. These girls had fathers who were either absent, distant, abusive, or deceived. Since they weren't treated as princesses by their dads, they don't expect to be treated as princesses by other men. Instead, they're now active participants in the cycle of abuse—a cycle of bondage that has gone on for thousands of years. Prostitution is called the oldest profession. It's actually the oldest form of abuse.

Many of us are given the incredible opportunity to move from victim to victor, from hurting to healed; but we choose instead to continue to lick the wounds of our abuse.

So, at what point does a person rise out of the ash-heap of his or her abused past into the amazing future God intended? When is the cycle of guilt and shame replaced by the freedom of forgiveness and peace?

The way up is down—humility is the doorway to our healing. It's been called, “hugging dirt.” We can choose to either fuel the flames of anger and bitterness or extinguish their hold on our lives. Forgiving those who have tormented us is always our choice. I once begged an elderly woman to forgive someone who had been dead for 25 years. She refused.

We have to begin to see the need of those who have hurt us and not just their offense. Look at the example of Jesus, who came to Earth to live and die in our place. He was successful because He was committed to focusing on our need and refused to be distracted by our offense. He could have stayed in heaven and just wiped Earth clean from sin.

Instead, Jesus chose the most difficult of all options: to put our sin on Himself. The Bible says that “When He was hung on the cross, He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing.”⁷ We are only now

forgiven because Jesus was willing to become human and experience all our temptations without giving in to them. He lived a perfect life and was willing to pay the price of our imperfect lives.

The Bible tells us that "...it was our weaknesses He carried; it was our sorrows that weighed Him down. And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God for His own sins! But He was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed!"⁸

In the same way, we can only forgive those who have hurt us by identifying with their sin and pardoning their crime against us with the same compassion we receive from God. If we refuse to forgive them, some day we'll find ourselves perpetuating the same sin against others. The chains and strongholds of sin are only broken when we're more committed to being healed than to remaining hurt.

Jesus challenged everyone, "...when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."⁹

Born into Bondage, Destined for Greatness

Moses was born to an oppressed family, hidden within a privileged race descending from the great patriarch Abraham. At the time of Moses' birth, the ruling pharaoh was so threatened by the multiplication of his Hebrew slaves that he issued a royal death sentence requiring all male Hebrew babies be killed.

Moses' parents wouldn't accept it.

**THE CHAINS AND
STRONGHOLDS OF SIN
ARE ONLY BROKEN WHEN
WE'RE MORE COMMITTED
TO BEING HEALED THAN
TO REMAINING HURT.**

They weren't afraid of the king's command, and they refused to comply with the evil decree. They hid him from their oppressors for three months.¹⁰ When this was no longer possible, they placed their baby son in a basket and sent him floating down a river near the pharaoh's palace.

God allowed the pharaoh's barren daughter to rescue and adopt him, and Moses grew up surrounded by the opulence of the royal family. According to the renowned Jewish historian Josephus, Moses was actually the heir to the throne because he had led the Egyptian armies to victory over their Ethiopian neighbors.

Although Moses was raised by an Egyptian, his Hebrew mother became his wet-nurse and remained a significant influence in his life. Because of this ongoing connection to his past, Moses was raised with a great respect for his Hebrew heritage.

One day when he was forty years old, he saw a Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian. Stepping in to defend the slave, he killed the Egyptian and buried the body in the desert sand.¹¹

But nothing remains hidden for very long.

Jesus guaranteed, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."¹²

Anger and violence are typical responses to past pain.

Had Moses learned this violent behavior from others in the royal family? Very possibly! This was the same family that kept millions of Hebrews as oppressed slaves for four centuries; the same dysfunctional family that had slaughtered hundreds of innocent Hebrew babies at the time of his birth.

Like Uday and Qusay Hussein, was Moses himself abused? Were there generational father wounds that fueled the anger and rage inside him? Did he identify with victims due to personal experience? What were the roots of his pain, anger and violence? Perhaps members of his adopted family had victimized him.

According to the Bible, anger was an area Moses battled his entire life.

When Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments and he saw the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf, he was furious and broke the stone tablets.¹³ Later, he raised his hand in anger and struck a rock twice with his staff, disobeying God's command, so God barred him from entering the Promised Land.¹⁴ (This was not heaven, but a piece of land encompassing much of the nation of Israel today.)

The day after Moses killed the Egyptian, he saw two other Hebrews fighting. As he attempted to restrain them, one of them snapped, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"¹⁵ Terrified the Egyptian authorities would find out about the murder, Moses fled into the wilderness of Midian (present day Saudi Arabia). He was there for forty years. Stripped of all confidence in himself, he learned to obey God alone.

It was in the wilderness that Moses learned the patience necessary to lead God's people. Although he wasn't flawlessly changed, he came back a far different man from the one who killed the Egyptian. After 40 years alone with God, the threats of Pharaoh wouldn't provoke him. After his time with God on the mountain, the rebellion of his people wouldn't anger him.¹⁶ He was a different man.

If we would allow Jesus to get us alone, without the distractions that so easily seduce us, He would transform our lives, too. Moses got to know God in the wilderness.

Less distraction. Fewer seductions.

The Bible says, "...the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."¹⁷

Our friendship with God is His greatest desire and our greatest need.

Like Jesus, Moses was blessed from birth, protected during his childhood, powerfully used by God, and rejected by those he came to rescue. Like Jesus, he left luxury for obscurity and learned obedience through suffering. He had been a stranger in a foreign land, but it was there God met him.

God used Moses, an abandoned child raised in a violent family, to rescue his people from four centuries of slavery. What could He do through us if we turned over our lives to Him, allowing Him to make us whole, too?

A Little Pain Goes a Long Way

It is impossible to fully relate and empathize with another person's pain, but a little of our own pain goes a long way in having compassion for the pain of others. I know many of you reading this have experienced things more painful than anything I have shared. My heart has broken countless times as people have shared the gruesome events of their childhoods.

IF YOU HEAR NOTHING

ELSE, HEAR THIS:

CHARACTER ONLY

COMES FROM RECEIVING

THE LOVE OF GOD.

As Paul the apostle once wrote, "So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer."¹⁸

Our own hurts often keep us from seeing our hidden worth. Our true value is not to be found in the high points of our life, but rather hidden under the rubble of our greatest pain. Only time, heat, and pressure can produce the most beautiful diamond. In the same way, God, in making all things new, allows old things to pass away: "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"¹⁹

Even though our struggles might seem pointless, seen from God's perspective, the good results will last forever. The scales of heaven will not miss an ounce of our true value. Even if we think there is tragic waste in our lives, if we allow God to heal

our hearts, the character being produced will far outweigh the pain suffered.

If you hear nothing else, hear this: character only comes from receiving the love of God. All attempts to change without first knowing how much God loves you will limit you to a life based on performance, not acceptance. If we reject God's infinite love, we will spend our lives falling short of our true potential.

A young boy in South Africa once swapped a costly diamond for a few toy soldiers because he was ignorant of what he had. Satan, the enemy of our soul, threw away his own eternal value and now attempts to devalue each of us. Once known as Lucifer ("light-bearing"), the chosen worship leader of heaven traded the priceless for the meaningless, when the love of God was all he would ever need.

Why is receiving God's love, and the eternal character that comes with it, so important? Because, in the end, there is nothing we can hide that will not eventually be revealed. In the beginning, charisma might get you going, but it will take character to keep you going. Although character may be seen in the great moments of our lives, it is formed in the small ones. The real limitations in our lives are only in us and in our character, never in the heart of a loving God. He will gladly fulfill our heart's desire once we fully embrace what is on His heart for us.

Although we are all distracted by the temporary pleasures of earth (money, idols, fame, relationships, etc.), eternity is in our hearts²⁰ and nothing else will satisfy. Nothing outside of God's promises and desires for us will bring the satisfaction we crave. My father had everything anyone could ask for—wealth, fame, family—but without God, what he sought

**ALTHOUGH WE ARE ALL
DISTRACTED BY THE
TEMPORARY PLEASURES
OF EARTH (MONEY, IDOLS,
FAME, RELATIONSHIPS,
ETC.), ETERNITY IS IN OUR
HEARTS AND NOTHING
ELSE WILL SATISFY.**

after never fulfilled him. I refuse to pass on the lie. By God's grace, the curse has been broken.

All pain has purpose. Find the purpose, and its value is self-evident. Miss the purpose, and the pain remains pointless—just another scar in a tragically long life. Now that my abuse, pain, and torment have been healed, they have reaped a far greater reward than they ever took from me. Embrace the healing process, and this will be true for your life, too.

Smiling With His Spirit

During the mid-19th century, a boy named Joseph seemed completely normal until age two when abrasions began to appear on his skin. They were the first swells of a violent storm that would envelope his fragile life.

Joseph had a wonderful, godly mother, but she died when he was 10 years old. He was left with a cruel father and a bitter stepmother who hated him.²¹ Joseph's deformities worsened. He had massive feet, was unable to use one of his hands, and became deaf in one ear and blind in one eye. The malformation of his mouth made it almost impossible to understand him when he talked.

At one point, his head measured three feet in circumference, his right wrist, twelve inches, and his right thumb, five inches. Fungus grew all over his body giving him a hideous odor. As a teenager, Joseph was so deformed that when he tried to sell products door to door, women would scream and even faint.

When Joseph was 15, his alcoholic father beat him so badly he was left unconscious and bleeding underneath the kitchen table. Sometime during the night, Joseph regained consciousness, crawled out from beneath the table, quietly gathered a few belongings, and left home for good.

Unable to support himself, the dejected young man eventually found work in a freak show, billed as "Joseph Merrick—The Elephant Man." Because his skin looked like elephant skin, his handlers made up a story that an elephant had attacked his mother when she was pregnant with him.

One day, a doctor visited him and, overcome with compassion, placed Joseph in a hospital. He later candidly described Joseph's condition as, "the most disgusting specimen of humanity that I have ever seen."²² During this period of his life, when one of the hospital attendants smiled at Joseph, he was so overcome by the kindness of this simple act that he broke down in tears saying, "You are the first woman I can ever remember who smiled at me."

During his long hospital stay, to the amazement of everyone around him, Joseph built incredibly elaborate, cathedral-like structures using only one hand. He would sit and read the Bible, especially the Psalms, for hours. It was said of Joseph, "He could not smile with his face, but he learned to smile with his spirit."

At just 28 years old, Joseph passed away, having lived a truly extraordinary life. In spite of overwhelmingly tragic circumstances, Joseph learned something that many people with far easier lives never do. He learned that God really liked him, and he was able to live in the joy and peace that comes from this life-altering revelation. As I reflect on his broken life, I like to imagine he once read and believed the comforting words of King David, "...this I know... God is for me."²³

No matter who we are or what we have done, whether beautiful or ugly, rich or poor, good or bad, loved or unloved, approved or rejected, we each need to know in the deepest part of our being that there is a God who made us in His own image and likeness. A God who not only loves us unconditionally, but likes us so completely His heart smiles every time He thinks of us—and He thinks of us constantly.

**OUR OWN HEALING IS
DIRECTLY CONNECTED
TO OUR WILLINGNESS
TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO
HAVE HURT US.**

But God doesn't just love us, He loves our wounded fathers and mothers, too. His passionate heart aches to see them healed and restored. Can we say the same? Are we willing to pray that God will forgive those who have failed us? Our own healing is directly connected to our willingness to forgive those who have hurt us.

It Doesn't Make A Difference Anymore

When I was a young Christian, one of my former pastors and spiritual fathers was very abusive. I was a leader in his church. He wounded me deeply, openly ridiculing me before the entire church, my friends and my family. So many times, I drove around town listening to worship music while crying uncontrollably. I felt like I was near a nervous breakdown. I couldn't stop crying. Before the ridicule began, God challenged me to respond well, so I remained silent in spite of the accusations.

Many years later, as the senior pastor of a church myself, I had a dream about him. In the dream, we were driving along in heaven. It was majestically beautiful with brilliant colors and complete peace. I turned to him in the passenger seat still full of hurt over the things he had said and done. Without any anger or vindictiveness in my heart, I looked into his eyes and asked, "Why did you do it?"

His face was sad but steady. Looking down in embarrassment, and then back up into my eyes, a gentle, understanding smile came on his face. Then reaching out and hugging me, he said, "It doesn't make a difference anymore."

And I knew it was true.

As we hugged, there was an explosion of love in my heart like nothing I have ever experienced on earth. The dream ended.

I woke up sobbing in my bed in the middle of the night. Some deep, supernatural inner healing had taken place. Though I had forgiven and released him hundreds of times, over many years, I was suddenly freer than I had ever been toward him. It was a glimpse of heaven and God's forgiving love I will never forget.

Today, will you completely forgive those who have hurt you?

Will you release those who have wounded your soul?

You may have to pray to release them hundreds of times, but each time you do, another set of shackles will fall off.

It is worth the process and the pain; it is a better place.

Would you pause for a moment and pray right now?

God is eagerly waiting to heal and restore your precious heart and answer your vulnerable prayers.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe ways you have been wounded and abused physically, sexually, and/or psychologically in your childhood. Describe how these abusive experiences have affected you.
2. In what areas of your life have you allowed God and safe people to help you move from victim to victor (hurting to healed)? In what ways has this impacted your life and your relationships?
3. Have you chosen to forgive those who have abused you? What effects has this had in your life? If you are still choosing to not forgive, describe what you think is keeping you stuck in the pain of the abuse and unforgiveness. How is this decision affecting your life?
4. What area of pain have you chosen not to face? Why do you think you're choosing not to face it? What are the ramifications of this decision in your life?
5. Describe ways you've ministered to another person who was abused in childhood. How do you think this has impacted both your lives?

7

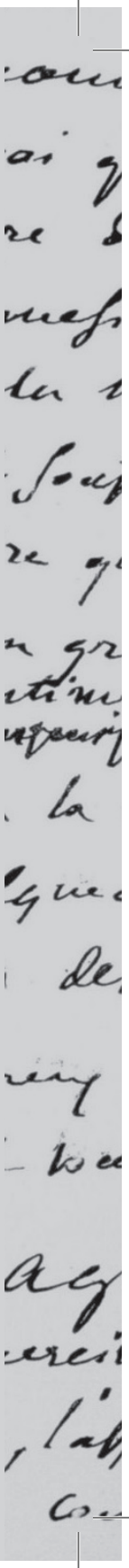
the spoiled child

*60% of parents believe that their children are spoiled.
15% of their teenagers agree.*

*—Dan Kindlon's survey findings in his book, *Too Much of a Good Thing**

Conrad was born to a large working class family in New Mexico. As a child, he developed a strong work ethic while helping out in his father's store. Later he joined the military and, after his service, used that work ethic to start a business at the age of 31. It grew to become one of the most successful companies in the world. During his lifetime, he became enormously wealthy, was married three times, divorced twice, and fathered four children.

At the end of his life, he left his estate to the Roman Catholic Church and a charitable foundation he had established. Much to his children's displeasure, he left almost nothing to them, writing in his will, "*There is a natural law, a Divine law, that obliges you and me to relieve the suffering of the distressed and the destitute. Charity is a supreme virtue, and the great channel through which the mercy of God is passed on to mankind.*"



His son contested the will in court and won. The ruling caused the bulk of Conrad's estate to be divided among his children. It was this sense of entitlement that forged the lawsuit and left an indelible mark on the family for generations to come.

Decades later, Conrad's great-granddaughter was born into this vast wealth. From birth she was denied nothing, being raised in the lap of luxury with the world's richest and most famous people. She was given the best money could buy—private education, houses on multiple coasts, expensive clothes, cars and toys. Feeling entitled to do whatever she wanted, she began partying at a very young age and engaged in many promiscuous relationships.

**WHEN PARENTS ALLOW
THEIR CHILDREN TO GET
WHATEVER THEY WANT,
GREED, ARROGANCE
AND SELFISHNESS
ARE CULTIVATED.**

When she was just a teenager, she began to pose for photos with little or no clothing, eventually posing for several men's magazines. She became even more famous. Her life was chronicled in the media—wild parties, car accidents, relationships, engagements and break-ups all in her selfish wake. Everywhere she went people talked about her. Girls wanted to be her. She seemed to have it all, setting trends in both fashion and culture. Her taste was sought after. If she acted in a movie or sponsored a product, it would sell.

Paris Whitney Hilton, great-granddaughter of Conrad Hilton, was born into a family of unimaginable wealth; a family trapped by the demon of entitlement. Her influence, whether we like it or not, has shaped American culture. Her life is the quintessential case of one spoiled child opening the door for a culture of millions of spoiled children. Since Paris is popular because of the way she looks and acts, millions of young girls think that if they can look and act like her, maybe they can be popular, too.

Spoiled Brat Syndrome

A spoiled brat is an excessively self-centered child, formed by a lack of discipline and limit-setting from his or her parents. When parents allow their children to get whatever they want, greed, arrogance, and selfishness are cultivated. The children become attached to getting their own way. Then, in response to a “no,” they will throw a tantrum—crying, screaming, shouting, or even hitting someone, behaving like infants until they gets their own way.

The “spoiled” in the phrase “spoiled child” comes from the saying “spare the rod and spoil the child,” which is commonly attributed to the Old Testament verse, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.”¹

History is full of famous spoiled children. Marie Antoinette is probably the most famous one. Rich, aristocratic, and egotistical, she personified the obvious qualities of a spoiled child. In modern times, celebrities Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Lyle and Erik Menendez (two brothers convicted of murdering their own parents) would fit the common perceptions of spoiled children. For six of the past seven years, Britney Spears is the name most often searched on the Internet worldwide.² We are now living in the Age of the Spoiled Child.

Spoiled brat syndrome is so pervasive in our culture that it’s easy to find examples in movies, books, cartoons, television shows and comic books. Some of the most famous spoiled brats are Eric Cartman from the cartoon *South Park*, Veruca Salt from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Montana Max from *Tiny Toon Adventures*, Angelica Pickles in *Rugrats*, Wendy O. Koopa from the Mario games, Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, Dudley Dursley from *Harry Potter*, and London Tipton from *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody*.

Were You a Spoiled Child?

The result of a person being spoiled is usually subtler than many of the other childhood dysfunctions we've previously discussed. Broken-hearted, abandoned, neglected, embittered, fearful, and abused children seem to demonstrate more obviously damaged characteristics than spoiled children do.

Spoiled children also seem to bear a greater responsibility for their present behavior. As adults we each choose how we will behave, whether to respond well to discipline or not. We each need to examine our lives to see if we have taken our spoiled responses with us into our adult life. If so, we may be less willing or even able to acknowledge the extent to which we have been spoiled. This accounts for the percentages at the beginning of this chapter from the 2000 survey: 60% of parents surveyed felt their child was spoiled, whereas only 15% of those same children felt they were.

Being spoiled seems to be inherently self-deceiving.

How can you know if you were spoiled as a child? Here are six indicators seen in spoiled children:

Temper Tantrums—A tantrum is a fit of bad temper, representing both anger and frustration. If, as a child, you tended to whine, complain, or get angry when you did not get your own way, it is likely you were spoiled. As a child, you may have used tantrums to force your parents to yield to your desires, though it was certainly not to your long-term benefit. Now, as an adult, you will need to learn to discipline your soul to submit to others. If not, your marriage will be threatened and your children will model your poor behavior. Spoiled children will always produce more spoiled children unless they learn to embrace discipline.

The Bible says, "...don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry."³

Difficulty Maintaining Friendships—If, while growing up, you were self-absorbed and fixated on your own desires, you probably had a hard time relating to the feelings of other people. Spoiled children do not like to share and tend to think of themselves as better than other people.

The Bible teaches, “Don’t be selfish... Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don’t think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made Himself nothing; He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form He obediently humbled Himself...”⁴

Dissatisfaction With What You Have—If you are rarely satisfied with what you have, you probably believe you deserve better—even if you have not earned it. This selfish attitude is called “entitlement,” and it is one of the signature qualities of a spoiled child.

The psalmist writes, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”⁵

Only as we look into the face of God can we see who we were created to become. Only then, as He makes us more like Him, will we be fully satisfied with who we are.

Unhealthy Eating Habits—It is not uncommon for a child who was allowed to do whatever he or she wanted to develop unhealthy eating habits. As an adult, the spoiled child may have a difficult time choosing the correct quality and quantity of food and drink to maintain a healthy body. Poor eating habits can indicate a lack of discipline, which is one benchmark of a spoiled child.

Is your diet wholesome? Do you give in to junk food, eating and drinking things you know are not good for you? This type of undisciplined behavior can lead to serious health consequences, and it probably began in your childhood with parents who were unwilling or unable to teach you healthy eating habits.

Scripture says, “...I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”⁶ Self-control is a wonderful result of God’s Spirit working in people,⁷ reflecting the character of God as much as any other virtue.

Over-Dependency on Others—Spoiled children expect other people to do things for them that they are completely capable of doing for themselves. They will anticipate and wait for others to serve them more than they will serve others.

Jesus taught, "...he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."⁸ Jesus modeled and encouraged a servant's heart. He understood this principle better than anyone who ever lived, saying, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."⁹

Manipulation—Manipulation is the act of unfairly coercing someone else into modifying his or her behavior to benefit you. Spoiled children manipulate people and situations to get their own way. This type of manipulation can be seen when you use charm, flirtation, flattery, guilt, shame, stubbornness, or even silence to dominate others with words and actions in order to get what you want.

Scripture says, "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: ...hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy...and other kinds of sin..."

"But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another..."¹⁰

In my own life I have found there are some dimensions of these six areas I still need to grow in. Maybe each of us has been spoiled in some way. You don't have to train a child to be selfish. The Bible says that from birth, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child..."¹¹

What's the cure for the spoiled child? The second half of the verse provides great insight: "...the rod of correction will drive it far from him."¹² Another translation says it this way, "...but discipline will drive it away."¹³

We are all certainly born with a great propensity to be angry, unfriendly, dissatisfied, unhealthy, overly dependent and manipulative. But the important question for each of us is whether any of these responses to life define who we are. No one wants to be around this kind of selfish behavior and, without a doubt, no one wants this kind of person for a spouse, parent, child, friend, neighbor, or co-worker.

The cure for the spoiled patterns of behavior in our lives is to yield to the Holy Spirit whenever a spoiled response surfaces in our lives. Ask forgiveness of those we selfishly hurt. Acknowledge spoiled attitudes before God and others. If not, these responses will poison all of our relationships. We all know adults, even elderly adults, who are angry, unfriendly, dissatisfied, unhealthy, overly dependent and manipulative.

