

**THE
VOICELESS
GIRL**

**HOW RELIGIOUS OCD
STOLE MY VOICE**

ELEANOR HASTIE

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My son, Robert, you are my biggest cheerleader and encourager—a young man of integrity.

My son, Andrew, you are my personal techie when I don't know what to do. This book would not have been possible without you.

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You were cheerful and fun, and you never grew up. You remained young and spry at heart. I loved that about you! Thank you for being you and for positively impacting my life!

INTRODUCTION

*M*y name is Eleanor Hastie; I live with my husband, Michael, and our cat Gracie. I have two sons, my greatest fans, Robert, and Andrew. I don't live in an igloo, but I live in Canada.

I'm compelled to tell my story about scrupulosity (Religious OCD). If you are suffering from any subtype of OCD and religious hurts this book is for you. I had religious OCD all my life, but I did not know that I had it; I just knew what I was struggling with was hugely distressing, and it made me feel different. I was exhausted. I needed an olive branch of peace, hope, and rest for more than a few minutes from the tormenting thoughts in my mind.

I pray that this book will bring hope to you as you journey through your struggle with OCD and religion. There is nothing wrong with you; you have anxiety and trauma that need healing. Something beautiful can come out of the broken pieces of your OCD and religion.

Recovery is possible, so as you learn to move through the intrusive thoughts and compulsions with less attention given to them, you will learn to love yourself, say kind words to yourself, and rise to new heights of freedom in every aspect of your life.

Know that the intrusive thoughts are not your thoughts. Don't try to walk this path alone; it is too traumatic. You deserve kind and compassionate help, so reach out.

I'm also writing this book to further my own healing and live my dreams that OCD and religion did not allow me to live.

I also want to inspire my sons to dream big dreams. Life is a journey of the good and the hard things. Know that you can rise above life's circumstances and that setbacks are opportunities for growth. Embrace your journey with courage and resilience. You are strong and capable. I will always be your biggest cheerleader!

PART 1

THE VOICES IN MY HEAD

*“I’m tired of being inside my head.
I want to live out there, with you.”*

COLLEEN McCARTY



CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING SCRUPULOSITY (RELIGIOUS OCD)

Most people have heard of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and various subtypes of OCD, like harm obsessions, repetitive checking compulsions, obsessions without visible compulsions, hoarding, symmetry obsessions with ordering compulsions, and contamination obsessions with cleaning compulsions. Fewer people have heard of a subtype of OCD called Scrupulosity, also known as religious OCD.¹ Ted Witzig Jr who is a licensed clinical psychologist and pastor said that as many as a third of people with OCD have symptoms of scrupulosity, and 5% have full-blown Scrupulosity. OCD is a mental health and behavioural disorder in which the individual has intrusive thoughts. Although all OCD's have things in common, the symptoms vary from person to person with subtypes of OCD. The treatment for all subtypes is the same.

1 Ted Witzig Jr [https://iocdf.org/faith-ocd/what-is-ocd-scrupulosity/#:-:text=OCD%20tends%20to%20be%20opportunistic,about%205%25%20have%20primary%20scrupulosity\(No date\)](https://iocdf.org/faith-ocd/what-is-ocd-scrupulosity/#:-:text=OCD%20tends%20to%20be%20opportunistic,about%205%25%20have%20primary%20scrupulosity(No date)

People without OCD can experience distressing thoughts or repetitive behaviours, but they usually don't interfere with daily life.

Obsessions are repeated thoughts, images, or impulses that feel uncontrollable. The person does not choose nor want these thoughts, they are shocking, disgusting, and illogical, they are extremely distressing and uncomfortable. These obsessions are usually followed by uncertainty and doubt and lead to compulsions in hopes of overriding disturbing thoughts. The cycle of obsessions and compulsion consumes time and much energy.

WHAT IS SCRUPULOSITY?

²It's persistent guilt and anxiety over minor moral and religious issues when religious morals become OCD. It is not linked to any specific religion or caused by religion. The OCD takes on the form of the religion the person is in, depending on the doctrines, teachings, or rituals. It's not a faith problem, it's an OCD problem. The exact cause is unknown. Like other forms of OCD, scrupulosity may be a result of several factors including genetics and environmental influences.³ *According to a 2021 study by Medical News Today, high religiosity may be a risk factor for OCD, but being highly religious does not mean a person will necessarily develop the condition.* Researchers also believe people with a biological or temperamental predisposition for

2 Sean Ferguson (2019, September 18) scrupulosity: when religious or moral beliefs become OCD <https://www.healthline.com/content-series/its-not-just-you/>

3 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8374933/#> Shafran R, Watkins E, Charman T. Guilt in obsessive-compulsive disorder. *J Anxiety Disord.* 1996;10 Steketee G, Quay S, White K. Religion and guilt in OCD patients. *J Anxiety Disord.* 1991;5

UNDERSTANDING SCRUPULOSITY (RELIGIOUS OCD)

OCD will be triggered at some point by an event, experience, or environmental stressor and develop full-blown OCD.