Guess what—time didn't help them. Little brats grow into big brats. It is truly a sad and pathetic waste of a life. But it doesn't have to be that way. God can heal every part of our lives if we let Him. If you find yourself identifying with the negative characteristics of a spoiled child, it is not too late to change. He can help spoiled children grow into kind, compassionate, disciplined adults—no matter how old the "child" might be! God is giving you understanding in order to break the curse of rebellion and restore the blessing of a surrendered heart.

**THE CURE FOR THE
SPOILED PATTERNS OF
BEHAVIOR IN OUR LIVES
IS TO YIELD TO THE
HOLY SPIRIT WHENEVER
A SPOILED RESPONSE
SURFACES IN OUR LIVES.**

**SERIOUSLY, NO
MATTER HOW MANY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIORS YOU HAVE
CHECKED OFF, IT IS
GOD'S PERFECT PLAN
TO HEAL YOUR HEART,
MIND, AND WILL.**

Spoiled Child Checklist

By the time spoiled children are two or three years old, their behavior will resemble the following:

- Easily frustrated
- Complaining about being bored
- Whining and throwing tantrums
- Insisting on getting their own way
- Unwilling to follow rules or cooperate
- Refusing to respond to “no” or other disciplinary commands
- Protesting about things they are asked to do
- Unable to differentiate between needs and wants
- Controlling and excessively demanding
- Showing little or no respect for other people

Let's conduct a little experiment ourselves. Of the ten behaviors just mentioned, how many would best describe you in your childhood? Take a moment and count them up. If you checked:

- 0–2 More than likely you were not spoiled.
- 3–4 You might have needed better guidance.
- 5–6 You had significant indications of being spoiled and are probably difficult to get along with.

- 7–8 You were spoiled and more than likely struggle with selfishness today.
- 9–10 You were spoiled and it has almost certainly left significant scars on your relationships.

Seriously, no matter how many inappropriate behaviors you have checked off, it is God's perfect plan to heal your heart, mind, and will. Begin the process today of letting Jesus lead you. He is the one who died and rose again in order to rescue you, so He is the one who is able to restore your life, making you the person you were created to be.

Peter, a man who three times denied knowing his friend and Master, Jesus, was forgiven, healed and restored, growing to become one of the greatest followers of Jesus of all time. Peter wrote, "In His kindness God called you to His eternal glory by means of Jesus Christ. After you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation."¹⁴ So let this prayer become your own: "I have suffered much, O Lord; restore my life again, just as You promised."¹⁵

Can a Spoiled Child Change?

Throughout the Old Testament we see many spoiled children. Thankfully, some grew up to become healthy adults. Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses were each initially unhealthy and manipulative in his or her own way. Some of them clearly demonstrated anger, dissatisfaction and over-dependence as well. But they all allowed God to heal their lives and use them mightily.

Of all the spoiled children in the Bible, Absalom might be considered the worst. He was the golden boy—the first of King David's many children and his personal favorite. David gave him everything. Even though Absalom had all of the rights and privileges of an heir, he still wanted more.

He was blessed from the moment he was born. He wasn't just the handsomest child in his family, he was the most attractive man in his nation. Absalom was given too much, too fast. Nothing was withheld from him, so he never developed the discipline needed for a healthy life. In the end, inner excess poisoned his mind and divided a nation. Although his name meant "father of peace," his life was more of a plague, ending in a violent, self-absorbed rebellion while trying to destroy his own father.

When he was a young man, he murdered his brother. Afterwards, he fled to his maternal grandfather for protection from David's anger. Absalom waited for five years until David, missing his son terribly, welcomed him back into the family.

It was a tragic mistake.

Absalom was always jealous of his father's enormous success and popularity. In a masterful campaign of deceit, Absalom began to seduce his nation. Each day he set out to say and do whatever was necessary to flatter the Israelites and gain their favor. It worked. The people loved him. He became even more popular than King David. Believing it was time to execute the next phase of his plan, Absalom attempted to overthrow his father and take the throne. But this part of the plan failed, and it cost Absalom his life.

Absalom threw away every privilege and advantage he had been given because nothing would satisfy his spoiled nature. Like Lucifer, he lusted after the power that would destroy him. Like Judas, he betrayed the one who loved him most and then died in disgrace, hanging from a tree. Absalom's poor choices and unrestrained self-absorption sealed his

**ABSALOM HAD NO
RESPECT FOR HIS
FATHER AND BECAME
CONVINCED THAT IT
WAS HIS RIGHT TO DO
WHATEVER HE DESIRED.
FROM HIS LIFE, WE SEE
THAT SPOILING A CHILD
IS ACTUALLY WOUNDING
A CHILD.**

fate, damaging both his nation and his family. His unfortunate life as a spoiled child serves as a warning today, as we find ourselves immersed in a culture of spoiled children.

At the root of Absalom's downfall was a lack of discipline and self-control. The Old Testament documents that King David spoiled his second son, Adonijah, never disciplining him in any way or even asking him what he was doing.¹⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that King David treated his older son, Absalom, in a similar way.

This lack of fathering and discipline had tragic consequences. Absalom had no respect for his father and became convinced that it was his right to do whatever he desired. From his life, we see that spoiling a child is actually wounding a child.

In spite of the many mistakes King David made as a parent, he loved his children deeply. When he heard his rebellious firstborn son was dead, he was heartbroken. Sobbing uncontrollably, he left the room and cried out in despair, "O, my son, Absalom—my son, my son, Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom, my son, my son!"¹⁷

The saddest look I have ever seen was on the face of a parent who had a child fall away from God. In contrast, the most joyful look I have ever seen was on the face of a parent who had a wandering child come back to God.

Those of us who are parents (or one day hope to be) need to begin praying for our children even before their lives are fully formed. We need to cry out for God's wisdom as we make critical decisions that will shape our children's vulnerable futures. Our choices may be the very things that draw them toward or drive them away from the God who loves them most.

David had a favorite child, and that favoritism cost Absalom his life. How tragic! God has no favorite children,¹⁸ and neither should we. Our gracious Heavenly Father loves each of us equally, and we need to learn to love each of our precious children without preference.

I have identical twin girls who are now parents themselves. They each have marvelous and unique God-given qualities. Throughout their lives, Suzie and I have loved both of our girls equally, and it has produced amazing results in them—a generational blessing that they are now passing on.

Having been a twin myself, I saw firsthand the challenges and potential destructiveness of competition and comparativeness. I'm so grateful my mother did not have favorite children. All five of her children were valued equally. It was a healthy quality my brothers and sisters were able to pass on, too.

Spoiling: An Act of Cruelty

Refusing to discipline a child is never an act of kindness—it's one of cruelty. The Bible affirms, "To discipline and reprimand a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child."¹⁹

Sometimes, less discipline is as destructive as over control.

Giving in to a child's demands is never truly respecting the child. The world does not revolve around his or her whims, and sparing a child from realizing that resembles hate more closely than love.

Many of us were totally unprepared for the realities of life. We were raised under the illusion that bad behavior gets rewarded. Maybe in the short-term this is true. Our increasingly shallow culture encourages moral brats, at times turning them into celebrities. In a society tuned in to reality TV, many people see fame as a right, not a responsibility. But fame, by its very nature, is short-lived, like shooting stars across the night sky.

No lasting heat. No lasting light. No lasting reward.

Our government has an appropriate policy to never negotiate with a terrorist. The reason healthy governmental systems refuse to reward terrorists is they know that once you acquiesce to the demands of bullies, they are empowered and emboldened to increase their requests. Next time the demand will be bigger, and the threat will be more destructive.

It's the same way with spoiled children—bad behavior and tantrums should never be rewarded. Desires become demands. Gifts are expected and unappreciated. Their lives become disfigured.

The Bible assures us, “Just as Death and Destruction are never satisfied, so human desire is never satisfied.”²⁰ Spoiled hearts are unable to find true contentment. They drain the life out of everyone they encounter, spreading the emptiness of their self-obsession. Even then they won't be satisfied: “The leech has two suckers that cry out, ‘More, more!’ There are three other things—no, four!—that are never satisfied...”²¹

When Spoiled Children Win, Everybody Loses

Overly lenient, permissive parents are the root cause of spoiled children. They fail to see the need for establishing limits of behavior. Spoiled children become the kings and queens of their world, ruling over their parents while still in diapers.

All children have needs and a parent should do everything appropriate to meet genuine needs. But there is a vast difference between a need and a want. A child's behavior becomes skewed when a parent tries to meet the child's every want. This pattern is the epicenter of spoiling, and it creates a bottomless pit of unfulfillment within the child.

Our primary goal as parents can't be to “not hurt our child's feelings.” The training and healing process we each encounter throughout our lives will sometimes be painful—there's no way around it. We all cry on occasion, or at least we should. Healthy babies may even cry for three hours a day.²² But as early as five or six months old, infants will deliberately cry to get

**SPOILING CHILDREN WILL
CAUSE THEM TO SUFFER
IN EVERY DIMENSION OF
THEIR LIFE.**

their own way. It is the first evidence that people are naturally inclined to be selfish. Although holding babies will not spoil them, giving them whatever they want when it's not really what they need does more harm than good.

If children haven't learned personal restraint and self-control by the time they enter school, they will have difficulty making friends. Their peers will see them as demanding and bossy, which will only lead to more isolation and unhappiness.

Spoiling children will cause them to suffer in every dimension of their life. Socially, they will struggle to fit in. Academically, they will lose their motivation to learn except for the subjects they have a personal interest in studying. Relationally, they will either find someone they can dominate, or they'll move from one failed relationship to another. Either option will lead to future heartache. In general, spoiled children are poorly prepared for life, lacking the flexibility to properly respond to the inevitable challenges ahead.

Educators have found in elementary schools that although an outdoor recreational area may be a good size, children will only play around the school buildings, using a small fraction of the available area to play. However, by installing a fence around the perimeter of the playground, children feel more secure and will play right up to the fence. No one told them they were safer with the fence—they just felt safer with protective boundaries. It's the same way in life! We all feel safer with appropriate limits and boundaries.

When I was in college, I was a psychology major. As an atheist and so-called freethinker, my philosophy of life was very unconventional. The more unorthodox the approach, the better I liked it. One year, I went to school in England and had the opportunity to visit one of my radical heroes. He was a child psychologist named A. S. Neill. He founded a revolutionary school called Summerhill that encouraged children to make their own choices, set their own boundaries with little adult interference, and go to school when and if they wanted to. For me, an anarchist-in-training who had been smothered in an oppressive boarding school, this sounded like the perfect way to raise a child.

I had devoured all of Neill's books and was ecstatic to visit his innovative school. He was in his mid-eighties and very frail, and I was honored to meet him and sit at his feet. He shared for about 30 minutes with a group of 25 people who had traveled from various parts of the globe to meet him. We were then invited to tour his facility. I couldn't wait. Now, I was going to see the fruit of his genius.

On the tour we came to a meeting hall, large enough to accommodate 100 people. But the room was in shambles. All of the chairs and tables had been knocked over. Trash and papers were strewn everywhere. It looked like it hadn't been used in a very long time. Our guide explained that two or three years before, some of the children had ransacked the room and left it unusable. Summerhill's policy was that children did not have to do anything they didn't want to do. He assured us that when the children were good and ready, they would fix the room up.

I was stunned. I was a huge fan of Neill's—a 19-year-old hippie, anti-establishment devotee. But this—this was incomprehensible. Even with all of the drugs I had ingested and the eccentric philosophies I had embraced, I knew this concept was insane. I wandered around the compound by myself and talked to a couple of completely disaffected 12-year-olds who hadn't been to any classes in years. It was a joke! I left totally disheartened. Though I hated to admit it, in my core, I knew there had to be some restraints on our lives or we would all live in chaos.

A year later, I went to see another of my heroes, Phil Ochs, a radical 60's folk singer, in concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City. In the middle of his concert, he invited two leading anti-Vietnam War activists on stage to speak. Up jumped hardcore leftists Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. I was a fan of both.

**DISCIPLINE IS AN ART
— IT IS THE BEAUTIFUL
CREATION OF A THOUGHT-
PROVOKING WORK.
SO, ALSO, IS A WELL-
ADJUSTED CHILD.**

They began to yell about the “f-ing pigs” this and the “f-ing pigs” that, going on for about 10 minutes. I’m sure they were stoned, because what they said was incoherent. They screamed at the top of their lungs in a final burst of profanity and then jumped off the stage, acting as if they had just climbed Mount Everest barefoot.

The room gasped. No one was impressed. Not even me.

In the wake of their confusion, Phil Ochs looked totally embarrassed. Trying to regain his composure and some kind of cohesion in the concert, he softly reprimanded what we had all just witnessed, saying, “If we lose our dignity, we have nothing.”

That resonated with me. Thankfully, order and reason had prevailed over the demands of these two spoiled adult brats.

**EVERY DAY, WE NEED
TO CHOOSE TO YIELD
TO GOD’S WILL AND
SURRENDER TO OUR
OWN PREFERENCES.**

The Art of Discipline

Discipline is an art—it is the beautiful creation of a thought-provoking work. So, also, is a well-adjusted child. If our parents didn’t pass discipline on to us, we have to develop it ourselves. Even if we were raised in a lawless, permissive environment, we have to now let God rule our lives.

The world’s idea of freedom often means embracing the very thing that will destroy us all—making ourselves the center of our lives. But real freedom comes from letting God be the center of our lives. Jesus said, “If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”²³ Only God knows His original intent and the perfect plan He has for each of our lives. We are free to be who God intended us to be when we surrender to His Word.

The Word of God, the Holy Bible, has established clear, protective boundaries for our fragile lives. Break God's boundaries, and you'll be in a danger zone. God means what He says. As we yield our will to His, He will give us the courage, power, and grace to actually do His will—everything that is filled with faith, hope and love: and that lasts forever.²⁴

Every day, we need to choose to yield to God's will and surrender to our own preferences. He will never force us. If we choose to remain spoiled, then our lives will continue to release the unpleasant fragrance that will cause people to eventually recoil from us. But if we allow Him to take His rightful place as the Lord and God of our lives, we will emanate the sweet aroma of a life well lived.

“In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us, he brings knowledge of Christ. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance.”²⁵

Finally, be patient with yourself. Your spoiled patterns of misbehavior didn't happen overnight. They will take time to change: “Patient endurance is what you need now, so you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that He has promised.”²⁶

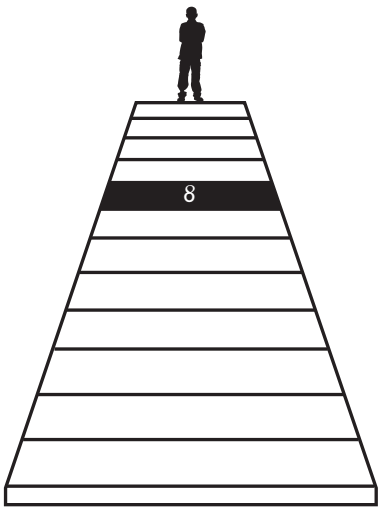
Maybe your life looks like the meeting hall at Summerhill—ransacked by your own uncontrolled behavior. It can be fixed. But you begin by picking up one piece of trash at a time, one broken chair at a time. God will help you clean up your life, bit by bit. Acknowledge where you have been spoiled, confess it as sin, and ask God for His forgiveness and healing. Your perfect Father wants you to be healed much more than you could ever imagine.

So, with humility and prayer, let the journey begin.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe ways you were spoiled during childhood. How did you react to, “No”? In what ways has this impacted your adult life and your relationships?
2. In what dimensions of the following areas do you still need more maturity: anger, being unfriendly, being dissatisfied, choosing unhealthy relationships, being overly dependent, being manipulative. How do you think your life would change if you became more mature in one of these areas?
3. In what ways have you passed on the spoiled areas of your life? How has that affected others? How has that affected your relationships?
4. How do you typically respond to discipline? How does that impact your life and your relationships?
5. Review the Spoiled Child Checklist in this chapter. What did it reveal to you about yourself? What are you willing to choose to put under the Lordship of Jesus Christ? How do you think this will affect you? How do you think this will affect your relationships?

...un
...i qu
...e de
...refin
...u m
...souff
...e qu
...gre
...tinen
...peripe
...la c
...ve es
...des
...ing
...we
...gr
...reie
...l'al
...comp





the performance-driven child

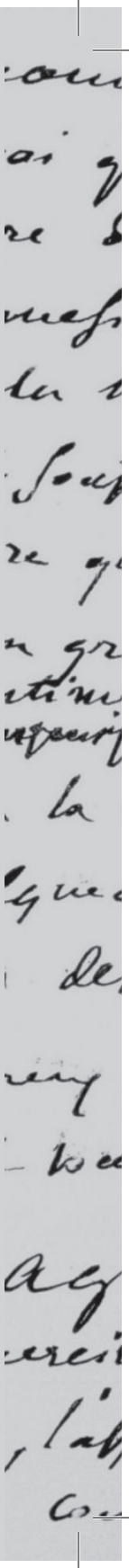
If God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He more surely care for you?

—Matthew 6:30, NLT

His dad was a former NFL lineman who was determined to raise his son to be the perfect quarterback. The expectations his dad had for his future achievement weren't just high—they were soaring. Even before he was born, he was being groomed for success. When his mother was pregnant, his father kept her on a strict diet of only lean meals, high in protein. Throughout his life, the son was kept on a special diet and a strict workout regimen. No fast foods, no short cuts—just hard work without frills.

When he was in high school, the son racked up a national record of 9,194 passing yards. He then attended the same college as his father, the University of Southern California. During his freshman year, he led the Trojans to the Rose Bowl. It was the highlight of his career, but, unfortunately, things went downhill from there.

During the next season, he started to skip classes and rumors of drug use began. Soon, his relationship with his coach deteriorated; he was suspended from the team multiple times.



He left USC to join the NFL, where he was the first-round draft pick of the Los Angeles Raiders. But after just two seasons with the Raiders, he was released. He then went on to briefly play with the Canadian and Arena Football Leagues.

But scandal followed him everywhere.

In 1997, he was arrested and served three months in jail for growing marijuana. In 2000, he was arrested again, this time for sexual assault. In 2001, he was arrested for suspicion of heroin possession. This arrest ended his professional football career. In 2004, he was sentenced to 90 days in jail for possession of methamphetamines.

Although he had once made the cover of *Sports Illustrated*,¹ in 2004, ESPN editors voted him number 4 in ESPN.com's list of "The 25 Biggest Sports Flops." In 2005, after fleeing from the police who arrested him with drug paraphernalia, he was ordered to undergo a year of drug rehabilitation and outpatient treatment.

Todd Marinovich, the underachieving son of an overachieving father, Marv Marinovich, was driven from the earliest age to perform. But when he could no longer meet an invisible, perfect standard, he gave up. Overwhelmed by unrealistic expectations, Todd collapsed under pressure, with little or no character to fall back on.

It's one thing to fail and lose—it's another thing to feel like a failure and loser. Without an inner sense of personal acceptance and validation, each of us will try to become something infinitely out of reach. We have the choice to either find out who God created us to be or spend our lives trying to measure up to an imaginary dream that can never be realized.

Although God Himself is perfect, He has never been disappointed with who we are. His plan all along was to rescue us from the curse of impossible expectations and the inevitable disappointment that comes from obsessing over performance.

His plan for us isn't just doable—it is His perfect will for our lives.

Endless Un-fulfillment

Do you live with the feeling that whatever you do, it just isn't good enough? For performance-driven children, as soon as one goal is reached, it is immediately replaced with another. They spend their lives endlessly pursuing the next rung on the ladder of success. In most cases, performance-driven people are driven by hidden inner needs of which they're not even consciously aware.

Performance-driven people are everywhere in today's society—always trying to succeed and defining their value based on how they function. They are frequently described as perfectionists and over-achievers. What will it take to be set free from this accomplishment-driven marathon of never quite being good enough, smart enough, or capable enough? In order to break this stronghold in our lives, we must first find out when and where the mindset began.

For most performance-driven children, the root of their need for approval through achievement can be traced back to their parents. A misguided understanding of discipline could cause a parent to withhold approval or acceptance from his or her child until the parent has achieved the desired result. The child walks away thinking, "He will only love me when I am good."

Parents also could find their identity through the accomplishments of their children. Insecure adults looking for significance can suffocate their children's understanding of significance.

Moreover, a genuine desire for their children to "do their best" could be toxically optimistic. Lots of parents put expectations on their children that are far from realistic. This drive can be passed down from one or both parents and, if not corrected, can be passed on generationally. Performance-driven

**FOR PERFORMANCE-
DRIVEN CHILDREN,
AS SOON AS ONE
GOAL IS REACHED,
IT IS IMMEDIATELY
REPLACED WITH
ANOTHER.**

children become performance-driven parents who alienate their own children with their intense desire for them to succeed. Usually, this drive stems from a lack of complete approval and acceptance and a conscious dread of not measuring up. There is an unhealthy fear of what other people think that stems from an unhealthy fear that their own parent does not approve.

Did your parents' perspective leave you feeling satisfied with who you are or always discontent? How we respond to life's challenges frequently shows us whether we were pre-programmed to feel accepted or to feel that we never quite measure up.

We can mistakenly put our Heavenly Father in the same box we put our earthly father in.

**GOD INTENDED OUR
ENTIRE RELATIONSHIP
WITH HIM TO BE BASED
ON GRACE — HIS
MERCIFUL KINDNESS —
AND NOT BASED ON
OUR HUMAN EFFORT
OR ABILITY.**

God intended our entire relationship with Him to be based on grace—His merciful kindness—and not based on our human effort or ability. The Bible tells us, “God saved you by His special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”²

Hear that again: God's amazing thoughts toward us are not based on what we have done or can do for Him. He has always been head-over-heels in love with us. “He (God) saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit.”³

His tremendous love for each of us should be the foundation for how we view ourselves. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more or less. He is, and always will be, at “maximum love” when it comes to His thoughts toward you.

Your Heavenly Father never holds back from fully embracing you. He isn't impatiently waiting for you to do something earth shattering or even for you to get your act together.

If you believe that God has ever been pleased with you, know that He still is. His forgiveness is not just based on covering past and present mistakes, but with a full awareness of all future sins as well. Sometimes we're pleased with someone when he or she has just done something good. God, on the other hand, has a complete panorama of all we will ever do, both good and bad. If "obsessive-compulsive" was a part of His makeup, then God could certainly fixate on any and everything we have ever "done wrong" and not just "done right." But obviously God is not performance-driven; He is driven by a much higher standard: Love. It is His love that covers a multitude of our sin and imperfection.⁴ He promises, "...I have loved you with an everlasting love..."⁵

And the Bible gives us a great response to that promise: "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!"⁶

In my own life, I've known first hand the struggle of trying to measure up to some invisible standard. I grew up never receiving the approval and acceptance of my high-profile father. It left me feeling never quite "a winner." But the reality is that God created me with no one else in mind. I am a unique reflection of His personality and attributes and not a reflection of anyone else.

In the early years of my life, I was much more driven than drawn, more compulsive than compelled. It left me in a constant state of unfulfillment. Now, because of God's endless love for me, I am constantly

**YOUR HEAVENLY
FATHER NEVER HOLDS
BACK FROM FULLY
EMBRACING YOU. HE
ISN'T IMPATIENTLY
WAITING FOR YOU TO
DO SOMETHING EARTH
SHATTERING OR EVEN
FOR YOU TO GET YOUR
ACT TOGETHER.**

trying to live my life the way He wants me to as a response to His love, not because I'm trying to earn His love. I am no longer driven by a misguided compulsion to please Him. I am already a pleasure to God⁷—always have been, always will be. This realization is the greatest comfort and reassurance my soul has ever known, and I hold on to its reality for dear life. In the same way I find my true identity in Him, I also find my value and acceptance. My Creator alone established my worth, and nothing demonstrates my importance to Him more clearly than His willingness to send His only Son, Jesus, to die in my place.

Jesus did not die a helpless victim, conned into taking our punishment. He was a willing participant, intentionally giving His life to demonstrate His great love for us. Jesus was not surprised at the cost of saving our lives—He determined it. Before the Earth was created, our Savior intended to give His life for the salvation of the world.⁸

God could certainly have chosen an easier way, but rather than skimp on the price of redeeming mankind, out of all the options, He chose the most difficult path possible. He became the very thing He hated most: sin. When Jesus, the only Person who has ever lived a perfect life, took the blame for all of the sins of the world, He became the ultimate sacrifice—perfectly demonstrating His deep love for us. When we begin to understand God's heart, we see that all of our efforts to gain His approval are futile, even laughable—we see that we've been trying to earn something that has already been given and can never be earned.

I am enormously thankful that God is the one Person who is most proud of me. I have never disappointed Him, and I never could. Of course, some things I've done have not been to my benefit or to the benefit of others, and they separated me from Him for a season. That fact is truly sad. But it can't negate the greater reality that He has always been pleased with me, even during my lowest moments. It's His love for me that has set me free from my performance-driven striving.

The Curse of Comparison

The Bible tells of a bizarre love triangle. It is a story filled with broken hearts, shattered dreams, shocking surprises, abject betrayal, and a tragic tale of unrequited love. But it is also one of the best examples of the heartache caused by comparison and performance.

The Hebrew patriarch Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel. These two sisters embarked on a baby war that changed the course of history. The Book of Genesis follows their “cloak and dagger” story.

Jacob, the youngest son of Isaac and Rebekah, cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright and blessing. The birthright and blessing represented the future inheritance and even destiny of each son. It was monumental in the minds of both parents and children. So, the loss of such a generational impartation was devastating.

After swindling Esau out of his birthright and blessing, Jacob fled for his life to Haran, located in present day Iraq. He settled there with his uncle Laban, his mother’s brother. “Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.”⁹

Laban’s oldest daughter, Leah, was less-than-average looking. She had bad eyesight, probably squinting in an attempt to see, which made her even less attractive than her younger sister, Rachel, who was a complete knockout.

Jacob looked past Leah and was immediately love-struck for Rachel.

“Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, ‘I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.’¹⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.”¹¹

Jacob was obviously infatuated. How many women would love to have a husband who would work for seven years to demonstrate his love for them? There are probably plenty of women who would settle for seven hours.

At the end of seven years, Jacob went to Laban and asked to finally be allowed to marry Rachel,¹² and Laban agreed.

But, little did Jacob know, he was in for the surprise of his life.

“And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. Now it came to pass in the evening that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?’”¹³

When Uncle Laban deceived Jacob, the conman had been conned. Jacob had deceived his own father and brother to secure the blessing, and now the father of his bride had duped him. How many of us have had something we did wrong come back and bite us? Although Jacob chose Rachel for his bride, Leah was given to him instead.

It was a wake-up call he would never forget.

Morning Is Broken

Poor Leah! Imagine how she felt the morning after her first night with Jacob. She had dreamed of getting married since she was a young girl. For years before her wedding, she had endured neglect while her younger sister was showered with constant attention. Now, on what should have been the happiest day of her life, she suffered the ultimate rejection—her husband wished she were someone else.

At first light, when Jacob realized Leah wasn’t his beloved Rachel, his look turned from delight to scorn. He was disgusted with her and did nothing to hide that fact. She was not the bride of his dreams, but the bitterest of disappointments.

Leah would never forget that crushing rejection.

From the moment Jacob had first seen the beautiful Rachel it was all about her. Even after learning he had married the wrong sister, he was still obsessed with Rachel. Jacob’s desire and affection were only for her, and not her sister. This adoration of Rachel over Leah would continue throughout their lives.

Leah may have had trouble seeing, but in reality Jacob was the blind one. He was unable to see Leah's true value. His indifference was a daily rebuff of Leah's identity as a woman, a wife, and a mother. He continually looked past her longing eyes into the eyes of another. This must have deeply wounded Leah's heart, causing her to battle intense resentment toward Jacob and constant jealousy toward Rachel.

"Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years. When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren."¹⁴

But in spite of this gift of God's love, Leah had a desperate need to be loved by Jacob that set her up to fail.

Baby Wars

Even though Jacob wasn't attracted to Leah, he was still willing to be intimate with her. In the Hebrew culture, having a son was essential in order to carry on the family name. This was the perfect breeding ground for a performance-driven mentality. Leah thought, "If I can produce what Jacob wants, an heir to the blessing and birthright, then he'll love me like he loves Rachel." In other words, maybe my perfect performance will make Jacob love me.

"Leah was first to conceive and birth a son. She called his name Reuben; for she said, 'The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me.'¹⁵

To her deep disappointment, it didn't work.

**IN LIFE, MAYBE THE
GREATEST PAIN OF ALL IS
THE PAIN OF DELIBERATE
REJECTION.**

But Leah didn't give up. She kept trying to gain Jacob's approval. Still, no matter what she did, Jacob would always love Rachel more.

Can you imagine the depth of the pain in her heart? Most of us have at least some idea. Everyone has experienced being rejected, unnoticed, ignored, or unseen. In life, maybe the greatest pain of all is the pain of deliberate rejection.

Three Dangerous Responses to Rejection

Most of us have experienced some kind of rejection. But how we respond to that rejection will make all the difference in how well we heal from it. In particular, we need to watch out for these three dangerous responses to rejection:

1. We look to people instead of God for acceptance.

Seeking other people's approval is one of the greatest causes of grief. Paul the Apostle warned us of this danger, writing, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."¹⁶

We cannot seek to please both God and others. At some point we will have to choose. If we choose to please others, we can never please God. But if we choose to please God, then we'll experience the joy of a life well lived.¹⁷

"Then she [Leah] conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also.' And she called his name Simeon."¹⁸

You don't know what real love is until you experience God's love. If you get your eyes off of His love for you, it doesn't matter what you do to fill yourself—you will always feel unloved. By naming her second son Simeon, Leah was basically saying, "Now I'll get God to feel sorry for me."

Because Leah perceived God's love as insufficient to meet her inner needs, she looked to Jacob to make up for her deep sense of emptiness. Her plan was doomed to fail.

2. We pity ourselves.

Self-pity leads to self-obsession—the highest peak in the mountain range of “self.” We are lifted to a lofty and superficial place that leaves us even emptier.

I once heard of a businessman who committed suicide. No one could figure out why he did it. There was nothing in his life that indicated any reason he'd want to take his life. It wasn't until a note was discovered that his reasons became clear. The note simply said, “In 30 years I have never had one word of encouragement. I'm fed up!” He was literally dying for encouragement. Unless we understand our eternal worth and value to God, we will die the same way—empty hearted, lacking the love and acceptance only a Creator can give.

“She [Leah] conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.’ Therefore his name was called Levi.”¹⁹

This was not love.

Love does not demand. Love has to be freely given and received or it's not love at all. Leah wanted Jacob to be as addicted to her as she was to him. It reminds me of a sad song I once heard, “I know that you don't love me, but just hold me tonight, and I'll do what's right in the morning.” Leah could have written those lyrics—she was so desperate for genuine love that she was willing to settle for a worthless counterfeit.

3. We pass on the rejection to others.

We are all the descendants of past generations. Within our spiritual, physical, mental and emotional DNA are the blessings and curses of those who have gone before us. Though we cannot choose what we have received, we are responsible for what we pass on.

It's all too easy to pass the curse of rejection on to others. But instead, we need to pass on a healthy legacy. There is only one Person in the universe to whom it is worth being completely attached—the only One capable of loving us unconditionally, appreciating us continuously, and meeting the deepest needs in our lives.

Real Love

“And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Now I will praise the Lord.’ Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.”²⁰

Leah finally got it.

She finally understood. She forgot about how Jacob felt about her and began to look to God for her self-worth. Judah's name means, “praise.” By naming him Judah, Leah was saying, “I'm going to praise God no matter what happens.” Finally, she had the healthy response to being hurt: she praised God and trusted Him whether anyone else cared about her or not.

Confusion stops when we trust God.

Despair stops when we depend completely on Him and stop looking to others for approval.

Don't blame God for your problems. He's not the source—He's the solution. If you want to be healed, begin to thank God for your problems, and trust Him for His plan. God doesn't just have the solution to all of our needs—He is the solution. Until Leah looked to God for approval, she would never be free from trying to find completion in Jacob.

I remember watching the movie *Jerry McGuire*, where Tom Cruise tells Renée Zellweger, “You complete me!” When he says that, all of the women

**DESPAIR STOPS WHEN
WE DEPEND COMPLETELY
ON HIM AND STOP
LOOKING TO OTHERS
FOR APPROVAL.**

in the room swoon. It seems like lots of women would like to be the thing that completes a man. But it's an illusion. It happens in movies, but most of the time, expecting someone to complete you will barely make it through the honeymoon.

When I proposed to my beautiful wife, Suzie, I assured her she would never have the number-one spot in my heart. It had been given to another—the only completely safe Person who would know exactly what my heart needed at any given moment.

Suzie was happy to get second place and offered me the same position. Now, 33 years later, our number two spots are more secure than ever because God is still in His rightful place as the Lord of our lives. Before we gave our hearts to Jesus, both Suzie and I had experienced firsthand the immeasurable pain of looking to a frail human being to complete us. And both of us found that no person could satisfy us the way God could.

Leah finally got her weak eyes off of Jacob and onto God. Consequently, God blessed her life. He had found in Leah someone from whom the Messiah could descend. Jesus came from Judah's line—in the Bible, He is called, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.”²¹ How ironic! Jesus came from lack-luster Leah and not ravishing Rachel.

There was big purpose in God's plan for Leah. The two greatest tribes of Israel came from Leah, not Rachel—Levi, the priestly tribe, and Judah, the royal tribe. Jesus descended from someone who knew how much God loved her. Jesus descended from someone who knew how important she was to God.

Leah was only freed from her performance mentality by the love of God. God loved her enough to not allow her to be satisfied with anything less than Him. Because Leah allowed God to fulfill her, she was able to rest in His love. She didn't need Jacob's fickle love; she needed God's faithful love. Before she found contentment in God, Leah was always trying to take Rachel's place, but we don't need to take someone else's place. God didn't make a mistake when He made us. We are a one-of-a-kind limited edition, priceless in every way.

Who was the first one to love Leah? God.

Who was the first one to love you? God.

“We love Him because He first loved us.”²²

In the end, Leah learned it only matters what God thinks.

If you are comparing your life to someone else’s, you will always come up short because you’re not meant to be like anyone else. Embrace the special purpose that God has just for you. But before you can know and receive what that is, He wants you to accept yourself as He created you. God wants to heal your heart from the insecurity and pain that comparison brings.

**GOD WANTS TO HEAL
YOUR HEART FROM THE
INSECURITY AND PAIN
THAT COMPARISON
BRINGS.**

Genuine love lasts forever. Only God’s love is eternal. It does not and cannot fail us. When you are looking for the genuine, don’t be seduced by the counterfeit. God will give you the wisdom to discern between the two, as you look for His leading in the Word of God and prayer. “For whoever finds me [wisdom] finds life and wins approval [Hebrew: delight, acceptance, favor, good] pleasure, from the Lord.”²³

Receiving God’s Approval

How many young women have given away their emotions, their trust, their intimacy, and even their moral innocence and purity, desperately wanting someone to love and completely approve of them? In the same way, how many young men have done things they knew were wrong just to impress someone?

In today’s culture, our seal of approval is often the applause of others. But it’s fleeting—this kind of approval has a shelf life measured in nanoseconds

compared to eternity. We can spend our lives endlessly attempting to derive our worth from this imperfect world, or we can value ourselves based on the preeminent perceptions of a perfect God.

God treasures us!

There is no greater demonstration of our immense value to God than the life of Jesus. He began His earthly ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. It was there that a supernatural event took place, which clearly shows God's Father-heart for each of us. "...Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"²⁴

This was the first record of the Father speaking to Jesus audibly. It seems, for the debut of Jesus' ministry, God wanted everyone to know how proud He was of His Son. So He basically shouted from heaven, "Hey everybody, listen up—this is My Son! And You know what, Son? I really love You, and I am incredibly proud of you!" The Father broke His years of silence to share two life-changing principles, "I really love you, and I am incredibly proud of You."

Most of us don't sit around wondering if the Father loved Jesus. We pretty much assume, "What's not to like?" But the love and approval the Father had for Jesus was not reserved just for Him. The Bible promises us, "...He [God] made us accepted in the Beloved."²⁵ The Greek word here for "Beloved" (*agapao*) is derived from the same Greek word (*agapetos*) used when referring to Jesus as "Beloved."²⁶

We are accepted into the same "Beloved" family as Jesus.

In a very real sense, when we give our lives to Jesus, the Father also speaks from Heaven to each of us, "Hey, listen up—this is My child! And you know what? I really love you, and I am incredibly proud of you!" God loves and approves of us just as much as He does Jesus. No matter what sins or mistakes we've made in life, God loves us exactly as He loves His perfect Son.

God does not want to clobber us—He wants to crown us.

The Bible promises, “You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken [destitute, refuse], nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate [devastated, wasted]; but you shall be called Hephzibah [a pleasure, desirable, a valuable thing, acceptable, delightful], and your land Beulah [married, a wife]. For the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.”²⁷

**THE CROWNING MOMENT
OF MY LIFE WAS THE
REALIZATION THAT I WAS
NO LONGER FORSAKEN,
DEVASTATED, AND
WASTED, BUT THAT MY
LIFE WAS ACTUALLY A
PLEASURE TO GOD.**

The crowning moment of my life was the realization that I was no longer forsaken, devastated and wasted, but that my life was actually a pleasure to God. I was created, not to be the embodiment of His disappointment, but to be the love of His life. What a relief! What a joy! As frail humans, we will never begin to know the fullness of God’s love until we experience failure and then realize He is still madly in love with us.

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”²⁸

The Cure For Perfectionism

Many times, the performance-driven person battles perfectionism. The truth is, none of us will ever reach perfection on this flawed planet. Unless we rest in the fact that God loves and cherishes us in spite of our imperfections, we are in for a bumpy ride.

I am complete in Him,²⁹ and I will never be complete in myself without Him. Never.

The only approval that is eternal comes from God. So the only love that matters in the long run is God’s

love. "...God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."³⁰

God doesn't love us because we are loveable. He loves us because He is love.³¹ Long before we received Jesus, God loved us—long before we ever did even one thing right. He loved us in the middle of our rebellion. He loved us at the lowest moments of our lives. He has always been able to differentiate between who we are and what we do. He has always loved us for who we are, and yet we are all well aware of the many things we have done that are not lovable.

Just because we're not all that we could be doesn't mean that God loves us less.

We can never gain God's approval by trying to keep His commandments or laws. God's laws were never intended to be our way of accessing His kingdom. He knew when He gave them to us that we would never be able to fully keep them. But our failure to perfectly follow God's impeccable standards opened the doorway for us to be rescued by a much clearer demonstration of His love: God's grace. It gives us unmerited favor before a holy God. Jesus fulfilled His Father's flawless standards and then passed on this complete acceptance to us.

The Apostle Paul, a man who used to live stringently by the law, once wrote, "For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God's approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I am not one of those who treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die."³²

Jesus also knew that God's love was the only kind of approval that lasts. Once, while speaking to Jewish leaders who were trying to kill Him, He said, "Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me, because I know you don't have God's love within you."³³ As we receive the love of God, we are able to feel the sense of approval our hearts have always craved.

Today, you can experience the joy that comes from seeing God's love for you. "See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for He allows us to be called His children, and we really are."³⁴ Do you know you really are His child? Do you bask in this favored love? Once you taste it, nothing else matters: "The LORD is for me, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"³⁵

The obvious answer is, "nothing"—unless, of course, I let them.

I can let people distract me from seeing God's smiling face. I can let others keep me from my heavenly Father's embrace. I can let the devil lie to me and believe, "What I have done wrong is more important to God than what He has done right." But there is not even a shred of truth in that lie. If there were, why would we spend all of eternity rejoicing in who God is and what He has done on our behalf and not even one moment re-examining the sins we have committed?³⁶

There is nothing you could ever do to make yourself more acceptable to God than Jesus already made you when He died on the Cross. You are fully accepted by "...Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood..."³⁷

Today, ask God to forgive you for trying to earn His approval and the approval of others. Ask Him to remove the curse of performance from your life and to let loose the blessing of His personal and complete acceptance of you as His cherished son or daughter.

Your search has ended.

Your striving is over.

You have received God's seal of approval, His kiss of acceptance.

Don't wipe it off; rub it in.

Wear it as a badge of honor.

You are God's favorite child, tied for first place with a multitude of other equally blessed and totally undeserving heirs of the grace and mercy of God.³⁸

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”³⁹

There’s an insightful poem I love that really shows the ingredients needed to raise a healthy child and therefore a healthy adult:

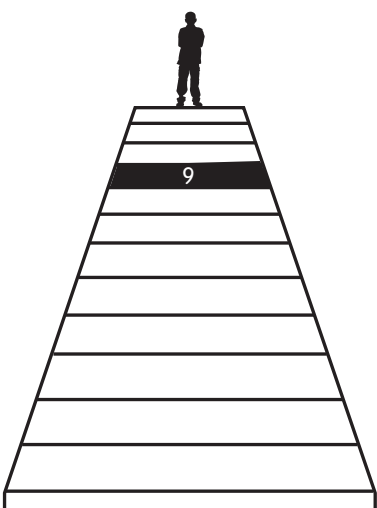
*If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
 If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
 If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy.
 If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
 If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
 If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.
 If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate.
 If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
 If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
 If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
 If children live with security, they learn to have faith
 in themselves and others.
 If children live with friendliness, they learn the world
 is a nice place in which to live.⁴⁰*

May we reclaim whatever part of our childhood was lost wishing we were a different person from the one God created.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what areas of your life have you felt disapproved of by one or both of your parents? Did your parents' perspective leave you feeling satisfied with who you are or always discontent? How has this affected you?
2. As you reflect about your life, in what ways do you try to please people and gain approval by performing? In what ways does this affect you and your relationships?
3. Have you ever felt like a failure, a loser, not good enough, and/or not smart enough? If so, please explain how this has affected you and your relationships.
4. Have you been able to see a generational pattern of disapproval that began with, or was prior to, your parents? If so, in what ways have you passed this pattern onto others? How has this impacted your life and relationships?
5. What scriptures give you encouragement about God's unfailing love and approval of you? In what ways do the truth of these scriptures combat the lie that you believe that you have to perform a certain way to receive God's love and approval? How do you think these truths will affect you?

...un
...i qu
...e de
...refin
...u m
...souff
...e qu
...gre
...tinen
...pour
...la C
...ue es
...des
...ing
...wen
...e qu
...reine
...l'at
...ou



9

the adult child

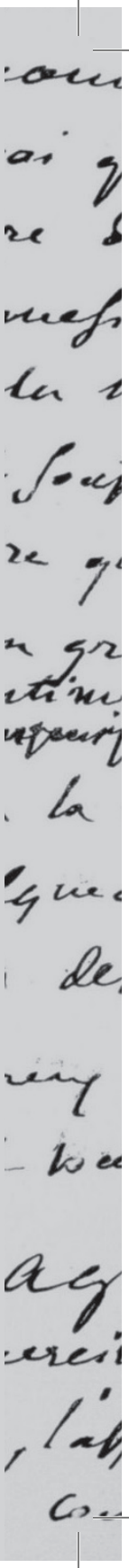
Modern culture is like a bad photograph, overexposed and underdeveloped.

She was born in the charity ward of Los Angeles County Hospital. At her birth, her father was nowhere to be found; he would never be a part of her life. Her mother was completely unstable and put her in a foster home just after her birth. She would stay in foster care until she was seven.

Depression ran in her family—deeply depressed, her great-grandfather and uncle both hanged themselves. Her grandfather died of syphilis in an asylum. The one bright spot in her family was her grandmother, Della Monroe Grainger, who had her baptized.

But life continued its downward spiral. Desperate not to go back to an orphanage or foster care, she married at 16. It would be the first of several failed marriages.