Scrupulosity is anxiety and a clear violation and transgression of a person's freedom. This person is anxious that they've fallen short of God's mercy because they must have sinned, and they are anxious about the intensity of their doubt that they may have been resistant to obey God. But it's never clear what they've done wrong; it is like a sin phobia, seeing sin where there is none. They believe that a brief, impure thought is sinful and has created a blockade between them and God. The fear of offending God is excessive. In the obsessive-compulsive cycle, religion and morals become entangled.

The intrusive thoughts shock and alarm the person suffering from scrupulosity, which then results in a feeling of shame and utter disbelief that one could have these thoughts. The intrusive thoughts are not the individual's thoughts, but they think that they are and therefore the sufferer needs to fix, analyse, and suppress these thoughts.

People suffering from scrupulosity hold themselves above human standards. This comes at a high cost to them in the here and now and to the future. It's very difficult for them to be at rest. Scrupulosity can cause severe stress and interfere greatly with daily function. The severity and the degree of the OCD can range from still functioning to not being able to hold a job.

⁴OCD obsessions are persistent, irrational thoughts that the person struggles to control. While most people have intrusive thoughts from time to time, these obsessions are usually

4 Ted Witzig Jr. (No date) <https://iocdf.org/faith-ocd/what-is-ocd-scrupulosity/#:-:text=The%20exact%20cause%20of%20scrupulosity,incluing%20genetic%20and%20environmental%20influences.>

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very upsetting, worrisome, and unceasing. At the core of the obsession is the misguided demand for certainty. It blocks the peaceful feelings people of faith desire to have. To an observer, symptoms of scrupulosity may only appear as a conscientious person extremely dedicated to rituals, church, or their faith.

Scrupulosity can gradually deepen until nothing can convince a person that they are not bad, unworthy, or blasphemous. The distress level of having lost touch with God can be overwhelming. When scrupulosity becomes full-blown, it can invade a person's life. It can leave them with little control over how they feel and act. The person suffering from scrupulosity is plagued by compulsions, and that can include any of the following:

- Fear of having committed a sin, possibly the unpardonable sin or blaspheming God.
- Having recurring anxiety about sin and immoral behaviour.
- Excessively seeking and pursuing purity.
- Fearing dying and going to hell.
- Fearing to lose impulse control.
- Doubting what you genuinely believe.
- Constantly seeking reassurance.
- Self-sacrificing and avoiding situations that could cause bad things to happen or errors to be made.

Scrupulosity has a strong urge to scrutinize and examine the source of the intrusive thoughts. The individual tries to fix the thoughts with arguing back against them. It's a constant effort in the individual's mind to correct the intrusive thoughts. They make restitution for the intrusive thoughts by compulsive behaviour. They might use prayer or rituals to do this, hoping to cancel out the disturbing intrusive thoughts.

UNDERSTANDING SCRUPULOSITY (RELIGIOUS OCD)

Self-shame and self-criticism are common harmful compulsions and shame, and uncertainty are two constants in scrupulosity.

Common examples of mental compulsions that occur may include the following:

- reciting Scriptures
- praying excessively
- replacing or erasing bad thoughts
- making agreements with God
- scanning for a level of faithfulness

Behavioural compulsions are visible and common examples are the following:

- repeated confessions of perceived sins.
- excessively seeking reassurance from loved ones or religious leaders.
- excessive praying.
- performing cleansing rituals.
- writing out prayers to check that they are done correctly.
- making mental efforts to erase bad thoughts.

Treatment might include:

⁵Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), medication or a combination of both. CBT helps people recognize untrue ways of thinking, and it helps them to determine the impact the thoughts have on a person's feelings and actions. However, treatment can vary depending on the person and their

5 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cognitive-behavioral-therapy/about/pac-20384610>

preferences. Cognitive behavioural therapy can be very helpful for some.

Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) may also effectively reduce compulsive behaviours. With ERP, people are encouraged to face their fears without engaging in compulsive behaviours. So, a person may be prompted to spend time in a situation that usually triggers a compulsion, but the person is prevented from performing that compulsion.

It may be challenging to find someone who detects or even heard about scrupulosity. Seeking out therapists or counsellors who are understanding and compassionate is necessary.



*You can't control the intrusive thoughts that suddenly
burst into your head, but you can control your reaction
and response to them.*

ELEANOR HASTIE

CHAPTER 2

THE RESPONSIBLE LITTLE GIRL

Over-responsibility can be a trauma response. You are not responsible for everyone or everything. Give yourself permission to lay down what doesn't belong to you.

TAYLOR GRISMORE

My parents, grandparents, and other people around me modeled survival, striving to manage their existence despite hardships. They gravitated toward harsh lifestyles with many restrictions. It seemed they found it spiritual to do what was hard and harsh. It was a sign of true godliness with no exceptions to hard work unless someone was sick.

My parents were born in Canada. A large group of Mennonites, including my parents moved away from Canada, first to Mexico in 1948 and then years later to British Honduras, now called Belize. My parents met in Mexico, and that is where I was born. When I was almost two years old my parents along with my grandparents moved to Belize.

The culture was also highly religiously fear-based, and everyone was expected to fit in the same belief box of what should and should not be practiced. I'll give you one example. When I was born my mom needed complete anaesthesia to give birth to me.

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She later was told that she did not take up her cross because women are supposed to have pain when they give birth. She was told she sinned and made to feel guilty.

I don't remember when I started going to church, but it was a very solemn place, and laughter was not allowed. Nobody in church laughed; men sat on one side and women on the other side. I wonder how many folks enjoyed church. I recall very strict sermons with hellfire and brimstone taught every Sunday. The echoes of sermons remain forever etched in my mind.

Fear distorts faith and when fear tactics are used it keeps people's beliefs where they feel safe but not necessarily scriptural. Fear has torment, so it's a powerful tactic to keep people in shape. The goal seemed to be to make people afraid of hell. As you will soon find out, this worked well for me throughout my childhood and young adult life.

Growing up as the oldest of ten kids was difficult, so as a young girl, I learned to fend for my inner world. I learned to survive in an imaginary world where life differed from my real world. In the imaginary world, daydreaming was my escape to feeling a sense of fun and where my emotions were safe.

A favourite part of the real world was Christmas Eve, with my mom's homemade chocolates and coconut-coated marshmallows, and my parents went to their bedroom to get our gifts. We each received one small gift, which my mom tells me I was very thankful for, and so were my siblings. Oh, and then there was Christmas with grandparents and cousins and the memory of a rabbit skipping under the Tannenbaum.

As I was growing up, the Americans who came to Belize had nicer homes than we did. So, in my world, my parents were

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missionaries with a lovely house like the Americans have, and there, my dad would be the wise missionary man who had all the answers to all my questions about God.

Our ancestors' and parents' trauma or adverse experiences can leave biological traces in their children. My parents are the product of their parents, and I am the product of my parents. Both, faith, and religion were passed down through the generations, however, I saw my parents wrestle with questions regarding their faith, and especially wondering about the assurance of salvation. My dad left a strong legacy to stay close as a family. All ten of us, five girls and five boys got along well, and we still have the utmost respect for one another.

I did not develop a clear sense of my own needs and feelings, and as an adult, I lack trust in people and God. Fear-based Christianity and religion harmed the development of peaceful or grounded faith. My faith wasn't well balanced and not grounded in peace. My focus was to strive to stay out of hell, so my faith didn't necessarily comfort me because I lacked clarity of salvation and who God was for me. So, I was fearful, not peaceful. It smudged my faith lenses and led me to the dark and lonely alley of scrupulosity.

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In my culture, it was customary for young children not to attend church. As the oldest child in the family, I was responsible for taking care of my siblings while my parents went to church. On one Sunday, the way I recall it, around the age of seven or eight, I was left with my siblings, and a couple of other children were dropped off for me to babysit. I was not the child playing; I was responsible for about six or seven kids. Sitting on a tree stump

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in the front yard of our home in Belize, I watched the kids play; overwhelmed by the weight of my responsibilities, I sat there frozen. During this season of my life, I began to shut down emotionally; it disempowered my voice, and hopelessness set in.