Later in life, she took advantage of the horrors of her childhood, embellishing them to make her life seem even more vulnerable. But, Ben Hecht, the ghostwriter of her autobiography once pointed out, “It is easy to know when she is telling the truth. The moment a true thing comes out of her mouth, her eyes shed tears. She’s like her own lie detector.”¹



She was so desperate for love she would do anything she could to get it, though she always felt undeserving. During one of her marriages she wrote to her husband, who was 11 years her senior, “My Dad, I don’t know how to tell you just how much I miss you. I love you till my heart could burst... I want to just be where you are and be just what you want me to be... I want someday for you to be proud of me as a person and as your wife and as the mother of the rest of your children (two at least! I’ve decided)...”²

But, nothing satisfied her—she was constantly looking for the love and acceptance her heart longed for. To add to her appearance, she had minor plastic surgery on her nose and chin as well as dental surgery.² Nude photos of her appeared in the first edition of *Playboy Magazine*, and she was credited as the first major motion picture actress to shoot a nude scene in a movie.

Seven months before her death, one of her ex-husbands was so concerned for her well-being that he placed her in a psychiatric ward for the most seriously disturbed. In the end, she was found dead in her Los Angeles home at age 36. The official cause of death was “probable suicide” by acute barbiturate poisoning.

Norma Jeane Mortenson, better known as Marilyn Monroe, grew up too fast, believed too many lies, had too many affairs, and never found the peace her heart yearned for. Evangelist Billy Graham once tried to reach out to her. He contacted her agent to set up an appointment, but the agent said, “Not now. Maybe two weeks from now.”

Two weeks later she was dead.

Marilyn once wrote, “In Hollywood, a girl’s virtue is much less important than her hairdo. You’re judged by how you look, not by what you are. Hollywood’s a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss, and fifty cents for your soul. I know, because I turned down the first offer often enough and held out for the fifty.”⁴

“I guess I wanted love more than anything else in the world.”⁵

Childhood Lost

Adult children are children who have in some way been denied a healthy, gradual upbringing and have had adult responsibilities forced on them. Simply said, adult children perform adult behaviors, whether good or bad, while still a child.

Throughout history, countless children have had to fight to not grow up too fast. From working in sweatshops to sex shops, they have been forced to act like adults and forfeit their childhood.

Sometimes, the situations these children are in aren't cruel, just unfortunate—like the child who has to raise her younger siblings while her mother is at work. At other times, children are robbed of their youth by selfish adults who exploit them for pleasure or profit. Either way the result is the same: a childhood vanished, never to return.

A few years ago I was on a trip in Mainland China. One day in the hotel, I entered the elevator and a beautiful young girl followed me in. I politely smiled and said hello. She didn't greet me in return—she just looked at me with a smug, enticing smile. She was probably barely 18 years old, but every pore of her being oozed seduction. I was shocked. I immediately stopped smiling and turned away. I couldn't wait until the elevator door opened.

It was the most awkward elevator ride of my life.

I've often wondered about and prayed for the girl in the elevator. What happened to her? Who robbed her of her childhood and forced her to sell her soul for pennies? How did the perversion of her life begin? Where were her father and mother? How would she end up?

**THROUGHOUT HISTORY,
COUNTLESS CHILDREN
HAVE HAD TO FIGHT TO
NOT GROW UP TOO FAST.**

When I looked into her eyes that day in the elevator, I saw a hatred for men. I think that in a twisted way, every degrading act of hers was a way to assault her tormentors, passing on the emptiness that had been forced on her. Men exploited her and in return she ravaged them—one soul at a time.

A friend of mine used to grow marijuana in his home. To accelerate the growth of the plants, he put them under artificial lighting, day and night. The results were amazing—the plants skyrocketed upward. He thought he had discovered the secret of rapid plant growth until one day he came home and saw they had all collapsed. For a season they had defied his expectations, but eventually they all withered away.

Premature growth does not allow for proper development. Children who are forced to grow up too quickly won't have time to learn to deal with the responsibilities of adulthood in a healthy way. Like the girl in the elevator, they will channel their pain in destructive ways until they eventually collapse.

This is true for so many adult children. Whether they've been stretched beyond healthy limits or seduced by evil intentions, their youth has been crushed and their foundation for healthy adulthood has been damaged.

Overexposed and Underdeveloped

We live in a culture that is designed to produce adult children. Sex-saturated music, sadistic video games, and the endless tantalizing gossip on the Internet have left our children unprotected and easy prey. It's not just teenagers who are testing the waters of adulthood anymore—now young children are experimenting with everything from hairstyles to makeup, from fashion to dating, and from cage fighting to drag racing. Today, the average age at which a child is exposed to pornography for the first time is 11 years old.⁶

The culture screams: "No rules! No limitatio

ns! It's your right to do what you want!" Kids are not just maturing faster—they're bypassing their childhoods altogether.

Susan Linn, child psychologist and author of *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*, warns of a brave new world for contemporary children: “Research shows babies learn faster from real life than videos. But they’re getting kids to turn to screens from the moment they’re born. It takes away from kids having the experience of learning to amuse themselves.”⁷

Adult children are becoming the standard. Look how far the headlines in teen magazines have come:

Headlines from Seventeen magazine in the 1970’s:

What Your Voice Tells about You
 The Gentle Art of Understanding Your Parents
 Hurry-Up Hairdos
 How to Beat the Gossip Game
 Which Is Best—Oldest, Middle, Youngest Child?
 Prize Fiction
 How Can I Get Him to Notice Me?
 Write, Illustrate, Photograph Stories
 Poems and Reports from Worldwide Places

Current Headlines from Teen magazine:

The Sexiest Hairstyles; The Sexiest Jeans
 On Girls, Geeks, and Going All the Way
 How to Be Happy, Calmer, and Hotter
 203 Ways to Look Crazy Good!
 438 Ways to Meet Tons of Guys
 Turn-On Secrets He’ll Never Tell You
 Get a Better Body in Two Weeks
 476 Ways to Look Sexy for Spring
 Hot! Sexy-Guy Postcards Inside⁸

These headlines sound more like chapters in a training manual for prostitutes than a magazine for teenage girls.

But this isn't really a new problem. The trend toward growing up too fast has been around for generations. The classic movie *Gone With The Wind* created a scandal in 1939 when it introduced a swear word into motion pictures. Rhett Butler told Scarlett O'Hara, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn!" That quote now seems tame compared to today's increasingly profane movies.

The 2007 Oscar-winning Best Picture of the Year, *The Departed*, contains 237 "F" words. How numb have we become? And what does that say about our culture's conscience and virtue?

Worsening with each new generation, our society is raping our children's minds and calling it "freedom and love."

**WORSENING WITH EACH
NEW GENERATION, OUR
SOCIETY IS RAPING OUR
CHILDREN'S MINDS AND
CALLING IT "FREEDOM
AND LOVE."**

Samuel's Story

Our culture may be depraved and prone to developing adult children, but it's still possible for us to respond well in spite of difficult circumstances. Even if we've had adult responsibilities forced on us too early, we can still have a childlike heart before God. In the Bible, the prophet Samuel is a great example of an adult child responding well.

The story of Samuel begins with his mother, Hannah. Hannah had been barren for years, and although she loved God and her husband and knew they loved her, she still desperately wanted a child. Each year, she would travel with her husband to the temple where she would fast and pray for God to give her a child. One year she was especially desperate, "And she made this vow: 'O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime...'"⁹

Hannah and her husband went home, and a short time later they conceived. She gave birth to a son and named him Samuel, which means, “heard of God.”

Hannah waited a few years until Samuel was no longer nursing, and then she brought him to the temple. She presented her only child to Eli the High Priest: “...they brought the boy to Eli. ‘Sir, do you remember me?’ Hannah asked. ‘I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.’”¹⁰

Samuel was probably 3 to 5 years old at the time. Here was this little guy who had grown up loved, safe, and happy. Now suddenly, through no fault of his own, he was handed over to live with a group of strangers. He would grow up fast.

To make the situation even more challenging, Eli was a terrible father—his own sons were evil men who took advantage of the people who came to worship at the temple.¹¹ Eli knew about this¹² and never stopped them. Obviously, his character wasn’t much better than his sons’.

From the outside, it might have looked like Samuel was in a position of privilege. He had come from a family that lived far away from the temple and could only afford to visit it once a year—now he was living in one of the most beautiful and respected places in his nation. He had been living in relative obscurity—now he was living among the priests, the men who had the high calling to lead the people of Israel in worshipping God. But, in reality, the men who should have been there to father and guide him weren’t even able to recognize the voice of God themselves.¹³

In spite of the challenges surrounding him, Samuel responded well. He fell in love with God from a very early age: “But Samuel, though he was only a boy, served the Lord. He wore a linen garment like that of a priest.”¹⁴ He spent hours serving God in the tabernacle, and it was there that Samuel heard the voice of the Lord for the first time.

**IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT
OBSTACLES YOU HAVE
FACED IN YOUR LIFE; IT
DOESN'T MATTER WHAT
YOU HAVE DONE OR HAD
DONE TO YOU; IT DOESN'T
MATTER HOW OLD YOU
ARE — GOD CAN STILL
SHOW UP AND SPEAK A
LIFE-TRANSFORMING
WORD.**

Samuel was alone. Eli, whose health was failing, had already gone to bed. “Suddenly the Lord called out, ‘Samuel!’ ‘Yes?’ Samuel replied. ‘What is it?’”¹⁵ Samuel didn’t recognize the voice of God because he had never heard Him before.¹⁶ Since Samuel knew that Eli was getting older, he was concerned that Eli needed him. Most likely, caring for Eli as he got older was a part of Samuel’s responsibilities even as a young child.

“He [Samuel] got up and ran to Eli. ‘Here I am. Did you call me?’ ‘I didn’t call you,’ Eli replied. ‘Go back to bed.’ So he did.”¹⁷

Three times Samuel heard his name called, and three times he ran in to check on Eli only to be dismissed. Finally, Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling Samuel’s name—the moment Samuel had been waiting for.

“So he [Eli] said to Samuel, ‘Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’ So Samuel went back to bed. And the Lord came and called as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel replied, ‘Speak, your servant is listening.’”¹⁸

Even though Samuel was a child, and the Bible says the Word of the Lord was rare in his day,¹⁹ the God of the universe still came down and revealed Himself to Samuel.

Samuel was a child thrust into difficult circumstances and given adult responsibilities. He responded by loving and serving God. God likewise honored Samuel by showing up in his life when just hearing the voice of God was uncommon. It doesn’t matter what obstacles you have faced in your life; it doesn’t matter what you have done or had done to you; it

doesn't matter how old you are—God can still show up and speak a life-transforming word. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice.”²⁰ Though God will probably not speak to you with His audible voice, He wants to bring healing to your heart, just as He did to Samuel's.

Despite everything Samuel faced, he still looked to God with a childlike heart—he loved spending time in God's presence and waited patiently for God's word. In spite of everything you have faced, God can restore a childlike heart of faith in you.

Chain Reactions

Why is it so essential for children to be children? What happens when a child is thrust into adult responsibilities and roles without having the fundamental development needed for healthy growth? A lot of chain reactions begin in a child's life when there is emotional dysfunction at a young age. Probably one of the most tragic examples is when children have bondages or addictions forced on them by adults who are bound or addicted themselves. But whatever the dysfunction, it has power to set off a negative chain reaction.

When children are given adult responsibilities early in life, they often struggle with the pressure of always being responsible. Some may eventually reject adult roles altogether; others may struggle finding a healthy balance between achievement and acceptance. Additionally, children forced to “grow up too fast,” can fall back into childlike immaturities and dependence issues as adults. They could still be seeking a safe environment to live out their childhood.

All children exhibit a tendency to sin from an early age, but when they are aggressively exposed to seductive temptations, these seductions can actually become intertwined with the core of their identity as they develop. Sexual bondages, such as pornography, promiscuity and homosexuality, attach themselves to the souls of children (their mind, will, and emotion), causing them to grow up with distorted sexual perspectives. This can ultimately lead to lifestyles filled with destructive patterns.

In the case of sexual abuse, children may grow up with an addiction to pornography, a seductive spirit, or, in contrast, may develop an extreme aversion to anything related to their own sexuality.

Each stage of a child's growth is indispensable for healthy maturing. Cutting corners disconnects and gradually deforms the child.

Guarding Innocence

Most of us are either parents or will be some day. But even without children of our own, we can have a positive influence on the children around us. We may not be involved in any form of abuse, but we still have to be on guard.

We say we would never allow an intruder to vandalize our homes or abuse our children, but when we allow children unrestricted access to our culture and media, we give the key to their hearts to strangers. They have instant access through the unlocked doors of music, movies, video games, and the Internet. If we aren't careful about what media children are consuming, they may be taking on adult responsibilities and burdens without our knowing. The damage could be significant before it becomes discovered.

Safeguards, like parental leadership and protective boundaries, are not smothering—they are often the final safety net of conscientious fathers and mothers. When no net is in place, our children plunge into brokenness, manipulation, and eventual unfulfillment and despair. They're promised the freedom and pleasures of grown-ups, but instead they get the pain of ignorance and permissiveness.

**IF WE AREN'T CAREFUL
ABOUT WHAT MEDIA
CHILDREN ARE
CONSUMING, THEY MAY
BE TAKING ON ADULT
RESPONSIBILITIES
AND BURDENS WITHOUT
OUR KNOWING.**

He Sent His Word and Healed Them

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can give us the everlasting peace our hearts want and need. He's not a typical lover, committed just for as long as the emotions last. His love endures forever. His commitment transcends even death. He has a loving, unconditional embrace waiting for people with sincere hearts. Too often, we cling to a mere counterfeit, numb to the reality of unconditional love. If our affections are for the temporary things of this world and not the eternal, we will each wake up in the arms of someone incapable of fulfilling us.²¹

If our affections stay misplaced, then soon we'll believe that the love we're looking for doesn't exist. We'll ridicule those who claim to have found the genuine article. For most people, the thought of living life without ever tasting the "love that is better than wine"²² is too much to bear, so denying its existence is much easier than facing the reality that we've just been unwilling to receive it.

In order to reclaim the portions of your life that have been lost to false love due to growing up too fast, you need the Word of God to wash over your soul.²³ God can restore your childlike heart to its rightful place before your loving Heavenly Father.²⁴

Take some time to prayerfully meditate on these scriptures, claiming them as your own. Through them, God can restore what has been taken from you.²⁵ He is calling you to have the life He intended.²⁶

Psalm 107:20—He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

John 10:10—Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Ephesians 5:25b–27—...just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Joel 2:25—The LORD says, “I will give you back what you lost to the stripping locusts, the cutting locusts, the swarming locusts, and the hopping locusts.”

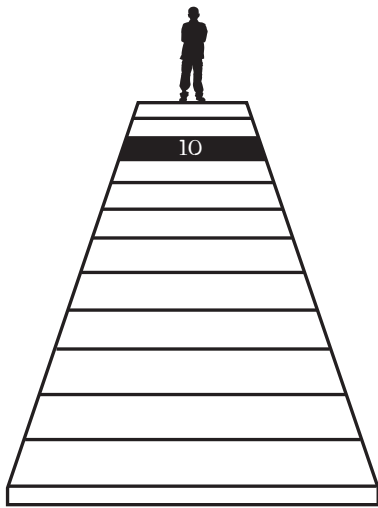
Psalm 51:1-4—Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my shameful deeds—they haunt me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

Psalm 51:10-12—Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways were you raised as an “adult child?” How did it affect your childhood?
2. How has growing up too quickly affected your adult life and your relationships?
3. What safeguards have you put in place to protect the children in your life from growing up too quickly? How do you think this will affect their lives?
4. Are you willing to forgive those who stole a part of your childhood? In what ways would your life change if you chose to forgive?
5. Take time to prayerfully meditate on the scriptures on pages 177–178. What is the Holy Spirit showing you through the truth of His Word? How is that impacting you?

...un
...i qu
...e de
...refin
...u m
...souff
...e qu
...gre
...timen
...pourje
...la a
...me es
...des
...ay
...we
...e gr
...reie
...l'alf
...comp



10

mother wounds

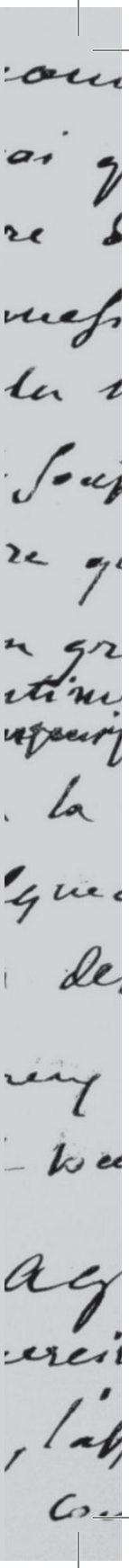
At some point in my life I hope my mother and I will get together... unfortunately that got dragged out into the public eye. This is a wound that needs to heal slowly and time does that.

—Jennifer Aniston

Jaid lived the New York City high life with her much older husband, John. It was John's third marriage, and it was doomed from the start. Sex, drugs, and fame were the bonds holding the couple together. John was incarcerated several times for drug use, drunkenness, and spousal abuse.

When Jaid became pregnant, John beat her and even kicked her stomach. After just three years, the marriage ended in divorce, right before the birth of a daughter. Jaid left her husband calling him an alcoholic and a drug addict. He rarely saw his daughter for the whole of her life.

Jaid's lust for fame and fortune would not allow her to slow down her lifestyle, even with a child. As she scraped her way into small movie roles and rubbed elbows with the Hollywood elite, she brought her daughter along. Jaid tried getting her daughter into acting as soon as she was born and landed her a commercial before she was a year old. This led to other roles and eventually movie parts.



Jaid went to Studio 54 and other clubs, bringing her child prodigy with her. Her daughter was first spotted drunk at 9 years old. By 10 she was smoking weed and by 12, snorting cocaine. She checked into rehab for alcohol and drug addiction before high school. Friends of the family noticed that Jaid would flirt with and even “steal” her daughter’s boyfriends.

At 15, her daughter legally emancipated herself from Jaid’s care and cut off all contact two years later.¹ In 1998 she told *US Weekly*, “The judge said he couldn’t turn back the clock, he could only turn it forward. I remember thinking, “Thank God! I don’t want to go back there!” I just knew: I am all my responsibility.”

But her wild life wasn’t over. By 20, Jaid’s daughter was covered in tattoos, married and divorced, and had posed nude for *Playboy*. Jaid was still fighting her daughter for the spotlight and posed for *Playboy* herself 8 months later at the age of 52.

Jaid’s wounding continued by auctioning off her daughter’s movie memorabilia, writing a book on her own sexual exploits and landing in jail on more than one occasion. Her daughter had another failed marriage and got an international reputation for her out of control behavior.

Jaid Barrymore led a selfish and reckless life, which deeply wounded her daughter, Drew. Drew Barrymore’s mother wounds shaped her identity and self-worth in her young life in a destructive and tragic way.

Absentee Mothers

In 2007, a nationwide study was conducted in Canada to determine what relationships hurt the most. Mothers came in fifth, listed below lovers, friends, fathers, and husbands, but above co-workers, bosses, siblings, wives, and children.

It was found that mothers hurt daughters more than sons. The study found 78% of the hurt caused by a mother is toward her daughter, with only 22% of mothers causing hurt toward a son.²

“She may have been there in body, but her heart wasn’t with me.”

That’s the confession of so many wounded sons and daughters. Emotionally abandoned at birth, they wait for hugs and comforting words that will never come. The wounds from a mother create in a child a Grand Canyon-sized hurt that only seems to get bigger.

When there’s a relational void between a mother and child it’s usually because of an inability to connect. If a mother is psychologically or emotionally unstable, her children will often grow up feeling an inner longing to connect that their mother just can’t fulfill. Somewhere along the line an emotional disconnect occurred within a mother’s internal makeup. Her heartache becomes the heartache of her children, too.

They want her to hold them, but she won’t.

They want her to listen to them, but she doesn’t.

They want her to be there for them, but she isn’t.

Unable to get past her own disappointments and instability, a broken mother cannot bear the burdens of her children. In response, they’re left to search elsewhere for the nurturing she should have provided. All too often, the generational chasm just gets wider.

Not all absent mothers are absent by choice, but the effect on their children is still painful and real. The premature death of a mother can also produce a significant mother wound. Pop icon Madonna, named after her mother, Madonna Fortin, lost her mom to breast cancer in 1963. She was very close to her mother and once shared, “One of the hardest things I’ve faced in my life was the death of my mother and that’s something I really haven’t got over to this day.”³

TV personality Rosie O’Donnell also lost her mother at an early age. When Rosie was ten, her mother died from cancer—she was just 39 years old. From Rosie’s own perspective, the death of her mother was the defining event of her life.⁴

Rosie’s Irish Catholic father dealt with his grief by withdrawing emotionally from his family, and he refused to allow the children to openly grieve for their mother. When her dad turned to alcohol to ease the

pain, Rosie was left with most of the family responsibilities, which included taking care of her diabetic grandmother.

Her father stayed emotionally distant.

During a Barbara Walters interview, Rosie once acknowledged, “I was a kid who had no mom. We were five children, and my dad was struggling to keep us all fed. It was a hard childhood and I had to take control. I think a lot of my success was because I drove the bus, I made the rules and I told people what to do.”

Plagued with the aftereffects of her traumatic childhood, Rosie consistently battled with self-destructive tendencies. Her separation from her mother at an early age seems to have left an emotional void that has yet to be filled.

Abused Mothers

Sometimes mother wounds don't come from the direct actions of the mother. Children who witness their mother being abused may feel guilty for not protecting her. Some children may even believe they were in some way the cause of the abuse. In addition, studies have shown that children raised in a family with an abused mother are 6–15 times as likely to be abused themselves.⁵

In other cases, abused mothers may pass their anger on to their children. Some moms may neglect their children by emotionally withdrawing into their battered lives. And of course, some mothers perpetuate the cycle of abuse. In spite of conventional thought, research shows that, aside from sexual abuse, mothers are more likely to maltreat their children. This is mainly because, in general, they carry the greater responsibility of parenting.^{6,7}

Hurt children also hurt other children, bringing their pain into future adult relationships. A son who has seen his mother being physically abused is ten times more likely to be abusive when he becomes an adult.^{8,9}

Children's hearts are crushed when they see their parents fighting, yelling, or physically hurting each other. They're left fearful, confused, and stressed out. One-third of children of abused mothers develop emotional problems.⁹

Children react in different ways to strife in the home: they may become withdrawn or shy, break down emotionally, become depressed, have a hard time making friends, or be excessively afraid of adults and authority figures. Children in abusive homes are more likely to develop physical and emotional abnormalities, such as wetting their beds, running away, committing crimes, or attempting suicide. In the long term, they also have a higher risk of alcohol or drug abuse.¹⁰

Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or seriously neglected at a rate 1500% higher than the national average.¹¹

If you have mother wounds from abuse, how have they impacted your childhood and adult life? Have you broken the cycle of abuse, or is it still breaking you? Now is the time for a frontal assault against the pain and confusion of your past. The weapons of your spiritual and emotional warfare are supernatural in nature.¹² Begin to tear down the destructive patterns in your life by soaking in the Word of God in prayer. God will renew your mind and heart as you look to Him for help.