As well as possible genetic and environmental influences, I was triggered by this event and repeating events, and a complicated, lonely journey began for this little girl. Trauma results from stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with the experience. So, I learned to bury my emotions only for them to surface later in life. I did not learn to express my pain or my feelings well. This event was a pivotal point in my life. I developed what I know now as scrupulosity or religious OCD which targets sufferers where they're vulnerable. Not everyone will have the same triggers of a similar event.

Over, time guilt and anxiety over unimportant religious matters increased and began to interfere with my psychological and spiritual well-being. This resulted in a complex and difficult journey of persistent intrusive thoughts bombarding my mind. As these thoughts intensified, they left me with shock, guilt, shame, and in utter disbelief about how I could have these thoughts. They caused intense stress and anxiety that were debilitating and interfered with enjoying everyday life. Not too often was I free from these thoughts. The following quote makes the thoughts seem a little less scary and frames them more objectively.

“Intrusive thoughts are basically anxious, scary thoughts that float into your brain, sometimes for no specific reasons.”
Hannah R. Goodman

6 Hannah Goodman (No date) When Thoughts are Sticky; Pure OCD and General Anxiety Disorder <https://oc87recoverydiaries.org/generalized-anxiety-disorder/>

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This led to spending long periods engaging in activities such as perfecting my prayers in hopes that God would hear me and accept my prayers. I timed my prayers for a period which drove my sister crazy, because we shared a room. I thought this was a sign of a godly person, and would impress God and, surely, he would give me extra points. When I pray out of fear and anxiety, I give God too many choices in my prayer that it overwhelms me. When I pray out of fear and anxiety, I overwhelm myself with too many issues in my mind to pray about. It is almost like the impending fear and anxiety pushed me to an overwhelmed state of mind going in circles about all the issues I should pray about. So, I doubt, and don't know which of my prayers I give to God to answer.

Most of my days were spent analyzing if the intrusive thoughts were mine, ruminating, and questioning if I meant to have them and how could I possibly have these thoughts if I am a Christian. Weary of performing, fixing, analyzing, and ruminating over the intrusive thoughts, I was exhausted. It's like being in a wrestling match with your thoughts without any breaks. I felt anxious if I did not perform to these compulsions, so I continued to obey the dictates of the compulsions. The dictates were the thoughts that came into my head that I felt horrible about. The compulsions were analysing and trying to fix my thoughts so I could feel okay once I had rationalized that I might be forgiven for these thoughts. It is like repenting of sorts. This only gave me a temporary sense of relief and peace. Following through on compulsions simply feeds uncertainty and worsens the condition.

⁷Confession and restitution are significant issues for many people suffering with scrupulosity. The anxious obsessions of whether I

7 Jamie Eckert (No date) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am9QvcnrBCK&t=6s>

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asked for enough forgiveness or made enough restitution added another layer of complexity and got me trapped in a spiral of chronic doubt wondering if I made enough restitution for God to accept me. I apologized often for things that were not wrong or sinful, but I could not have peace until I asked for forgiveness. One night I woke up an elderly man because I could not sleep over something I said or did. I don't remember any details. I was embarrassed to do this, but I could not risk waiting till the morning in case I would die and go to hell. I'm sure it was not a sin, but in my mind, at that time, it was a sin worthy of hell.

I excessively reviewed past experiences like a conversation. As soon as I opened my mouth to speak, I began to ruminate in my mind on how I might have come across. I was sure I hurt someone or sounded stupid, all unintentionally done. I was very introspective. Somebody approached me and told me he'd never met anyone with so much introspection. Self-reflection can be healthy, but I also went to self-ruminating, which increased my anxiety and negative self-perception.

Doubts create rituals, and I had a lot of doubt about myself and my faith in God. I was unsure if my religion or my faith was genuine and good enough for God. Salvation is meant to be very simple, but I complicated the gift of salvation that we receive by faith by obsessing about the quality of my faith. I needed a lot of reassurance that I was okay. I felt an overwhelming need to do the right thing and felt severely bothered when I made mistakes. I equated mistakes with sin. I went to great lengths to clarify misunderstandings, even if it embarrassed me, but I couldn't bear the thought of accidentally lying.

It was my responsibility to pray about everyone and everything. I feared something bad would happen if I didn't pray it away. It was my job to prevent disasters for myself and others. This is

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an extremely heavy yoke distorted by the anxiety of the OCD which distorts vision. I questioned many times if I had sold myself to the devil and committed the unpardonable sin or possibly possessed by Satan.

Randomly thoughts entered in that I blasphemed God. This caused me a great deal of mental suffering and torment of the mind. I could not go to sleep until I was right with God, but that was rarely certain.