Healthy Moms

Bank tellers aren't trained to recognize counterfeit money by handling bogus bills—they're trained to recognize it by being surrounded with real currency. It's the same principle with mothers. We can better understand our mother wounds and begin the

**NOW IS THE TIME FOR
A FRONTAL ASSAULT
AGAINST THE PAIN
AND CONFUSION OF
YOUR PAST.**

healing process when we're surrounded by a genuine example of a mother.

So much of the damage caused in children's lives can be traced back to parents whose lifestyles created an environment that was detrimental and even destructive to their children. But instead of wallowing in your mother's shortcomings, it will be more helpful to examine the healthy qualities God intended a mother to have. God gives instructions in His Word to show mothers how to live a life that will help nurture godly, healthy children. Although these might be painful to read as they remind you of mother traits that were sorely absent from your life, God can still use His original design to bring healing to your heart.

**MANY OF THE MOST
COMMON MOTHER
WOUNDS ARE A
DIRECT RESULT OF A
MOTHER'S NOT HAVING
THESE VIRTUOUS
CHARACTERISTICS.**

God made everyone—including mothers and fathers—in His own image and likeness.¹³ God encompasses all of the healthy male and female attributes that He gives us. So allow God to fill the void a wounded mother or father may have left behind.

Many of us know all too well the pain of an unhealthy or absent parent. There will always be some sadness for what we've lost. I will always wish I had a healthy dad—but I didn't. Maybe you feel the same way about your mother. Begin to replace the broken parts of your heart with an understanding of true motherhood. It will bring perspective and healing to your aching soul.

The Bible provides clear guidelines for all things related to life and godliness¹⁴ and outlines the role of godly women and mothers. Many of the most common mother wounds are a direct result of a mother not having these virtuous characteristics.

The Bible instructs, "...teach the older women to live in a way that is appropriate for someone serving the Lord. They must not go around speaking evil of others and must not be heavy drinkers. Instead, they should teach others what is good. These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to take care of their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God."¹⁵

These verses list twelve qualities that clearly describe godly, mature women:

1. Live in a way that is appropriate for someone serving the Lord.

The Bible is the greatest roadmap for navigating life. If we disregard its clear direction, we'll take a detour leading far from God's perfect, intended destination for our lives.

How we live affects everyone around us. Mothers whose lifestyles go against God's design will likely raise children who lead lives of unnecessary pain and dysfunction.

God's way leads to life: "You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever."¹⁶

But the path of an immoral woman leads to death: "For she does not care about the path to life. She staggers down a crooked trail and doesn't even realize where it leads."¹⁷

2. Not go around speaking evil of others.

The Greek word for evil here is *diabolos*, the same word we get "devil" from. Women (and men) who give themselves over to gossip and slander really are doing the devil's work. Satan is the original false accuser.¹⁸ When we tell lies that put down other people or when we tell other people's secrets because it gives us a false sense of power, we're following in Satan's steps.

**A GODLY WIFE PLAYS
A VITAL PART IN
ENCOURAGING HER
HUSBAND TO WHOLE-
HEARTEDLY FOLLOW GOD.**

3. *Not be heavy drinkers.*

How much pain has been caused by parents attempting to escape their problems through addictive substances or activities? Whether it is an addiction to painkillers or sex, if we give ourselves over to any addictive behavior, it will eventually erode our lives and our family.

The Bible uses the Greek word *pharmakeus* (where we get the word “pharmacy”)¹⁹ when it refers to those who use illicit drugs, saying that their end will be destruction. The consequences of this type of excess are always tragic.

4. *Teach others what is good.*

A “teacher of goodness,” Bible translator John Nelson Darby, translates this verse, “teachers of what is right.” My wife, Suzie, was the primary influence in the teaching of our daughters. Even now, as they are 30 years old and mothers in their own right, she is still teaching them every day.

5. *Train the younger women to ‘be sober’ to love their husbands.*

The Greek word for “sober,” *sophronizo*, speaks of restoring a husband to his senses by challenging, exhorting, and admonishing him to hold on to his duties as a husband. What a great responsibility! A godly wife plays a vital part in encouraging her husband to whole-heartedly follow God.

We can only train our children by example. Many wounded children grew up in homes where strife was the norm and love gradually faded from the fabric of their lives. As adults, without exposure to a better way to live, they will continue to pass on the dysfunction they were shown.

6. *Train the younger women to love their children.*

It has been said that all mothers have a favorite child: it is the one who needs them at the moment. This attitude demonstrates most clearly the selfless love of a mother.

One night a hen house caught fire. By the time the farmer was able to extinguish the flames, he found the mother hen's body, smoldering from the flames, yet still sitting on top of her nest. When the farmer lifted up her charred remains, he found her brood of chicks alive and well. The mother hen had willingly given her life for her young.

Mothers, love your children with the same nurturing love of that caring mother hen.

7. *Live wisely.*

Living wisely in this verse indicates living a sane lifestyle. It means we can't give in to inappropriate desires and impulses; instead we need to act with self-control and self-restraint. Too many moms bow to cultural peer pressure, lacking the courage to say "no" to the world, the flesh, and the devil when it comes to their child's spiritual and emotional well-being. There are times when your child will say, "But all the kids are doing it!" At that moment, it may be critical for a courageous mother to respond to her child's complaint with, "I know one who isn't!"

8. *Be pure.*

The word "pure" in the original Greek language implies being self-restrained, self-denying, abstaining from extramarital sex and inappropriate sexual desires. It is the opposite of promiscuous or immoral behavior. It also indicates dressing modestly to avoid indecency or attracting sexual attention.

WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME SHOULD NEVER CAUSE THEIR HOUSEHOLDS TO SUFFER. THE PRIMARY GOAL OF EVERY MOM SHOULD BE ONE OF NURTURING, WHETHER THAT IS SPIRITUAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL.

Mothers who model impure behavior for their children encourage their children to do the same. Everyone, especially children, needs more self-control—a result of knowing God that is desperately missing from our self-absorbed culture. When we give in to lust, we worsen our children’s inability to say “no” themselves.

9. Take care of their homes.

It is so important for mothers to make sure that their homes are a safe place for their husbands and children. Work outside the home should never cause their households to suffer. The primary goal of every mom should be one of nurturing, whether that is spiritual, mental, emotional or physical. Better to have less materially and be there for your children than to have some of the “extras” and miss out on the biblical essentials: “moral excellence... knowledge... self-control... patient endurance, and godliness.”²⁰

10. Do good.

The original language here implies mothers not just being pleasant and agreeable, but having a joyful and happy attitude as they are doing good toward their families. Miserable mothers create an atmosphere of misery for their children. Happy moms raise healthy children. It’s even possible to have joy in the midst of difficult and painful circumstances—it is God’s plan for us.

11. Be submissive to their husbands.

Husbands and wives are equals and, at the same time, they have different roles and functions within the family unit. A husband should love and not lord over his wife, and a wife should show the appropriate respect and appreciation for her husband. When a husband cherishes his wife with the love she deserves, she is much more likely to give her husband the respect he longs for.²¹

In my 32 wonderful years of marriage to my beautiful wife, I’ve never had to mention the submission aspect of this verse to Suzie. By majoring on loving her as Christ loved the church and focusing on laying down my life for her, she has gladly given me all of the respect my heart could ever desire.²²

12. *Not bring shame on the word of God.*

Nothing misrepresents God’s Word more than His people living hypocritical and phony lives. It causes people to not just disrespect us, but the Word of God we claim to represent, too. It’s not coincidental that Proverbs states that “a child left to himself brings shame (primarily) to his mother.”²³

Mother Love

A wise person once said, “A mother is a person who seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie.”²⁴ That’s the kind of self-sacrificing love God intended all mothers to have for their children.

The Bible uses the Greek word *phileoteknos* to describe the love of a healthy mother. This word describes a mother who “prefers” her children, “cares” for them, “nurtures” them, “affectionately embraces” them, “meets their needs,” and “tenderly loves” each one of her children as unique gifts from God.²⁵

Throughout the Bible both mothers and fathers are challenged to raise their children this way:

- To be available to their children—morning, noon, and night.²⁶
- To be involved with their children—sharing life together.²⁷
- To be teaching their children—the Scriptures and a godly world-view.²⁸
- To be training their children—developing skills and strengths.²⁹
- To be disciplining their children—teaching the fear of the Lord and drawing the line consistently, lovingly, firmly.³⁰
- To be nurturing to their children—providing an environment that is healthy, verbally affirming, accepting, and loving.³¹
- To be modeling integrity for their children—living consistently upright with words and actions.³²

For a mother to fulfill the role God has given her, she is called to live in the following way:

- love her husband and her children³³
- submit to her husband's leadership³⁴
- respect her husband³⁵
- comfort her children and care for them with gentleness, not harshness³⁶
- take care of her children's physical needs³⁷
- teach her children spiritual truths³⁸

The “Proverbs 31” Mother

One of the most beautiful descriptions of a godly woman and mother is found in the final chapter of the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. The presence of these virtues in a mother strengthens everyone around her, but their absence produces a void that can't be filled by anything else on Earth.

If you've suffered because your mother lacked these qualities or because you lost your mother, it may be painful to read what you have missed. But the Bible encourages us that “The entrance of [God's] words gives light...”³⁹ Sometimes, light illuminates what has been hidden in darkness. Other times, combined with heat, it burns away what needs to be removed. In either case, the experience may be painful. But, it's a pain that leads to healing.

Here is a breakdown of Proverbs 31:10–31:

- Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? [She is competent.]
- She is worth more than precious rubies. [She is priceless.]
- Her husband can trust her. [She is safe.]

- She will greatly enrich his life. [She gives her husband value.]
- She will not hinder him but help him all her life. [She will benefit him.]
- She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. [She is industrious.]
- She is like a merchant's ship. [She has great capacity.]
- She brings her food from afar. [She goes out of her way.]
- She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plan the day's work for her servant girls. [She is self-sacrificing, and she manages others well.]
- She goes out to inspect a field and buys it. [She's a decision-maker.]
- With her earnings she plants a vineyard. [She builds toward the future.]
- She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. [She is bold and brave.]
- She watches for bargains. [She takes initiative.]
- Her lights burn late into the night. [She is diligent.]
- Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber. [She is tireless.]
- She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy. [She is compassionate.]
- She has no fear of winter for her household because all of them have warm clothes. [She cares for her husband's and children's needs.]
- She quilts her own bedspreads. [She is not dependent upon others.]
- She dresses like royalty in gowns of finest cloth. [She is creative and attractive.]

- Her husband is well known, for he sits in the council meeting with the other civic leaders. [She brings honor to her husband.]
- She makes belted linen garments and sashes to sell to the merchants. [She is ingenious.]
- She is clothed with strength and dignity. [She is a woman of character.]
- She laughs with no fear of the future. [She is a woman of faith.]
- When she speaks, her words are wise. [She is wise.]
- Kindness is the rule when she gives instructions. [She is gentle.]
- She carefully watches all that goes on in her household. [She is perceptive.]
- She does not have to bear the consequences of laziness. [She is never idle.]
- Her children stand and bless her. [She is highly esteemed by her family.]
- Her husband praises her. [Her husband is captivated by her.]
- There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all! [She's one of a kind.]
- Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised. [She has true and lasting beauty not of this world.]
- Reward her for all she has done. [She deserves praise, remuneration and honor.]
- Let her deeds publicly declare her praise. [She should be publicly acknowledged.]

The biblical model of femininity is a woman and mother of excellence. She may work outside of the home, but her family doesn't suffer because of it. She maintains the right balance and keeps her family her priority at all times.

The godly mother's family is her principle mission in life.

The Road to Forgiveness

The ultimate healing from mother wounds—or any hurt—comes from God. He is the One who can restore health to our battered hearts and minds through forgiveness.

Jesus taught how essential this forgiving process is. He clearly instructed us, “Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may Your name be honored. May Your Kingdom come soon. May Your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”⁴⁰

Jesus is clear. If we have hard, unforgiving hearts, it calls into question whether we have ever fully received God's forgiveness toward us.

The forgiven heart will forgive others.

The forgiven heart will relinquish the right to punish the person who has caused hurt, just as God the Father relinquished the right to punish us by sending His Son to die on our behalf.

The forgiven heart will no longer hold the people who have done wrong fully responsible for their words, attitudes or actions.

In order to understand the extent of God's forgiveness toward us and, consequently, how to forgive, first we have to receive God's forgiveness for our own lives. My appreciation of God's forgiveness of my own sins provides the perfect impetus for forgiving others. The following verses are an amazing example of God's caring heart toward each of us.

“The LORD is merciful and gracious; He is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does He deal with us as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is

as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him.”⁴¹

Forgiveness is essential for inner health, but it’s possible to experience forgiveness without complete reconciliation. The word reconciliation comes from two Latin words *re-*, meaning “again,” and *conciliare*, which means “to bring together,” so reconciliation means, “to bring together—or to make friendly—again.” Reconciliation is certainly a goal, but not a requirement, for forgiveness.

Today, God can remove the stranglehold of unforgiveness in your heart. He can break the curse of resentment and bitterness toward the mother who hurt you. But you have to release her from the consequences of her sin, just as God has released you.

Let God pour His grace and forgiveness into every broken memory from your past. A healthy future can only happen after we take the pain of our past into the presence of the God who heals.

Time doesn’t heal—Jesus does! It’s time to allow God to do what He does best.

Jesus promised, “I will prove that I, the Son of Man, have the authority on earth to forgive sins.”⁴² Let Jesus remove the hurt from your broken past.

Forgiving others opens the doorway to the depths of our own forgiveness. God has promised, “if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”⁴³

Pause and pray right now.

He longs to restore your broken heart.

Let the healing begin!

Questions for Discussion

1. What type of mother did you have: absentee (emotionally disconnected), abusive (or observed her being abused), neglectful, controlling, manipulative, healthy? How did your mother impact your childhood?
2. In what ways did you respond to your mother during your childhood? In what ways did that impact your childhood?
3. How have your mother's influence and your childhood responses affected you as an adult? How have they affected your relationships?
4. As you reflect on the twelve qualities that describe a godly, mature woman starting on page 187, what are the truths of these scriptures personally saying to you?
5. Have you chosen to forgive your mother and started praying for her? If so, how has that impacted your life? If not, what do you think is hindering you from choosing to forgive her? In what ways is that choice affecting your life?

11

reclaiming your childhood

The things which the child loves remain in the domain of the heart until old age. The most beautiful thing in life is that our souls remain over the places where we once enjoyed ourselves.

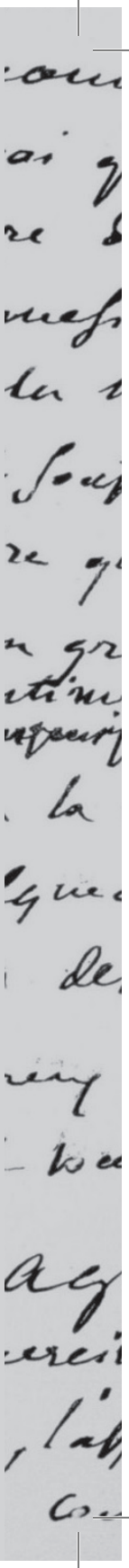
—Kahlil Gibran, *Author*

Destiny Walks

I vividly remember my brother and I walking with our father the five blocks to St. Joseph's, our neighborhood Catholic church, on Sunday mornings when we were young. It was a predominantly Italian community, and my father would stop every 100 feet or so to talk with people in front of their homes, always in Italian. Since this was the secret tongue my parents communicated in, my brother and I were unable to understand a word. It left us standing awkwardly next to him for unbearably long periods of time. But, as their Congressman, consulting with his constituents was a good opportunity to meet a need.

Although at the time I couldn't stand the parade of conversations, it's actually a lot like what I do now as a pastor. I find myself moving from one opportunity to touch a life to another. Whether I like it or not, in some ways, the apple didn't fall too far from the tree.

In more than a few ways, I am like my father.



Ironically, my father's middle name, L'Episcopo, means the "bishop." So our family's ancestry may be traced back to those who were spiritual leaders in their tiny village in Sicily, Italy. Our ancestors on my father's side came from a small town in Sicily near Mount Etna called Gagliano Castelferatto. My older brother and sister, who have visited this town, told me it has only two striking features. The town sits adjacent to a massive rock formation called La Rocca (the rock), and one of the most prominent buildings in the village is a Catholic church, which happens to sit right below this massive rock.

Gagliano Castelferatto, Sicily



How strange—I may be descended from a heritage of bishops in a village known for its church next to The Rock, and I am now the pastor of The Rock of Roseville church in Roseville, California. Although these parallels may only have significance to me, they once again affirm God's loving intention for my little life. He has a destiny for me that spans generations: past, present, and future.

From the foundation of the world, I was created to be a pastor, a bishop of people from a church called The Rock.

Worth the Price of Sacrifice

Before you buy something, you need to know the actual value of what you're buying. Each of us would only be willing to purchase what we really believe is worth something. In the same way, we wouldn't bother spending time and effort reclaiming what would be considered garbage.

Unless that garbage was actually valuable.

A long time ago, I worked in a large resort hotel in South Lake Tahoe, California. One day a maid cleaning the rooms threw away some tissue on a nightstand. What she didn't know was that the handful of seemingly discarded tissues contained a diamond necklace worth tens of thousands of dollars.

When the distraught guest alerted the resort about what had happened, the hotel management sprang into action. Immediately, they stopped the disposal of all garbage and then commissioned dozens of employees to meticulously rummage through a mountain of trash to find the lost valuable.

For days, trash was stacked in hallways and backed up into an adjacent overflow warehouse. Nothing would be thrown out until it had been thoroughly examined. Twenty-four hour security was posted to scrutinize those looking for the missing necklace so that no one would try to steal it when and if it was found.

What was thought to be a worthless pile of tissue had suddenly become invaluable! When one of the workers finally found the misplaced necklace, the employees who had waded through the stinking mess were given a reward for their efforts, and the hotel guest was ecstatic that what had been taken from her had been returned.

If we are willing to take the time and make the effort to allow God to redeem what has been lost in our lives, the God of the impossible will make a way to reclaim what is precious to us.

It will be messy.

What we have to wade through will stink.

But somewhere in the pile of past hurts lies something priceless: a healed heart.

A police officer is killed while protecting his community. A man lays down his life for his country. A mother gives her life for her child. Each of these courageous people are willing to die for something, affirming the incomprehensible value of the recipient of their sacrificial act. They've made the ultimate sacrifice and blessed a community, a country, and a child—because they believed the ones they were dying for were worth it.

Jesus paid the ultimate price when He gave His life for us by dying on the cross. His sinless life and selfless death made an eternal statement: “You are priceless to Me! There is no price too great for Me to pay in order to redeem your precious soul.” We are each the beneficiary!

If the God who made us considers each of us priceless, then, even during our lowest moments, we should never devalue our treasured lives.

The Perfect Plan for Redemption

In order to reclaim the damaged portions of our childhood, we have to believe their redemption is possible and that rescuing them will be worth it. But also, and most importantly, that reclaiming our childhood is God's will for each of our lives—even the reason He died for us. If, as the Bible says, “we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them,”¹ then all that happens to us is not just redeemable, it is purposeful and invaluable.

At this point in my 35-year journey with Jesus, I would not change any of the horrendous events of my traumatic childhood. Although it hurts me to even think about them, whether I like it or not, each situation made me who I am. Change the circumstances, and you change the person.

God knew that we would each experience great pain because of harm caused by others and ourselves. But He's always had a plan. In every situation, God's ultimate intention is the complete redemption of all that has been taken from us or lost.

The word redemption means to "buy back." If we choose to believe it, the God who redeems all things always intended on buying back and restoring what was lost in every dimension of our lives.

God is a God of redemption. It's not just what He does—it's who He is. By redeeming what was lost in us, He affirms our eternal value and demonstrates the vast ocean of love that is in His heart.

More than anything else He's done, God established our value by sending His Son to die in our place. He couldn't have made a bigger sacrifice. The greater the cost of redeeming our dysfunctional lives, the greater the demonstration of His depthless love and our intrinsic value.

But beware of counterfeit redemption!

There are many who offer a substitute for the real thing.

The World's vs. the Word's Plan of Redemption

This fallen world has a plan of redemption for us, too. It centers on self: self-will, self-esteem, self-preservation, self-realization, self-serving, etc. As if "finding yourself" was in some way the cure for what ails us. Self is not the cure. It's the epicenter of our problem. We cannot save ourselves. Our Creator has reserved that privilege for Himself.

A few years ago, a minister named Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the State of Kansas

**THE GREATER THE COST
OF REDEEMING OUR
DYSFUNCTIONAL LIVES,
THE GREATER THE
DEMONSTRATION OF HIS
DEPTHLESS LOVE AND
OUR INTRINSIC VALUE.**

Senate. What he prayed wasn't culturally popular or politically correct, but it was one of the most morally and biblically accurate prayers I have ever heard.

As he prayed, some of the legislators walked out in protest. In the aftermath, his church received over 5,000 phone calls, 99% of which were positive responses. Radio commentator Paul Harvey aired the prayer and received a larger response to the program than any other he had ever aired.

Here is Pastor Joe Wright's controversial prayer:

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it pluralism. We have worshipped other gods and called it multi-culturalism. We have endorsed perversion and called it alternative lifestyle. We have exploited the poor and called it lottery. We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn children and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it self-esteem. We have abused power and called it political savvy. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

Pastor Wright's prayer was profoundly accurate, and at the same time, it was completely contrary to what some would call conventional wisdom! The world's wisdom—put yourself first, do whatever feels good, create your own truth—will just perpetuate the dysfunction in our lives. Only God holds the key to restoring what was lost in our childhood. Only He can get it back for us and continue His plan of making us like Himself.

If we buy into the psychobabble of a deceived culture, we will never retrieve what's been stolen from our wounded lives.