I could not stop thinking about the possibility of going to hell. This was a dilemma too huge for me.

Jesus says in Matthew 19:24 "I'll say it again-it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" (NLT)

This verse made me wish many times that I was not born. We were not rich, but the part in this verse that I got hung up on was that is entirely impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a sewing needle. So, logically, that made it impossible for me to go to heaven. This is taking it out of context, but OCD needs to have it black and white. Jesus often used metaphors to bring his point across. The eye of the needle could refer to a smaller gate that the camels had to go through and had to be stripped of their load to fit in and go through the gate because the gate was short and possibly narrow. The root cause of these intrusive religious thoughts lies in the misconception of God's character, which affected my well-being. My misunderstanding of his character needed to be restored into wholeness of my faith. The focus of faith is believing, the feelings of OCD are not facts.

⁸Scrupulosity is monstrous, shocking and distorts facts. “OCD is living in a cage. It is a monster that is hungry to be fed through performance. When we feed it, the Monster grows. The more we can stop feeding the monster, the quieter it will grow. You have to honestly address the monster and call it out. It cannot beat you when you call it out. Keep the monster out in the open.” said Tausha Johnson.

As a scrupulosity sufferer, I was harder on myself than I needed to be. I was critical of myself for no warranted reasons. Kindness towards self is simply learning to understand when we fall short of our expectations of ourselves and responding with kindness rather than judgement. My self-talk was unkind. I interpreted failure and not measuring up as bad. I needed to learn to speak appealing, beautiful, and life-giving words. “For they release sweetness to my soul and inner healing to my spirit.” (Proverbs 16:26)

The intrusive thoughts are not your thoughts. More than anything, this is what I want the readers who have intrusive thoughts to walk away with. The knowledge of this one sentence would have been a lifesaver for me, but I didn't know that they were not my thoughts. These thoughts are not a reflection of your character, the intrusive thoughts are entirely meaningless. The brain is encountering a disruption in the flow of communication. OCD and mental illness can be a debilitating disorder. So, practice being kind to yourself. Practice mindfulness instead of wrestling.

8 https://www.ted.com/talks/tauscha_johanson OCD_starving_the_monster Youtube.com. April 13, 20188

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*“You need to gift something today, To yourself,
Just a little bit of kindness, Won't hurt you in any way.*

*You remove time for everyone, But what about yourself?
When will you take some time out, To forgive yourself?*

*Don't punish yourself, Don't be so harsh, You are a
human as well, Who deserves kindness just as anyone else.*

*Mistakes are an opportunity to learn, Failures are the
stepping stone to success, You'll get there eventually, But
first, be kind to yourself.”*

KASHISH KAY

“Silent solitude makes true speech possible and personal.

*If I am not in touch with my own belovedness, then I
cannot touch the sacredness of others.*

*If I am estranged from myself, I am likewise a stranger to
others.”*

BRENNAN MANNING

CHAPTER 3

THE VOICELESS AFFLICTION

“Be bold enough to use your voice, brave enough to listen to your heart, and strong enough to live the life you’ve always imagined.”

ANONYMOUS

We all want to say goodbye to the darkness that has been our companion through trauma, grief, anxiety, and depression. The darkness that has blocked the peaceful voices in our heads and our inner guiding system that has weakened us. The inner guiding system is our intuition or the still, small voice that knows the truth. The inner voice is our internal dialogue or self-talk. Trauma is an emotional upset or response to a distressing event—a result of sin from the injustice done by people or by something that happened to us that we had no control over. Trauma becomes embedded in the body, mind, spirit, and voice.

The wounds and scars left by traumatic events impact our self-esteem and confidence and can cause a lack of connection with people, as in dissociation. The pain of the experience can be crippling, leaving them feeling as if their voice has been silenced.

Suffering from scrupulosity has been a complex and traumatic experience for me and required understanding and empathy

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to restore that which OCD has robbed. Suffering from this condition wounded me spiritually, though it was no fault of mine, and I needed a great deal of grace to heal. This struggle was traumatic and left me trapped in my emotions and intrusive thoughts. I often felt hopeless, sad, and fearful; later, some turned to anger. It caused long-term physical, mental, and emotional pain lasting for years. It made it difficult to cope with everyday life, leaving me overwhelmed and disconnected. It affected the way I viewed myself and the world around me. I saw the trauma as a sign of weakness rather than a natural response to what happened to me.