An embittered heart cannot forgive.

An angry mind will not release.

A selfish perspective cannot be satisfied.

If we choose to self-medicate instead of allowing our Creator to heal us, the repairs will not go deep enough, and we'll never feel fully whole. Bandages on brain tumors and compresses on cancers won't work.

Though there is no quick fix, we should never be discouraged into believing there is no fix.

The Bible's groundbreaking promise holds true today: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."²

The Reclamation Project

Some of the doors of hope and healing that closed during our childhood have to be painstakingly pried open. Others have to—over time and with a lot of prayer, examination, and counsel—be even cried open.

We have to keep God's promise to restore each of our lives in the forefront of our minds so we can keep on believing and not get discouraged. God says, "But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed."³

The Bible also encourages, "The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of streets to dwell in."⁴

Of course, there are bleak moments in each of our lives when all seems lost. The Old Testament describes the vast devastation caused by Israel's rebellion against God:

"Despair, all you farmers! Wail, all you vine growers! Weep, because the wheat and barley—yes, all the field crops—are ruined. The grapevines and the fig trees have all withered. The pomegranate trees, palm trees,

and apple trees—yes, all the fruit trees—have dried up. All joy has dried up with them.”⁵

What could have been is now gone.

What exists isn’t enough to satisfy.

As the songwriter once wrote you “don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone.”⁶ We ache for a different outcome for our broken lives. It will take faith and obedience to make it happen, but that deep desire for life to be different comes from God, and it is His delight to fulfill it.

The challenge in the Book of Joel continues, “That is why the LORD says, ‘Turn to Me now, while there is time! Give Me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don’t tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts.’ Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. Who knows? Perhaps even yet He will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this terrible curse. Perhaps He will give you so much that you will be able to offer grain and wine to the LORD your God as before!”⁷

Now the tone turns ecstatic!

God’s promise of healing and restoration has finally arrived.

“Rejoice, you people of Jerusalem! Rejoice in the LORD your God! For the rains He sends are an expression of His grace. Once more the autumn rains will come, as well as the rains of spring. The threshing floors will again be piled high with grain, and the presses will overflow with wine and olive oil. The LORD says, ‘I will give you back what you lost to the stripping locusts, the cutting locusts, the swarming locusts, and the hopping locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the LORD your God, who does these miracles for you. Never again will My people be disgraced like this. Then you will know that I am here among My people of Israel and that I alone am the LORD your God. My people will never again be disgraced like this.’”⁸

Destined for Restoration

A head-over-heels in love God, intent on establishing an eternal relationship with us, created each of us for Himself. He is not just a God of love, He is a God in love.

His plan is redemption—to redeem us to our former value.

His intention is reclamation—to reclaim all that we have lost.

His desire is restoration—to restore our lives to fulfill His original design.

We have been predestined from the foundation of the world to conquer where we have failed; to be healed where we have been hurt; and to allow all that has happened to somehow work for our good.

The New Testament writer Paul understood this implicitly when he wrote to persecuted Christians, “Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? (Even the Scriptures say, ‘For Your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.’) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.”⁹

Even before our ancestors Adam and Eve fell, God’s intent was to restore them and all of their blemished descendants, ourselves included. But it is God’s method of restoration that, once seen, so completely captures our hearts. More than a momentary phenomenon, an infinite sequence of God-authored events begins to open our eyes to see who our wonderful Creator really is.

**WE HAVE BEEN
PREDESTINED FROM THE
FOUNDATION OF THE
WORLD TO CONQUER
WHERE WE HAVE FAILED:
TO BE HEALED WHERE WE
HAVE BEEN HURT; AND
TO ALLOW ALL THAT HAS
HAPPENED TO SOMEHOW
WORK FOR OUR GOOD.**

Profoundly more telling than the story of the missing necklace in the pile of garbage is the fact that Jesus actually became garbage for us: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”¹⁰ He defined once and for all what true love is.

Out of all possible options, God wrote a script that was the most difficult imaginable and personally costly to Him. His acts of love would make such an indelible impression on our untrusting hearts that we would at last see “...how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for He allows us to be called His children, and we really are!”¹¹

**ARE YOU WILLING TO
EMBRACE THE TRUTH
THAT GOD LONGS TO
HEAL YOUR WOUNDED
HEART?**

Ready To Reclaim Your Childhood?

Are you willing to embrace the truth that God longs to heal your wounded heart? Are you willing to believe that all that has happened in your past was actually intended to become a stepping stone to your ultimate destiny and purpose? Are you willing to resist the cynical temptation to believe that any attempt to retain value from your past wounding is an exercise in futility? If you're willing, then you are perfectly positioned to allow the light of God's grace and forgiveness to shine into the darkest recesses of your past.

Whoever wounded you, whatever harm they caused, three things now need to take place for your healing to be realized:

1. Don't Let the Evil Done to You Define You

No amount of restitution can make up for the harm done to you. How can someone become un-abused or un-abandoned? An emotional scar will remain after your wounds are healed, but if you give God all of your pain, it will become a scar of remembrance, a sacred altar attesting to the greatness of God's healing power.

If you allow God to take you through His healing process, refining you in the fires of adversity, then you too will be able to minister hope to others who have been wounded. Much of my week, every week, for many years, has consisted of helping people who have been hurt, like I was hurt.

My pain is now worth it.

If, on the other hand, you refuse to fully examine what has wounded you, your pain will remain an oozing sore of unforgiveness, and it will probably be passed on to those you love in countless wrong responses to life.

The Bible teaches us not to let the evil done to us define us: "Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good."¹²

Passiveness will not allow you to fulfill your destiny, and a stubborn resistance won't allow God to remove all of your pain.

The way is Jesus!

The truth is "...He (Jesus) was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed!"¹³ We can accept His healing gift now and not allow our past to define us.

If, after asking God to forgive us, we receive by faith that our sins are washed away, then we need to forgive those who sinned against us, too. Jesus admonished us, "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven."¹⁴

2. See Others' Needs More Than Their Offenses

As you forgive and pray for the people who have harmed you, God will begin to give you insight into their needs. Though it may seem difficult to believe at this point, one of the greatest joys in life is being freed sufficiently to forgive those who have hurt us the most. In time, if you allow Him full reign in your life, the needs of those who have hurt you will stir your heart more than any of their offenses do.

Author Graham Cooke tells the unforgettable story of a 14 year-old girl who was gang-raped by four men. The last man who raped her had horrible scars on his face. As he was abusing her, she did the unthinkable—she reached up and prayed for the scars on his face to be healed. Immediately, as she prayed, his face was healed.

Cooke heard of this extraordinary event from the young man himself after a God-sized inner healing had taken place in him. Jesus was so at work in that girl's heart that she was able to focus on her rapist's needs instead of his offense even as he was raping her.

Imagine what God could do in you if you will let Him.

3. Become a Rescuer

As you examine the pain of your past and allow God to heal your wounded soul, ask Him to reveal a passion in your heart—a passion He wants to give you to protect and rescue others in the same way He has rescued you.

Somewhere, beneath your pain, is a God-given passion to build bridges of hope with people God sends your way. You can begin fighting for their future even before they are fully aware or able to.

The very nature of the God of the universe is to rescue, even those who have resisted Him the most. As we have been created in His image and likeness, that rescuing and forgiving ability is in us as well, if we will but yield to it. The divine finale of all that we have been through will bring full closure to the pain of our past.

The Bible confirms this is God’s intent: “He (God) comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.”¹⁵

Reclaiming the Tortured Years

In the Old Testament, Joseph’s own brothers maliciously sold him into slavery. This set in motion a chain of events that caused Joseph to be a slave and then a prisoner for 13 long, torturous years. But Joseph’s unthinkable challenges also set him up, at a strategic moment, to be supernaturally established as the Prime Minister of Egypt. Only by experiencing all of these life-altering events was Joseph divinely positioned, years later, to save his helpless family (brothers included) from dying in a famine.

In hindsight, we can see that if even one painful dimension of his life had been eliminated, Joseph wouldn’t have been in a position to rescue his dying family—from whom none other than Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, descended.

Every aspect of Joseph’s family’s multi-dimensional miracle hinges on one thing: his response to the wounds of his past. If Joseph hardens his heart against his helpless brothers floundering in front of him—if he executes vengeance instead of forgiveness—then history implodes, and the line of Abraham leading to the Messiah is abruptly cut off. All of us today would have remained spiritually dead and without any hope.

But Joseph didn’t choose revenge. He lived a surrendered life and submitted to God’s refining process. He responded well to life’s extraordinary pressure and pain, allowing God to use each difficult event to

**SOMEWHERE, BENEATH
YOUR PAIN, IS A GOD-
GIVEN PASSION TO BUILD
BRIDGES OF HOPE WITH
PEOPLE GOD SENDS
YOUR WAY.**

perfectly craft him into the man he was meant to be. By letting God have His way in him, Joseph was able to reclaim his wounded past and have a profound effect on future generations. There is no greater miracle than this!

Years later, when Joseph was faced again with the choice to forgive or avenge, he shared his God-centered, forgiving perspective with his terrified brothers: “As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.’ So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.”¹⁶

Incredible—Joseph reclaimed his childhood!

The dream he had when he was young of his brothers bowing before him eventually came true because Joseph allowed God to keep his heart soft. No part of his tragic past had been wasted. It was all salvaged for transformation. Joseph was living proof that our past can be reclaimed.

Tragically, although Joseph meant every healing word he said, his brothers refused to believe him. While Joseph had reclaimed vast acreage from a wounded past, his tortured brothers never would. The same choice exists today, and not everyone will take advantage of the amazing grace God so freely offers.

Grace to heal!

Grace to forgive!

Grace to rest without regret!

So, what do you want to do with your past? Will you hide it away in a dungeon of despair? Or will you, right now, dive heart-first into the lifelong process of allowing God to redeem, heal, restore, and eventually use you as an agent of healing? If you choose to let God in, He will teach you to turn the other cheek, to lay down your life, and to say, as Jesus did, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”¹⁷

In the end, you will be the person God always meant for you to be.

Make your move toward the path of life!

Allowing Jesus to really become the Lord of your life will cost you. You'll have to give up your self-will, your preferences and you being the god of your own life. But it will be well worth it.

The Bible assures us, "the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day."¹⁸ Thirty-five years after allowing Jesus to be the Lord and God of my life, I have no regrets—just the joy of being completely forgiven, the peace of a healed past, and an incomprehensible love for God and other people.

I have seen thousands of wounded people become healed because I first allowed God to heal my heart. I am not a victim anymore—I am now the victor God envisioned from the beginning. Although my journey isn't complete, I am no longer intimidated by my need to examine, acknowledge, and admit my past, and to forgive and release myself and those who have hurt me.

Entering the Battle Against the Darkness

Can the pain of our past wounds ever compete with the joy of being set free and seeing others set free? Can darkness ever compete with light? I can tell you from experience that it's no contest!

Sometimes in this deceptive world, it looks like darkness has the upper hand, but each new sunrise shatters the notion that darkness has a lasting future. It too will eventually fade, as will all tears and sadness. Then the day will break and the shadows will flee away.¹⁹ But for now, we must battle against the darkness. We have to eradicate, once and for all, the lie we've been told that our past will always possess us in some way—that God's promised grace is insufficient to make us whole as He originally intended.

The Bible encourages us in this battle:

“A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.

**HE PROMISED TO GIVE
EACH OF US LIFE TO
THE FULLEST, AND GOD
MAKES GOOD ON ALL
HIS PROMISES.**

In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.”²⁰

The battle won’t be easy—the tortured, negative words I sometimes speak are vestiges of my old wounded, wayward self. But God enters the battle with us. More and more, the healing power of Jesus flows through my life and changes me. He promised to give each of us life to the fullest,²¹ and God makes good on all His promises.

The Final Healing

In the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi issues a simultaneous prophetic encouragement and warning:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”²²

This enigmatic verse is the cryptic climax of the Old Testament. It is a prophetic paradox that has left many a Bible student in a quandary—the prophet Elijah had already lived and died. The Bible also emphatically rules out the possibility of reincarnation or someone returning to live a second life on earth in this crystal clear New Testament verse: “...it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment.”²³

So it seems apparent that only the “spirit of Elijah” will in some way impact the earth in the future, as was recorded shortly after his death: “Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’”²⁴

Since the Bible teaches that the “spirit of Elijah” will in some way re-impact the earth prior to the return of Jesus, it is important for us to briefly look at the eternal repercussions of his first visit.

Just like our present world, Elijah’s day was a time of great duplicity and distraction among believers. King Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel, had led the nation of Israel to follow false gods, breaking their covenant with the One True God.

As a counterfeit father of the nation, Ahab was a gross misrepresentation of the majestic Father-heart of God. But God always seeks to find someone whose heart purely longs to follow Him. He found that kind of someone in the frill-less prophet Elijah.

Even though you might call Elijah bull-headed, a bit egotistical and reclusive, you could never accuse him of being less than 100% devoted to God. He was as committed a believer as anyone who ever walked the Earth. The Bible affirms this in multiple places. Perhaps Elijah’s greatest quality was that of a forerunner—his willingness to fearlessly trail-blaze an unprecedented obedience to follow God wherever He led. From the nose-to-nose standoff on Mt. Carmel with 450 demonized false prophets—to calling down rain during a drought, Elijah did

the seemingly ridiculous and subsequently experienced the miraculous. After such astounding acts of faith, God swept him away to heaven in a chariot of fire.

But the spirit of this great man would one day return to earth.

Just before the birth of Jesus, an angel told a man named Zacharias that his unborn son, John, was destined to become a great leader: “He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”²⁵ Like Elijah, John the Baptist was a forerunner, a way-maker, one who prepares the way for God to come.

So, what will be the role of the spirit of Elijah before Jesus comes again on that “great and dreadful day of the Lord?” Let’s examine the Malachi verse more closely: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”²⁶

Prior to the Second Coming of Jesus and the Final Judgment of God, there will apparently be a great estrangement between parents—and in particular fathers and their children. Although this in itself is a curse, the perpetual lack of healing between fathers and children would bring an even greater relational holocaust to the planet if it were not healed.

What could burden the heart of a father more than a division with one of his children? It would be that much worse for the infinitely loving Father-heart of God: a breach between His beloved sons and daughters would be unbearable.

Consumed with a passion to bring healing to the broken relationships between parents and their children, and all the more desperate to bring His children back to Him, God the Father sent His only begotten Son to Earth to pay the ultimate price of restoration. As the perfect Father for all time, God will do everything in His power to bring healing between His beloved children.

The question is not “if” God will bring a miraculous restoration between parents and children, but “when.” The Psalmist wrote, “He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct?”²⁷ God would not be true to Himself if He would perpetually allow us to be untrue to ourselves. His Father-heart aches for our own father-hearts to be fully awakened and for the hearts of His children to be healed. He will not rest until all He originally intended for the family becomes a reality.

Because He has promised, it will happen!

My prayer is that its fulfillment will be in our day. We don't need to wait for a time of greater family dysfunction than we have today to establish that families are in crisis.

It's Time To Heal

Will you allow Jesus to heal your heart?

Are you broken? He will mend you!

Are you abandoned? He will surround you!

Are you neglected? He will fill you!

Are you fearful? He will free you!

Are you embittered? He will soothe you!

Have you been abused? He will comfort you!

Have you been spoiled? He will train you!

Are you performance-driven? He accepts you as you are!

**HIS FATHER-HEART
ACHES FOR OUR OWN
FATHER-HEARTS TO BE
FULLY AWAKENED AND
FOR THE HEARTS OF HIS
CHILDREN TO BE HEALED.**

Has your heart been wounded? He will make it as good as new!

That's why Jesus came. When He stood up in His hometown synagogue, He affirmed His unwavering intention when He said, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."²⁸

Jesus stands waiting, eager to lay His healing, nail-scarred hands on your broken soul. It is not too late! It's the perfect time for a new beginning—the start of the transforming work He wants to complete in you.

It is time to break the curse of wounding in your life.

It is time to reclaim the blessings and promises of a loving Creator.

"Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise..."²⁹ The God, who is love, has never failed you.³⁰ It would be impossible.

The God who knows the intimate details and challenges of each of our lives will not abandon us. His promises surround us at every turn, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I (the Lord) will not forget you."³¹

Let God's Word wash you.

Let the Holy Spirit heal you.

**JESUS STANDS WAITING,
EAGER TO LAY HIS
HEALING, NAIL-
SCARRED HANDS ON
YOUR BROKEN SOUL.
IT IS NOT TOO LATE!**

Receive God's forgiveness right now.

Forgive and release those who have hurt you.

Allow His healing grace to pour into every crevice of your wounded heart.

Your healing will come in stages. It will take some time as each layer of pain is tenderly restored to God's original healthy intent.

"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you..."³²

Let the Father-heart of God comfort you!

Questions for Discussion

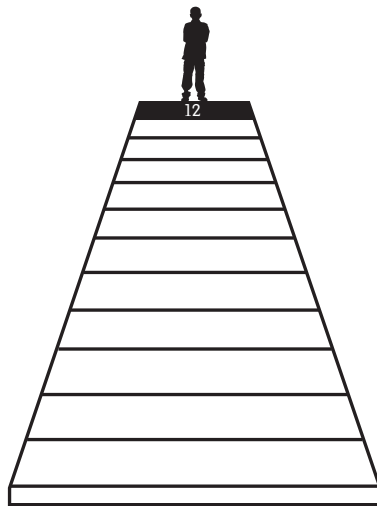
1. In what ways have you tried quick fixes to heal your pain: anger, bitterness, selfishness, “finding” yourself, self-medication, or abusing others? How have these choices affected you and your relationships?

2. Describe the ways your painful and hurtful life experiences have shaped you.

3. The author wrote about three things that need to take place for your healing to be realized:
 - A. Don't let the evil done to you define you
 - B. Let God give you insight into others needs more than their offenses
 - C. You are called to rescue, not revenge.
As you reflect upon these three things, how do you think your life would be impacted if you chose to do them?

4. God defined His love for you and His priceless and eternal value for you in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, He poured God's goodness into us.” (The Living Bible) And, the author writes “His plan is redemption (to redeem us to our former value), His desire is reclamation (to reclaim all that we have lost, His heart for us is restoration (to restore our lives to fulfill His original intent)”. How does this verse of scripture and the author's thoughts apply to you?

...
si qu
e de
refin
u m
souff
e qu
gre
timen
peripe
la C
me
des
ay
we
regu
reine
l'alf
comp



12

the search for fathers

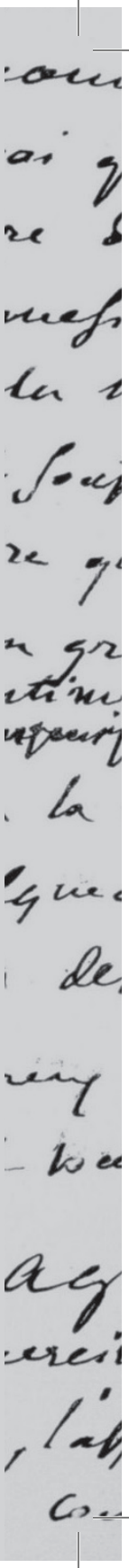
Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example instead of his advice.

—Unknown

Becoming a Father

In 2000, a dear friend of mine, Pastor George Brantley, was a guest speaker at our church. He is one of the best fathers I know, both with his own three sons and with the men and women of his great congregation, The Rock of Gainesville, in Gainesville, Florida. It was during George's stay with us that the Holy Spirit revealed an unhealthy perspective in my heart.

Just before George spoke, I was describing to our congregation that my primary role as their pastor was as a coach. I thought nothing of my comments until later that day when, during lunch, George gently commented he was surprised I had presented my role to the church as primarily being a coach and not a father. I quickly responded, "I refer to myself as a coach, and not a father, because I don't want them to feel I am being controlling."



Even as the words left my mouth, I knew they were deformed. Why would I assume the mere mention of my being a father would connote an overbearing attitude toward those I am called to serve?

As I thought and prayed about my comments, I realized I was presenting myself as a coach because I didn't want to even appear to be overly controlling, as my father had been. My wounded past had once again distorted my present perspective.

It grieved me tremendously and made me shudder wondering what other misguided perceptions I harbored in my soul. I had seen other ministers misrepresent God's heart during my Christian life. Personally, I would rather not claim to represent Him at all than to represent Him wrongly. So many times, I have literally sobbed when I've realized my distorted view of being a father has adversely affected the way I serve the precious people entrusted to my care.

Even as a young Christian, my father wounds made me reluctant to be a father myself. Having had such an unfulfilling childhood, I didn't want to have a family of my own until I saw healthy children in our local church. When my wife and I finally did, we made an appointment with that particular family. Over time they became close friends while we raised our children. On many occasions we found their advice to be invaluable.

Similarly, I have never felt fully capable of being a spiritual father, even though I know I am called to be one. But I believe, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain..." So I can be the father God called me to be by His grace.

A little while after this monumental, personal epiphany, I polled our church during our weekend services:

What role would you like me to have as your pastor?

A. Coach, B. CEO, C. Older Brother, D. Father

An overwhelming 70% in each of the weekend services voted for "D"—Father.

It broke me again!

I then publicly asked our church's forgiveness for in some way misrepresenting God's heart. This revelation and my subsequent repentance brought a further level of healing to the father wounds in my own life and, I believe, in the lives of many others in our congregation. Since then I have tried to walk in my God-appointed fathering role. Although I will never feel adequate within myself to fully represent God's father-heart, this ongoing understanding of being a father has proven to be life-transforming.

I Was a Predator

As I alluded to in the first chapter of this book, there was a second girl in college I got pregnant. In my mind, I denied it for years. A few weeks after I had stopped dating her, she came up to me and said she was pregnant. She was soft-spoken and gentle about it. I was defensive and, without even asking her one question, blurted out, "It's not my baby!" It was a rude, selfish, and insensitive thing to say.

After a short discussion, I walked away insisting the baby was not mine. I had no reason to believe it wasn't mine—I was just responding out of fear and selfishness.

Two years went by.

I was now on drugs, suicidal, and depressed. I was a godless, hedonistic atheist whose "god of pleasure," like the Philistine god in the Bible, had fallen on his face.¹ My live-in girlfriend had just had an abortion and I was working for the U.S. Postal Service.