I was good at hiding the trauma, but it had to go someplace, and it showed up later in life. One traumatic event I suppressed happened in my early teens in Belize when I woke up to a gunshot across the street. Shortly after, I heard people wailing; when I looked out the window, I could only see the lights from the flashlight people were using to look for the body in tall grasses. This event left a subconscious impact on me, only to surface years later.

I began having flashbacks at night. I saw men forcing themselves in with guns. I had suppressed anxiety, which came to the forefront when I took a course on anxiety in seminary; every week, my anxiety with this scene in my mind worsened and interfered with my nights. One of my professors and a small group of friends offered to come and pray. We prayed in every room of the house, and then they prayed over me. After that the stronghold of that memory was broken, and the anxiety of that experience lessened every night. Today, it's a memory that does not control me any longer.

My inner voice and expressions were affected at an early age, and especially in my early teens. Because intrusive thoughts

dictated my life, I often could not be decisive and doubted myself regularly. It blocked out the other voices that needed to rise confidently instead of limiting me. Healing from trauma required me to step into the deep, dark wound that had been suppressed and covered by scar tissue.

Just like people grieve differently, we all react to trauma differently. I suppressed trauma to cope. Dealing with trauma is not the time for judgement against ourselves or others, but that's precisely what I did. I often asked myself what was wrong with me. I questioned if I was normal like other people. Trauma made me feel different; I didn't understand that trauma makes you feel this way. It's like I was estranged from myself, creating negative core beliefs about myself.

I developed a stuttering problem sometime in my early teens. I chose my words carefully so I could speak without stuttering. To my disappointment, I wasn't always successful in hiding it. I had a lot of shame around my stuttering, often inhibiting me, so I began to organize my life around my stuttering. The larger the crowd, the quieter I was. I couldn't risk intensifying the shame I already had. As the embarrassment and fear increased, so did the stuttering. Keeping quiet was a safe place but also a lonely place. I thought less of myself because of my stuttering. I had an incredibly high standard attached to my self-worth. Add stuttering to the intrusive thoughts raging in my mind, and I had a perfect storm of consistent self-shaming, self-defeating thoughts, and low self-esteem, which only intensifies the disorder of OCD.

After stuffing my emotions down for so long, I found it challenging to articulate and express myself or explain what I wanted to say and bring the thoughts from my brain forward to my mouth to speak. It's an emotional blockage that I struggle

to get past. Anxiety and trauma have blocked the authentic self-expression I deeply desire to have along with the ability to express with greater freedom. ⁹Pastor Bill Johnson in a YouTube Video says, “*There’s an authentic expression that God created you to be, and the world is aching for.*”

When I undermine who I am, I undermine God and what he has given me to offer this world and who God created me to be. I sabotaged the very essence of my purpose that I was given to offer to the world.

The brain minimizes trauma for several reasons: to evade being engulfed by the magnitude of stress or to evade the shame they feel by explicit or implicit messages from people who minimize trauma or other people’s problems. Nobody talked about trauma when I grew up. That was not a thing. Behaving and performing was a thing.

I used to think only people who were in the war had trauma. I also compared my trauma to someone I felt had experienced worse and believed I shouldn’t feel the way I felt. By doing this, I only suppressed my struggles deeper to deny them, and I felt I wasn’t allowed to feel what I was going through. That seemed selfish.

In scrupulosity, the predominant voice of the dictations was drowning out and diminishing my authentic voice. It devalued me and gave room for self-hatred and hatred towards others because of their dependency on me. I didn’t dare to value myself enough to set boundaries, so I often felt used by people by allowing myself to be at the mercy of others and allowing them

9 Bill Johnson (No date) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9iirJkdJp4>

to tell me how to think and feel rather than being confident in my autonomy.

The intrusive thoughts were the voices that spoke to me, and they kept me captive doubting, scared, and limited and took away the ability to be trusting and open. Because OCD is an anxiety disorder, it makes it more difficult for an individual with it to speak up.

Psychological and emotional pain seeks pleasure to avoid feeling the mental anguish. When we haven't processed our trauma, we disconnect from the pain as a means of coping.¹⁰ Alex Howard explains six emotional styles that people use to disconnect from trauma. This has been helpful for me to look at how I function in my dysfunction.

1. Somatising

I somatise often, it can happen when we've learned that feelings are unsafe and too big to process. It's unconsciously expressing emotions as physical symptoms. Our feelings are out of touch, but they must go somewhere. It can become physical pain when we don't feel our emotions. We learn to put our emotions in our bodies.

2. Avoidance:

Some individuals intentionally keep busy by avoiding and distracting themselves, so they don't have time to feel. Or they focus on other people's needs to avoid feeling their pain. The question to ask is, what place are you busy from? These people don't need to be as busy as they are. When they feel

¹⁰ YouTube Bernadette Logue. (2021, November 5). *Alex Howard - the 6 styles of emotional disconnection*. YouTube 6 Styles of Emotional Disconnection.

overextended, they still have the need to keep busy. To sit and relax is very difficult.

3. State-changing:

State-changing is when emotions are too strong to avoid and distract from trauma. It's using external tools such as sex, drugs, alcohol, food, and exercise to change how they emotionally feel. It's an emotional and intellectual neglect that they do to themselves.

4. Analyzing:

When the intellect is valued over feelings, it creates a lack of safety and emotional vulnerability; people analyze and intellectualize rather than feel and are not in touch with their feelings. They like to think their way to safety, but you can't think your way to safety.

5. Blaming

This is when a person blames the outside world for their feelings. "They make me mad" is an example; in a sense they feel their feelings but not in a vulnerable and true way. This comes from a culture that shames and does not allow feelings. Being raised in a blame culture results in not taking ownership of their own emotions.

6. Empath:

There is a difference between empathy and being an empath. When you give empathy it's an appropriate response to someone's situation or circumstances. An empath tends to take other people's feelings and they feel the heaviness of their feelings. They feel the need to rescue. They feel other people's feelings but not necessarily their own.

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The trauma that has happened to us can be healed. As I heal, I can experience more joy and find profound meaning and purpose in life. The Holy Spirit can co-exist with mental health problems and the sufferings we face, and God is always present with us, despite our perception.

As I learned to deal with intrusive thoughts, by not giving them attention through compulsions, my diminished voice could rise to heights of assertiveness. The process of healing the inner voice is possible even though the process takes time. I'm unlearning what disabled me and learning new ways of thinking that make living possible. Unlearning is most often uncomfortable at best, but the reward of stepping out of my prison into an unshackled world where I can experience what imprisonment did not give me is where I want to live.

As I move away from the passive voice where I let things happen without an active response, I'm able to take better ownership of the thoughts that come into my inner world, my inner world referring to where I inhabit my own thoughts and feelings, and not what is dictated to me. As I recover my passive, inner voice, and gain healthy self-confidence, I have become more assertive and can choose the thoughts I want to believe. This process requires courage and resilience, but each step I take towards healing my inner voice is closer to healing my trauma and the wound it created.

Getting in touch with my inner voice was difficult because that meant embracing my weaknesses and listening to my self-talk. Being unkind to myself hurt me. I came across ¹¹Caroline Leaf's Brain Detox Challenge online. She says it takes 21 days to detox

11 Caroline Leaf (1998) <https://storage.snappages.site/SB46BN/assets/files/21-Day-Detox-Guide.pdf>

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the brain of a thought habit and 63 days to rebuild a thought habit. I journaled about one toxic thought habit or pattern that I needed changing for 21 days and replaced it with, what I called a “truth” thought. I took toxic thoughts captive, and I found the result freeing and rewarding. I got rid of toxins that I was tired of chattering in my brain.

“He heals the wounds of every shattered [brain].” (Psalm 147:3)

Recently a friend told me that her life story would be very boring. Well, I used to think the same. But we all have events in our lives that shape us with personal triumphs and struggles, and that is what I needed to embrace and tell. By being vulnerable and telling our stories we create human connections that will benefit others.

As I began to engage in my story, my inner self, which was separated from trauma and religion, I began to heal. In my case, I feel unworthy to write this book and to share what I know because I think it’s not enough. But that’s not where I want to camp and pitch my tent. I know I am created for more, and I am not a victim of my past.

To approach and heal from difficult situations, I needed to discover my assertiveness and not allow the difficult situations of my past to dictate my limitations. My limitations are God’s possibilities. God does not limit me or restrict me; he empowers me, and with him, I am rising higher.

I needed to reclaim what was mine and reclaim territory over what had been wrongfully taken from me, and the injustice of what the “hard” in my life has done and, in my case, the “hard” is my battle with scrupulosity. It’s not a small injustice; it pretty much wrecked my life, and the reality I lived in was not the

same as everyone else. It misrepresents the character of God to a strict and unreachable being who, at any point would punish me for not living above human standards. I had an inflated sense of performing to an unreasonable degree I could never attain.