One day, while delivering mail to a shop in Hackensack, New Jersey, I came face to face with my past. The girl who had previously said she was pregnant with my baby was working behind the cash register.

**ALTHOUGH I WILL
NEVER FEEL ADEQUATE
WITHIN MYSELF TO
FULLY REPRESENT
GOD'S FATHER-
HEART, THIS ONGOING
UNDERSTANDING OF
BEING A FATHER HAS
PROVEN TO BE LIFE-
TRANSFORMING.**

A few months before, I had heard she had married a doctor. As I now walked toward her, I could see she was pregnant. My past irresponsibility toward her caused me to quickly drop off the mail and barely acknowledge her before fleeing the store.

Once outside, I walked about twenty-five feet before becoming completely overwhelmed with guilt and shame. Almost in a trance, I turned back.

She was completely alone in the store. Feeling like the idiot I was, I walked up and said, “I know that I was a real jerk a couple of years ago, and I’m really sorry for what I did to you.”

It was a very intense moment.

As tears rolled down her cheeks, she whispered, “Thank you.”

I walked out shaken and unable to fully process the injustice I had done to her.

I couldn’t yet begin to accept that the primary victim of our sin and my selfishness was the baby we rejected. Not until a few years ago was I willing to focus on what had really happened. Like many men in our culture today, I was a predator. But God had a far greater plan. He created me to be a protector. That realization would come later on in my life.

The Fatherless Epidemic

A few years ago, my friend Pastor George Brantley was invited to speak to 1,100 students at a Bible institute in Texas. After spending two days lovingly sharing about the “Fathering” principle, he offered anyone who needed a “safe hug” to come forward.

What happened was both tragic and astounding.

Hundreds of young men and women lined up for three hours to receive a “safe hug.” One after another, they sobbed on George’s shoulders, literally ruining his jacket and shirt. That’s the kind of desperate hunger for godly fathers people have.

It is probably our society's greatest need today.

Our culture wants dads to be protectors but spends billions of dollars seducing men into being predators who prey on the young and innocent for selfish ends. Every day, fathers and mothers have to fend off a barrage of advertisements purporting our inadequacies. Without their products—car, bra, pill, DVD, cruise, exercise machine, etc.—we will never become who we really long to be. In most cases, their appeal is based more on lust and lies than on contentment and truth. In essence, they're offering junk food instead of real nourishment to our starving souls.

Just look at the devastating results of the seduction of fathers and the destruction of fatherhood:

1. Fatherlessness is the nation's number one family and social problem.

According to 72% of the U.S. population, fatherlessness is the most significant family or social problem facing the country.²

2. One-third of U.S. children live without their biological father.

An estimated 24.7 million children (36%) do not live in the same home as their biological father.³

3. Only 50% of U.S. children have an intact family.

Children who were part of the post-World War II generation could expect to grow up with two biological parents who were married to each other. Eighty percent did. Today, only about 50% of children will spend their entire childhood in an intact family.⁴

4. One-parent families are increasing.

With the increasing number of premarital births and a continuing high divorce rate, the proportion of children living with just one parent rose from 9% in 1960 to 28% in 1996. Currently, 58% of all African-American children, 32% of all Hispanic children, and 21% percent of all Caucasian children are living in single-parent homes.⁵

5. The fatherless are at high risk for drug and alcohol abuse.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states, “Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse.”⁶

Children who live apart from their fathers are also 4.3 times more likely to smoke cigarettes as teenagers than children growing up with their fathers in the home.⁷

6. The fatherless are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems.

Children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems.⁸

7. The fatherless are far more likely to commit suicide.

Three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has been absent.⁹

8. The fatherless tend to underachieve academically.

In national studies, children who lived with only one parent had lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations, poorer attendance records, and higher drop out rates than students who lived with both parents.¹⁰ Fatherless children are also twice as likely to drop out of school.¹¹

9. The fatherless are more likely to be hostile and withdrawn.

School children from divorced families are absent more, are more anxious, hostile, and withdrawn, and are less popular with their peers than those from intact families.¹²

Children in single-parent families are more likely to be in trouble with the law than their peers who grow up with two parents.¹³

10. The fatherless are more likely to be promiscuous.

Teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 raised in homes without fathers are significantly more likely to engage in premarital sex than teenage girls raised in homes with both a mother and a father.¹⁴

A white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents.¹⁵

11. A majority of Americans have unresolved father problems.

Over half of Americans agree, “Most people have unresolved problems with their fathers.” Cumulatively, 56% agreed with this statement, up from 54% in a 1996 poll. Not surprisingly, the generation who has experienced the most father absence, 18- to 24-year-olds, displayed the highest level of agreement (67%).¹⁶

Our society is in desperate need of healthy fathers.

**OUR SOCIETY IS IN
DESPERATE NEED OF
HEALTHY FATHERS.**

Let the Sons Shine

The absence of a father can be devastating, but having a godly father can make all the difference in a person’s life.

The prophet Elijah recognized he had a spiritual son in a man named Elisha. As a caring father, Elijah wanted to bless him. So, when Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s ministry (as the Message paraphrase states Elisha said, “Your life repeated in my life. I want to be a holy man just like you.”), Elijah wasn’t threatened. He offered it to him by giving him a challenge (as the Message paraphrase again

states, “If you’re watching when I’m taken from you, you’ll get what you’ve asked for.”¹⁷ In other words, if you stick with me until the end, then I will give you the double portion you are asking for.

Elisha stuck, and Elijah was true to his word.

During his lifetime Elisha performed nearly twice as many miracles as his mentor, Elijah: fourteen, compared to Elijah’s eight. The comparison of miracles by no means implies that Elisha was twice the man his spiritual father was. But it does show that, in some way, the double portion requested by a son was granted by a responsive father. Elijah was not threatened that his son would outshine him. Like Jesus does for us, he gladly put Elisha above himself.

**REGARDLESS OF OUR
PAST, WE NEED TO EACH
EMBRACE THAT SAME
PARENTING MANDATE
TO PUT THOSE WE ARE
NURTURING FIRST AND
GIVE THEM ALL WE
CAN OF OURSELVES.**

Not surprisingly, when Elijah was taken up into heaven, Elisha yelled, “My father, my father”—not “my teacher” or “my prophet.” Certainly, Elisha embraced Elijah’s role as a spiritual father in his life.

Recently, one of my daughters was speaking at a women’s conference about teaching and moving in the Gifts of the Spirit.¹⁸ I heard from the senior pastor’s wife that my daughter’s ministry in the Gifts was even more impacting than my own.

My response: “Go ahead! Make my day!”

As the Bible says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”¹⁹

In the New Testament there were a few great leaders within the early church who caught the vision of the Father-heart of God and nurtured people beyond their family. Believers Priscilla and Aquila were spiritual parents to the teacher Apollos,²⁰ the apostle Peter called the disciple Mark, “my son,”²¹ and the apostle Paul called both of the disciples Timothy²² and Titus²³ “my sons in the faith.”

But the premiere Father of all time was Jesus, whom the Bible calls the “Everlasting Father.”²⁴ He spent three and a half years fathering His disciples and withholding nothing from them, promising, “...all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”²⁵ Jesus is likewise a father to all of us who are His present-day followers.

Regardless of our past, we need to each embrace that same parenting mandate to put those we are nurturing first and give them all we can of ourselves.

I Am a Protector

I contrast my pathetic decisions in the past as a predator (i.e. my abortions and taking advantage of young women) with a dramatic situation that occurred in 1998 when 20 of us from our church went on a mission trip to the nation of Tibet. Located below Mainland China and above India and Nepal, Tibet is considered one of the most remote nations on earth.

We were coming to the end of a two-week journey that had kept us constantly at an altitude of between 12,000 and 14,000 feet. As we arrived at the tiny airport to fly out, two members in our party became seriously ill. One of them was Shannon, the daughter of an associate pastor who was not with us on the trip. The other was my 20-year-old daughter, Havilah. Both were having a serious bout of altitude sickness, which can be fatal. Our tour guide that week had shared with us the tragic story of how her own father had died from altitude sickness a few years before—and he was a native of Tibet.

On top of severe diarrhea and vomiting, both Shannon and Havilah were having trouble breathing. We gave them oxygen at the airport’s medical station, but their condition continued to rapidly deteriorate. We sensed we had to get them out of the country to a lower altitude or they could die. It was extremely intense. I carried my daughter Havilah through the airport check-in and across the tarmac to our plane.

She was gasping for air.

I was crying quietly as I carried her. We were directed to the wrong plane, so I had to carry her much farther than necessary. It was excruciatingly hard work at such a high altitude. When I got to the steps of the correct plane, I was completely exhausted and could not go any further. My twin brother Joseph took over. He told me later he barely made it, carrying her up the steep steps and into the plane.

Our first flight took us to Chengdu, in Communist China. Havilah and Shannon were on oxygen the entire flight and were still in trouble. As soon as we arrived, we took them to a tiny medical room in the primitive airport.

None of us really understood what was going on, but we knew the girls were in serious trouble. Both were near hysterics and continued to have great difficulty breathing. Our communication with the doctors wasn't working, and, frankly, they didn't seem to know what to do either. Finally, the doctors told us we needed to check the girls into a local hospital, and so they called for an ambulance.

Things were getting to a crisis point.

At that near-desperate moment, God sent an angel. An American nurse who had just come from a Base Camp of Mount Everest happened to walk by as we were huddled in a corner of the no-frills airport. She quickly examined both girls. When she finished, she leaned toward me with a grave expression on her face. She looked directly into my eyes and whispered, "You need to get both of these girls out of this city and to Hong Kong immediately! You must not let the doctors take them to their local hospital."

All ambiguity was gone—we had to get out!

By now, doctors, an ambulance, and Chinese Communist soldiers surrounded us. They refused to let us get on our next flight to Hong Kong. Apparently, they didn't want the potential liability in case something unfortunate happened.

We insisted!

They refused!

We sensed things could easily escalate out of control medically or politically at any moment. Heated discussions in broken English took place. We were not communicating with one another. Finally, as we were about to miss our flight, I picked Havilah up out of her wheelchair and began to carry her around the blockade of 15 people to our gate.

Soldiers and doctors were now yelling at us in Chinese.

Hurrying as fast as we could, we tried to get lost in the crowd. But they found us, continuing to insist we would not be allowed on the plane. Our mission director, Marco Prado, insisted right back. He was truly heroic.

All I could think of were the face and words of the American nurse, "Get them out! Immediately!" Without looking back, and while yelling ourselves, we made another end-run around the blockade and on to the plane.

The plane took off!

Once in Hong Kong, thank God, both girls recovered. I know the doctors and soldiers at Chengdu sincerely wanted to help, but I am convinced we did the right thing.

God has called each of us to be protectors.

I once spoke with my daughters, Deborah and Havilah, about growing up, after they had passed through the turbulent teen years having, by the grace of God, kept their virginity and gotten married.

Deborah confided, "I didn't have to look to men to bring value to me because I found the value I was looking for in being a daughter."

Havilah also shared with me, "I found that your love for me put a stamp of approval on my life, which helped me avoid falling into other relationships, looking for approval."

I give God all of the glory for breaking my generational strongholds and healing so many of the wounds of my childhood and young adult life. Although I'm far from perfect, I am a son being restored, a

husband striving to remain faithful to the promise I made to my precious wife, and a dad still learning how to father both natural and spiritual children.

Calling All Fathers and Mothers

Teachers and coaches are needed in almost every dimension of life. Thank God, many people respond to these vital callings. But there are far fewer fathers, and those are all the more important. My daughters have had many teachers and coaches—but only one dad!

The great apostle Paul described himself as a father. He wrote, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”²⁶

The word “instructor” here in the Greek means, “boy-leader.” There are ten thousand “boy-leaders,” but not many dads. These are the words of a “dad”—not just a teacher or a coach, not just a sibling or a friend, but a dad. Paul the Apostle calls to us from the time of Jesus, “I’m a dad! Be a dad too!”

It takes extraordinary courage and an absolute willingness to lay our lives bare before others to effectively father them. The Bible clearly teaches that we are created to share what is most precious in us with those most precious to us. Only then are we walking in the light God intended.

Spiritual fathers and mothers who model “walking in the light, being transparent, and breaking the silence”²⁷ create a safe atmosphere for sons and daughters to come clean as well. Suddenly, our sin is not a disqualification from being healed, but a

**THE BIBLE CLEARLY
TEACHES THAT WE ARE
CREATED TO SHARE WHAT
IS MOST PRECIOUS IN
US WITH THOSE MOST
PRECIOUS TO US.**

glorious opportunity to get free from a curse, even a generational one.

Our weaknesses are no longer the unspoken, un-nurtured dimensions of our lives, but become doorways to humility, truthfulness, and boundless freedom. As we continue to study and live out God's Word, we truly become His disciples, and the Truth (Jesus) begins to set us free.²⁸

Throughout this process, there will probably be a need for lots of tears and lots of prayer. It will be essential to not resist the high level of sincerity that it takes to render the enemy of your soul helpless and instead to take on the Lord's robes of righteousness and protective armor of faith.

But through this process, broken, abandoned, neglected, fearful, embittered and abused sons and daughters will come home to their Father, sobbing on His shoulder—safe in His arms.

By getting to know Jesus, a foundation of forthrightness, complete acceptance and unconditional love will be laid. You may never have experienced this level of acceptance in your home, in your church, or among your peers. But God will show you His amazing love and, through it, a new way to live. The gift of transparency will become a healing balm—not just for you, but for all those you are willing to parent with your humble, healed heart in the years to come.

God has a promise for each of us from the final book of the Old Testament: "But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture."²⁹

It's time to rise!

It's time to be healed!

It's time to be set free!

It's time to leap for joy!

Questions for Discussion

The Search for Fathers Note: These questions and answers would be best processed within a relationship with a spiritual father, or a relationship with a spiritual mother and father over time, in which there would be a fully accepting, non-judgmental and emotionally “safe” environment for frank and open truth telling—don’t rush this process.

1. How has the following affected your life: fatherlessness (abandonment; death), a childhood without a biological father in your home, living in a one-parent family, living in a “blended” family, etc.
2. In what ways have you tried to feel valued and approved of? How have these ways affected your life?
3. Describe five of your personal strengths. How does this show you the ways in which God created you to be? How do you think God might use your strengths to help others, currently and in the future?
4. Describe five of your personal weaknesses (temperament). What do you think needs to be refined, removed, or are potential liabilities needing further discipline, guidance, and consideration? How do you think these five weaknesses affect you and others? How do they impact you helping others?
5. In what ways has this book impacted your life? Write out a prayer of thankfulness to your heavenly Father for what He has done in your life through this study.

appendix

My Fathering Journey

My pilgrimage into fathering, both naturally and spiritually, spanned being disinterested (two abortions), ignorant (I was not fathered myself), terrified (I felt there were enough brats on the planet already), and cautious (if I was going to have any fathering ability, it would take a miraculous intervention).

Enter the Will of God

Over time, no matter what phase of my life I was in, I found I always had a desire to love and care for people. The challenge was that people inevitably want to be fathered. So God sent me on a journey from being a somewhat detached coach to being a full-blown father to the fatherless.

I was discarded as a child and it left me with a desire to reach out to other strays—life’s leftovers, the forgotten, those born but not bred, natured but not nurtured. When you examine your pain, it will eventually lead you to your God-given passion.

My pain was that I wanted a father to nurture me.

My passion became that I desperately wanted to father the under-nurtured.

When my wife and I began pastoring a local church in 1997, we came with a desire to reach and raise up young men and women to follow Jesus. We had been working with Christians from all over the world for 18 years, and we knew that the greatest need young people had wasn’t an impartation of head knowledge about God, but a commitment to guide them into a deeper relationship with God.

The truth is, as soon as you venture into the relationship strata with God, you realize that He is first and foremost a Father—a Father who wants to father, who loves to father, who lives to father. It is the essence of who He is. So, any true incarnation of God’s heart must have fathering at its core.

That’s why, from the birth of our church family, we began to center on nurturing and caring for people. A year after the church was planted we and the other leaders began an internship focusing on 18- to 25-year-olds that continues to this day. Although there are many classes taught by excellent instructors during this rigorous nine-month program, I have personally concentrated on leading a weekly 90-minute “Fathering Class,” being a spiritual father to a fatherless generation.

It has become a breakthrough experience for so many young people, guiding them into a deep understanding of who they are and are not, uncovering their strengths and weaknesses, and providing an honest appraisal from both peers and pastors of the greatest areas of need in their lives. Gradually, the Fathering Class brings each intern to an honest assessment of who God created them to be and how the enemy of their souls could potentially keep them from becoming just that.

Going Deep

During the first week of each nine-month internship, the new first year interns go on a three-day intensive retreat accompanied by pastors, leaders, and second year interns. While there, each intern is asked to share about his or her own life journey with as much raw, gut-level honesty as they are comfortable in sharing. Many are desperate for the opportunity. Others hold their cards close. Their wounds are deep and their pain is great.

They will need more time.

September through December

During the first week of classes, interns are asked to candidly write down what they perceive to be their five primary strengths. These strengths can be areas of personal gifting or even personality traits, but they must in some way touch upon who God has created each of them to be, and how, in the future, He might use them to help someone else.

In addition to determining their God-given strengths, they each write down what they believe are the five potential weaknesses. These are elements of their character and temperament that need to be refined, removed or are potential liabilities needing further discipline, guidance, and consideration.

These strengths and weaknesses become the basis of future personal exploration with their intern family and leaders. They begin with their strengths: the greatest qualities they believe God has given them. These are usually shared somewhat timidly, needing verbal encouragement from both peers and pastors. In short order, a Spirit-led atmosphere is established in which the Spirit of God provides further insight into the essence of who they really are. “As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country.”¹

The class is a profoundly positive and enlightening time!

With a dozen interns in each Fathering Class meeting for 90-minutes per week from mid-September through mid-December, it usually takes three months to go through each person’s individual strengths, allowing for dialogue, prophetic insight, and prayer. Though God’s Spirit may direct a brief concentration on an area of weakness that is, in some way, the antithesis of a particular strength being discussed, it is essential to return to focusing and examining each intern’s individual strengths. This positive focusing on God’s heart for them allows interns, who invariably battle with low self-esteem, insecurity, and a search for their true identity, to see his or her life from God’s perspective.

The Bible says, "...the goodness (kindness) of God leads you to repentance..."² This literally means that a good and kind God wants to help each of us think differently about who He is and who we are as well. It is God's goodness that draws us into reconsidering our moral choices, arriving at a change of heart, and leading to a radical reformation of our inner being.

Focusing on the gracious personal qualities God has imparted to each of us opens our eyes to see what of Him we have each been given. Ample time must be spent concentrating on who God created us to be before we can focus on those things that could potentially undermine His original intent.

The Bible reinforces this thought, stating that we will actually become more effective in sharing our faith "by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."³

When you take family photos, you typically keep the good ones and get rid of the bad. Sure, you might examine the less-than-positive representations of who you are in order to learn from them, but you would never keep them as accurate expressions of who you are or want to be. Only the mirror of God's Word can provide the perfect reflection of who God wants us to be. That is why we must fight to hear His voice above all others.⁴

January through May

After a two-week Christmas break, the Fathering Class usually begins to focus on the five areas of weakness each intern has written down in September. By January, as the interns' perception of themselves becomes more astute, they usually have updated their list of weaknesses, to more accurately represent who they perceive themselves to be.

Having spent four months establishing a clear understanding of God's love and vision for them, fellow interns and leaders are now in a position to discuss each intern's areas of weakness.

It is time to go deep!

Built on months of developing a relational trust, having spent significant time in prayer, worship, and studying the Word of God, and fueled by a hunger for more of God, it is now the perfect time to further examine each individual's weaknesses. The transparency of leaders, having been modeled for some months, will provide a fully accepting, non-judgmental environment for open truth telling.

Though always a battle to walk in, this transparent atmosphere will become contagious.

From January through mid-May, one candid acknowledgement leads to another. Like a spiritual greenhouse, it is now a safe environment to be transparent. Though some dimensions of personal pain and even abuse will need to be ministered to in private by qualified pastors or counselors, many areas of wounding can be discussed over time with peers and pastors.

Straightforward and outspoken, each intern begins to share openly, even allowing others to offer input. Kind begets kind. Deep calls to deep. Jesus is in the room. A shallow response is seen as dishonest. There is no reason to not admit. It is now time to "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results."⁵

Each intern begins to overcome the demons in their lives. "They have defeated him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of their testimony. And they were not afraid to die."⁶—They let go of their pride.

John, the disciple who maybe best knew how much God loved him, once wrote, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."⁷

“Walk in the light.” What does that really mean? The original Greek text could be translated, “to make known one’s thoughts, to be transparent, to break the silence.”

What an incredible concept!

Many years ago, when I first began to minister for Jesus, the vast majority of leaders I knew often ministered out of their successes. In my own life I had difficulty relating to a person who seemed to be victorious most of the time when I found myself struggling so much to be like Jesus. So, while speaking to audiences, I began to open up and candidly tell about my own mistakes and struggles. To my surprise, the overwhelming response was positive. People liked my honesty and transparency more than any other part of my message.

It was risky; it still is. But it began to have amazing results. Hundreds of people are walking in a level of transparent honesty that has transformed their lives.

It is my hope and prayer that those who have read this book will walk in that level of honesty and openness so that a fatherless and motherless generation can see and believe as the Holocaust survivor, Corrie ten Boom, once wrote: “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.”⁸

recommendations

Perfectly Positioned: When Perspective Triumphs Over Circumstance

Do you wish God had written a different script for you? Get free from hoping your life will “turn out” by being changed from the inside out! Behind every challenging situation there is a loving God whose victorious perspective is far greater than the trials we face.

Living Perfectly Positioned Daily Devotional

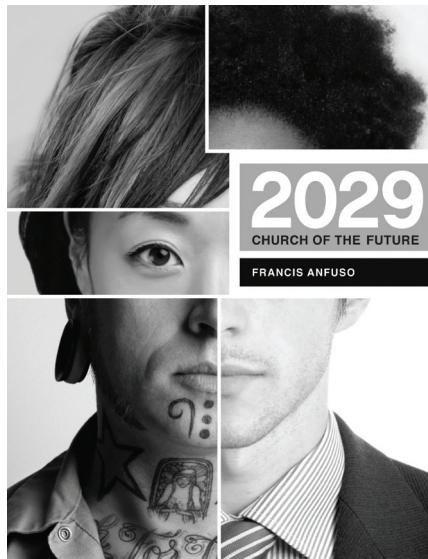
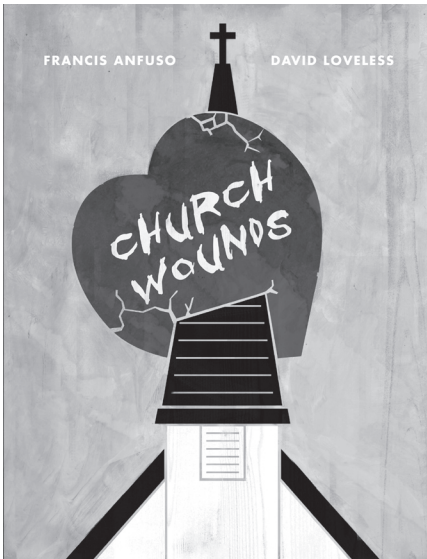
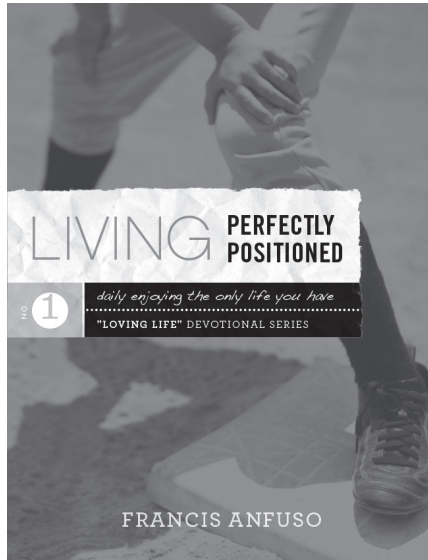
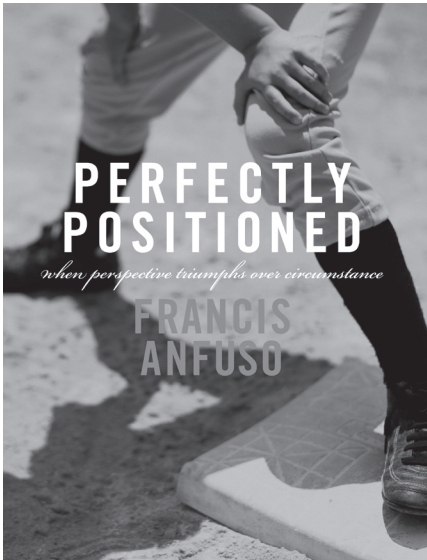
Be daily transformed by these perspective-altering devotionals! Equip yourself to take on everyday as an overcomer and you will love your life!

Church Wounds

Authors Francis Anfuso and David Loveless conducted a survey of more than 2000 people examining the most common hurts inflicted by Christians: hypocrisy, judgmentalism, leader insensitivities, and abuse, plus many more. Read the stories of those who were not just hurt, but healed, and experience the healing yourself.

2029: Church of the Future

Now is not the time for the Church to shrink back and recoil as the battle in our culture rages. Instead, we are approaching our finest hour! *2029* details the “attitude of Christ” revolution that is on the horizon and how to get there.



Visit FrancisAnfuso.com

for other titles, messages and materials by Francis Anfuso!

endnotes

Chapter 1

- 1 Romans 8:28
- 2 Genesis 50:20
- 3 Hebrews 2:17–18, NLT
- 4 Isaiah 61:3, Amplified Bible
- 5 2 Kings 20:19
- 6 2 Chronicles 33:2–3
- 7 2 Chronicles 33:4
- 8 2 Chronicles 33:6
- 9 2 Chronicles 33:9
- 10 Joel 2:25
- 11 2 Chronicles 33:10–11
- 12 2 Chronicles 33:12
- 13 2 Chronicles 33:13
- 14 Proverbs 24:16, NKJV
- 15 1 Kings 11:7–9, Amplified Bible
- 16 2 Chronicles 11:15
- 17 2 Corinthians 10:5
- 18 2 Chronicles 33:15–16
- 19 Psalm 27:10

Chapter 2

- 1 Manson C, Emmons N. *Manson in His Own Words*. New York, NY: Grove Press; 1994.
- 2 Glass B, Pluto T. *Champions for Life: The Healing Power of a Father*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Faith Communications; 2005.
- 3 H. H. Munro (Saki). H.H. Munro Quotes. ThinkExist.com. Available

- at http://thinkexist.com/quotation/he_is_one_of_those_people_who_would_be_enormously/10944.html. Last accessed August 11, 2010.
- 4 Malachi 4:6, NKJV
 - 5 Lazin L. *Tupac:Resurrection*. Maryland: Amaru Entertainment Inc; 2003.
 - 6 Luke 4:18–19
 - 7 Exodus 2:12
 - 8 Exodus 31:1–11
 - 9 Numbers 20:8–9,11–12 emphasis added
 - 10 Acts 20:35
 - 11 Galatians 1:16–17
 - 12 James 1:4
 - 13 Hebrews 12:15
 - 14 2 Chronicles 33:21–22
 - 15 2 Chronicles 33:23–24
 - 16 2 Chronicles 34:1–3
 - 17 1 Timothy 4:12
 - 18 2 Chronicles 34:19
 - 19 2 Chronicles 34:27
 - 20 2 Chronicles 34:30b
 - 21 2 Chronicles 34:33
 - 22 Proverbs 17:6

Chapter 3

- 1 Kelleher MD, Kelleher CL. Murder Most Rare: The Female Serial Killer. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group; 1999.
- 2 Gaines JR. Mark Chapman: the Man who Shot Lennon. *People Magazine*. 1987;27(8).
- 3 Freud S. *Leonardo da Vinci*. Moffat, Yard & Co; 1916.
- 4 Sartre JP. *Existentialism*. New York: Philosophical Library; 1947.
- 5 Vitz PC. *Faith of the Fatherless*. Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company; 1999.
- 6 Hayman R. *Sartre: A Life*. 1st ed. Simon & Schuster; 1987.
- 7 Vitz PC. *Faith of the Fatherless*, Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company; 1999.
- 8 Evangelical Atheist. Urban Dictionary. Available at <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=evangelical%20atheist>. Last accessed August 11, 2010.
- 9 1 Samuel 16:11
- 10 1 Samuel 17:28
- 11 John 7:5, Acts 1:14
- 12 1 Samuel 20:14–17
- 13 2 Samuel 9:1
- 14 2 Samuel 9:3
- 15 2 Samuel 9:6–8
- 16 2 Samuel 4:4
- 17 2 Samuel 9:11b, 13
- 18 2 Corinthians 5:17
- 19 John 15:13
- 20 Jeremiah 31:3
- 21 2 Samuel 12:7b–8

Chapter 4

- 1 2 Timothy 4:18
- 2 Luke 4:18, NLT
- 3 Hebrews 11:1, The Message
- 4 Psalms 34:19
- 5 Isaiah 40:11a, NLT
- 6 John 8:31b–32, Amplified
- 7 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 8 Psalm 56:3
- 9 Luke 1:74
- 10 Psalm 59:2, NLT
- 11 Psalm 140:1, NLT
- 12 Proverbs 3:25
- 13 Job 3:25, NLT
- 14 Job 13:15
- 15 Job 42:12, NLT
- 16 2 Timothy 1:7, Amplified
- 17 1 Kings 15:3
- 18 Matthew 18:18, NKJV
- 19 1 John 4:8b
- 20 1 John 4:18a
- 21 1 John 4:18b
- 22 Colossians 3:15
- 23 2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV
- 24 1 Peter 2:17
- 25 Proverbs 1:7
- 26 Acts 9:31, NLT
- 27 2 Corinthians 7:1b, NLT
- 28 Proverbs 8:13, NLT
- 29 Proverbs 10:27, NLT
- 30 Matthew 10:28
- 31 1 Samuel 10:21b–23, NLT
- 32 1 Samuel 18:12, 14–15, NLT

250 | FATHER WOUNDS

- 33 1 Samuel 15:12b, NLT
- 34 1 Samuel 15:24
- 35 Psalm 34:7, NLT
- 36 Philippians 4:19

Chapter 5

- 1 Proverbs 14:10, NLT
- 2 Hebrews 12:15b
- 3 Psalm 105:19, NLT
- 4 1 Peter 2:23, NLT
- 5 Galatians 5:22–23
- 6 Hebrews 10:36
- 7 Romans 8:28
- 8 Genesis 41:51
- 9 Genesis 41:52
- 10 Luke 4:18
- 11 Genesis 42:36
- 12 Romans 8:35
- 13 Genesis 50:20, NLT
- 14 Mark 16:15
- 15 John 10:10
- 16 Genesis 37:5–8
- 17 Genesis 37:5–11
- 18 Romans 12:21, NLT
- 19 John 8:31–32

Chapter 6

- 1 Bullock A. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*. New York, NY; Knopf; 1992.
- 2 Bullock A. *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. New York, NY: Harper & Row; 1971.

- 3 Toland J. *Adolf Hitler*. Anchor Books; 1976.
- 4 Wingate B. *Saddam Hussein*. New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group; 2004
- 5 Kornblum W. *Sociology in a Changing World*. 8th ed. Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning; 2007.
- 6 Soukhanov AH. *Encarta World Dictionary*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press; 1999.
- 7 Galatians 3:13b
- 8 Isaiah 53:4–5, NLT
- 9 Mark 11:25
- 10 Hebrews 11:23
- 11 Exodus 2:11
- 12 Matthew 10:26b
- 13 Exodus 32:19
- 14 Numbers 20:11
- 15 Exodus 2:14
- 16 Numbers 16–18
- 17 Exodus 33:11
- 18 2 Corinthians 1:6
- 19 2 Corinthians 5:17
- 20 Ecclesiastes 3:11
- 21 Montagu A. *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity*. 3rd ed. Lafayette, LA: Acadian House Publishing; 2001.
- 22 Treves F. *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*. Charleston, SC: BibiloBazaar, LLC; 2009.
- 23 Psalm 56:9b

Chapter 7

- 1 Proverbs 22:15
- 2 Ostrow A. Britney Spears is Still the #1 Name in Search. Available at <http://mashable.com/2008/12/01/britney-spears-yahoo-search>. Last accessed August 11, 2010.
- 3 Ephesians 4:26
- 4 Philippians 2:3–8, NLT
- 5 Psalm 17:15
- 6 1 Corinthians 9:27
- 7 Galatians 5:23
- 8 Luke 22:26b
- 9 Matthew 20:28
- 10 Galatians 5:19–26, NLT
- 11 Proverbs 22:15a
- 12 Proverbs 22:15b
- 13 Proverbs 22:15b, NLT
- 14 1 Peter 5:10, NLT
- 15 Psalm 119:107, NLT
- 16 1 Kings 1:6, NLT
- 17 2 Samuel 18:33
- 18 Acts 10:34
- 19 Proverbs 29:15, NLT
- 20 Proverbs 27:20
- 21 Proverbs 30:15
- 22 Mayo Foundation for Medical and Educational Research. Crying Baby: What to Do When Your Newborn Cries. 2009. Available at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-baby/PR00037>. Last accessed August 11, 2010.
- 23 John 8:31–32

- 24 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 25 2 Corinthians 2:14, The Message
- 26 Hebrews 10:36, NLT

Chapter 8

- 1 Looney DS. The Minefield. *Sports Illustrated*. 1990:73(10).
- 2 Ephesians 2:8–9, NLT
- 3 Titus 3:5, NLT
- 4 Proverbs 10:12
- 5 Jeremiah 31:3
- 6 Psalm 139:17–18
- 7 Revelation 4:11
- 8 John 17:24, 1 Peter 1:20, Revelation 13:8
- 9 Genesis 29:16–17, NLT
- 10 Genesis 29:18, NLT
- 11 Genesis 29:20, NLT
- 12 Genesis 29:21, NLT
- 13 Genesis 29:22–23, 25, NLT
- 14 Genesis 29:30–31, NLT
- 15 Genesis 29:32b, NLT
- 16 Ephesians 1:10, NLT
- 17 Proverbs 16:7
- 18 Genesis 29:33, NLT; Simeon means “The Lord Hears”
- 19 Genesis 29:34, NLT
- 20 Genesis 29:35, NLT
- 21 Revelation 5:5
- 22 1 John 4:19
- 23 Proverbs 8:35, NLT
- 24 Matthew 3:16b–17
- 25 Ephesians 1:6

- 26 Matthew 3:17 <http://marilynmonroepages.com/facts.html#surgery>;
- 27 Isaiah 62:3–4 <http://obits.com/monroemarilyn.html>;
- 28 2 Corinthians 9:15 <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0812885252/002-5281259-2024807?v=glance&cn=283155>
- 29 Colossians 2:10
- 30 Romans 5:8
- 31 1 John 4:8
- 32 Galatians 2:19–21, NLT
- 33 John 5:41–42, NLT
- 34 1 John 3:1
- 35 Psalm 118:6
- 36 Psalm 103:12
- 37 Revelation 1:5b
- 38 1 Peter 3:7
- 39 Ephesians 2:4–7
- 40 Nolte DL. Children Learn What They Live. 1972.
- 4 Monroe M. Taylor R. *Marilyn Monroe in Her Own Words*. Delilah/Putnam: 1983.
- 5 Zolotow M. *Marilyn Monroe*. Harpercollins: 1990.
- 6 English B. The Secret Life of Boys: Pornography Is a Mouse Click Away, and Kids Are Being Exposed to It in Ever-Increasing Numbers. *The Boston Globe*. 2005.
- 7 Particular NN. Overstimulated Kids. 2006. Available at http://www.nowen-n-particular.com/nowensarticles/overstimulated_kids.htm. Last accessed August 19, 2010.

Chapter 9

- 1 Kovan FW. Ben Hecht & Marilyn Monroe: Hecht Wrote Marilyn Monroe's Memoir, "My Story." Snickersee Press. Available at http://benhechtbooks.net/benhecht_marilyn_monroe. Last accessed August 12, 2010.
- 2 Shea J. Joe's Bid-ness: DiMaggio's Granddaughters Are Selling Off Their Memorabilia. *San Francisco Chronicle*. 2006. Available at http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-05-17/sports/17296601_1_dorothy-arnold-joltin-joe-hunt-auctions/2. Last accessed August 12, 2010.
- 3 For additional information, here are some resources I found helpful:
http://www.celebrityplasticpics.com/marilyn_monroe_plastic_surgery.htm;
- 8 Rimm S. *Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Inc; 2006.
- 9 1 Samuel 1:11 NLT
- 10 1 Samuel 1:25b–28a NLT
- 11 1 Samuel 2:12–17
- 12 1 Samuel 2:22–25
- 13 1 Samuel 3:8
- 14 1 Samuel 2:18 NLT
- 15 1 Samuel 3:4 NLT
- 16 1 Samuel 3:7
- 17 1 Samuel 3:5 NLT
- 18 1 Samuel 3:9–10 NLT
- 19 1 Samuel 3:1
- 20 John 10:27

- 21 Colossians 3:1–3
- 22 Song of Solomon 1:2
- 23 Ephesians 5:25b–27
- 24 Psalm 51:10–12
- 25 Joel 2:25
- 26 Exodus 23:27–30
- Chapter 10**
- 1 Laufenberg NB. *Entertainment Celebrities*. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing; 2005.
- 2 Study conducted by Professor Marcelo Peruzzo, MBA, Professor of Marketing and Relationships in graduate and MBA courses in more than 18 universities and schools in Brazil.
- 3 Rooksby R. *Madonna: The Complete Guide to Her Music*. Omnibus Press; 2004.
- 4 Meachum V. *Rosie O'Donnell: Talk Show Host and Comedian*. Enslow Publishers; 2000.
- 5 Wilcox WB, Drew J. Protectors or Perpetrators? Fathers, Mothers, and Child Abuse and Neglect. Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Families. 2008:7. Available at <http://center.americanvalues.org/?p=70>. Last accessed August 24, 2010.
- 6 Rosenberg J, Wilcox WB. U.S. Children's Bureau—Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children. 2006. Available at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chapterthree.cfm>. Last accessed August 24, 2010.
- 7 A Safe Place. Lake County Crisis Center. Effects of Domestic Violence on Children.—Part 1. Available at <http://www.asafeplacefor-help.org/childrendomesticviolence.html>. Last accessed August 24, 2010.
- 8 Domestic Violence Roundtable. The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children. 2008. Available at <http://www.domesticviolence-roundtable.org/effect-on-children.html>. Last accessed on August 24, 2010.
- 9 An Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection. Long-Term Affects of Domestic Violence. 2008. Available at <http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/effects/shtml>. Last accessed August 24, 2010.
- 10 Georgia Department of Human Resources. Family Violence Manual. Battered Families... Shattered Lives. 1992 January.
- 11 National Woman Abuse Prevention Project, Washington, D.C.
- 12 2 Corinthians 10:4–5
- 13 Genesis 1:27
- 14 1 Peter 1:3
- 15 Titus 2:3–5, NLT
- 16 Psalm 16:11, NLT
- 17 Proverbs 5:6, NLT
- 18 Revelation 12:10
- 19 Revelation 21:8
- 20 2 Peter 1:5–7
- 21 Ephesians 5:25–33
- 22 Ephesians 5:25–33

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 23 | Proverbs 29:15 | Chapter 11 |
| 24 | Tenneva Jordan | 1 Romans 8:28 |
| 25 | Titus 2:4–5 | 2 Acts 10:38 |
| 26 | Deuteronomy 6:6–7 | 3 Habakkuk 2:3 |
| 27 | Ephesians 6:4 | 4 Isaiah 58:11–12, NKJV |
| 28 | Psalm 78:5–6; Deuteronomy 4:10;
Ephesians 6:4 | 5 Joel 1:11–12 |
| 29 | Proverbs 22:6 | 6 Cinderella. Don't Know What
You Got Till It's Gone. <i>Long Cold
Winter</i> . Island/Mercury; 1988. |
| 30 | Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews
12:5–11; Proverbs 13:24;
19:18; 22:15; 23:13–14;
29:15–17 | 7 Joel 2:12–14 |
| 31 | Titus 2:4; 2 Timothy 1:7;
Ephesians 4:29–32; 5:1–2;
Galatians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:8–9 | 8 Joel 2:23–27 |
| 32 | Deuteronomy 4:9, 15, 23;
Proverbs 10:9, 11:3;
Psalm 37:18, 37 | 9 Romans 8:35–37 |
| 33 | Titus 2:4 | 10 2 Corinthians 5:21 |
| 34 | Colossians 3:18 | 11 1 John 3:1a |
| 35 | Ephesians 5:33 | 12 Romans 12:21 |
| 36 | Isaiah 66:13;
1 Thessalonians 2:7 | 13 Isaiah 53:5 |
| 37 | Proverbs 31:21–22 | 14 Luke 6:37 |
| 38 | 2 Timothy 3:14–16 | 15 2 Corinthians 1:4 |
| 39 | Psalm 119:130 | 16 Genesis 50:20–21 |
| 40 | Matthew 6:9–15, NLT | 17 Luke 23:34 |
| 41 | Psalm 103:8–13, NLT | 18 Proverbs 4:18 |
| 42 | Matthew 9:6, NLT | 19 Song of Solomon 2:17 |
| 43 | 1 John 1:9, NLT | 20 Ephesians 6:10–18 |
| | | 21 John 10:10 |
| | | 22 Malachi 4:5–6 |
| | | 23 Hebrews 9:27 |
| | | 24 2 Kings 2:15 |
| | | 25 Luke 1:17 |
| | | 26 Malachi 4:5–6 |
| | | 27 Psalm 94:10 |
| | | 28 Luke 4:18–19 |
| | | 29 1 Kings 8:56 |
| | | 30 1 Corinthians 13:8 |
| | | 31 Isaiah 49:15 |
| | | 32 Isaiah 66:13a |

Chapter 12

- 1 1 Samuel 5:3–4
- 2 National Center for Fathering, Fathering in America Poll, January 1999
- 3 National Fatherhood Initiative. Facts on Father Absence. 2009. Available at <http://www.fatherhood.org/Page.aspx?pid=330>. Last accessed August 25, 2010.
- 4 Popenoe D. *American Family Decline: 1960–1990: A Review and Appraisal*. Institute for American Values: 1992.
- 5 Saluter AF. U.S. Census Bureau. Marital Status and Living Arrangements. 1994. Available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/msia.html>. Last accessed August 25, 2010.
- 6 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC, 1993
- 7 Stanton W. Oei TPS, Silva PA Sociodemographic Characteristics of Adolescent Smokers. *Substance Use and Misuse*. 1994;29(7).
- 8 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. “National Health Interview Survey.” Hyattsville, MD, 1988
- 9 Elshtain JB. Family Matters: The Plight of America’s Children. *Christian Century*. 1993.
- 10 McClanahan S, Sandefur G. Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps. Harvard University Press; 1994.
- 11 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC; GPO, 1993
- 12 The Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families. One Parent Families and Their Children: The School’s Most Significant Minority. Principals. 1980:60 (1).
- 13 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey. Hyattsville, MD, 1988
- 14 Billy JOG. Brewster KL. Grady WR. Contextual Effects on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 1994;56; 381–404.
- 15 Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. Facing the Challenges of Fragmented Families. *The Philanthropy Roundtable*. 1995;9. 1;21.
- 16 National Center For Fathering. Unresolved Father Problems. 2007. Available at <http://www.fathers.com/content/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=400>. Last accessed August 25, 2010.
- 17 2 Kings 2:10
- 18 1 Corinthians 14
- 19 3 John 4
- 20 Acts 18:24–26
- 21 1 Peter 5:13
- 22 2 Timothy 1:2
- 23 Titus 1:4

256 | FATHER WOUNDS

- 24 Isaiah 9:6
- 25 John 15:15b
- 26 1 Corinthians 4:15–16
- 27 1 John 1:7
- 28 John 8:32
- 29 Malachi 4:2

Appendix

- 1 Proverbs 25:25
- 2 Romans 2:4
- 3 Philemon 6
- 4 1 Corinthians 14:10
- 5 James 5:16
- 6 Revelation 12:11
- 7 1 John 1:5–7, italics added
- 8 Smith E. History. Corrie ten Boom House Foundation. Available at <http://www.corrietenboom.com/history.htm>. Last accessed August 11, 2010.