To heal, I needed to validate the trauma in my life and acknowledge it, not minimize it. I did more harm than good by living in denial, but that's all I knew to cope. Because I couldn't heal any further than I was willing to go, my only option was to push in and upward. Healing has empowered me to love myself and accept myself in a way that I wasn't able to before.

RELIGIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

While religious OCD isn't caused by religion, high religiosity can intensify it. Religion promoted rigidity and overemphasized obedience to laws and rules. It emphasized sin and guilt and humiliated and minimized individuals. Spiritual trauma occurs due to events that threaten and damage core values and goals.

The following makes sense now as I look back at my young development years as a child and teen, and it explains why religious OCD is more prone to develop during these stages of a person's life.

¹²“The teen brain is susceptible to anxiety. The part of the brain that produces fear and anxiety develops quicker than other parts. So, when fear is used to control, it is harmful. Teens are prone to fear and don't have the same reasonings that adults have to silence or reason with that fear. Religious trauma might emerge when teens

¹² Carol Howard Merritt <https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2014-06/fear-anxiety-and-christian-community>

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are exposed to a vindictive God during these critical years. Using fear when it is already untamed in a person's mind seems (at the least) irresponsible and (at its worst) close to torture. It can be a very traumatic experience when the adults in charge of your spiritual health exaggerate that fear to manipulate you."

Carol Howard Merritt

When hell, fire, brimstone, and damnation were preached regularly to a church of Christians, it made me believe that God's wrath was more significant than his love. This is harmful and unbalanced teaching and overshadows the meaning of the true gospel of Jesus. Preachers were not the only ones using fear tactics. I heard many end-time conversations that were not truth-based but fear-based. Religious fear tactics worked well for me; I felt the need to get saved repeatedly to avoid God's wrath. The obsessive thoughts of scrupulosity had me trapped in a cycle of doubt around my salvation in Jesus Christ.

The emotional pain from religion and scrupulosity caused a false and a mixed view of church, religion, and a mistrust of many Christians. How could I heal spiritually from religious trauma and believe that the God of wrath loves us? This is motivation to walk away from church and God. When God's wrath is our motivation, we don't serve him out of love, but out of fear and trembling. In Jesus, I am no longer under the penalty of God's wrath. I am under grace.

My inner guiding system got messed up; it needed to be restored so I could trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit and not be tossed around with doubt and turmoil of a broken spirit and a tormented mind. I am bold like a young, ferocious lion. (Proverbs 28:1) I do not always feel it, but I declare it.

THE VOICELESS AFFLICTION

Revisiting memories can be painful, but it is necessary to understand ourselves and our responses to life and to heal the anger, sadness, and fear. The essence of self-compassion is to embrace your inner child that longs to be held.

*“The presence of anxiety is unavoidable,
but the prison of anxiety is optional.”*

MAX LUCADO

CHAPTER 4

ANXIETY AND FEAR

Merriam Webster Dictionary explains anxiety and fear as similar feelings. Anxiety is a reaction to our emotions versus danger in the environment. Anxiety is a stop-reaction to the impulse that fear, and other core emotions create in our bodies. Fear mobilizes energy for movement, and anxiety pushes it down.

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¹³Fear is a reaction to a perceived threat, whereas anxiety is concerned about a threat that has not yet occurred or may never occur.

ANXIETY

Anxiety directs attention to the future and fears uncertainties and adversity. It's afraid of what might happen, so it must stop it from happening. While this anxiety feels real, this view is unfocused and excessive. This is self-doubting and questioning if one can cope with the anxiety. Anxious people are not weak,

13 Kimberly Drake(2022, August 16) <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/how-the-brain-gathers-threat-cues-and-turns-them-into-fear#:~:text=Fear%20is%20a%20natural%20emotion,may%20also%20play%20a%20role.>

but they lack confidence and fear that they won't be able to manage.

Anxiety has a strong need to control and keep bad things from happening, and it has a strong urge to believe the worst, which places our hope in the grave. Meaning anxiety can't be trusted, it has a false reputation. According to anxiety, doom is looming around every corner. Now, it's our responsibility to keep it from coming.

¹⁴OCD is an anxiety disorder using mental or behavioural compulsions to manage and lessen the dictates of the anxiety of the intrusive thoughts that are forever bombarding the mind. Anxiety is an accumulation of thoughts; when they come to a climax it's like a collision of thoughts triggered by events, often subconsciously, and they take us off guard in a weak moment.

¹⁵Compulsions are unhealthy coping mechanisms. When we're in a religious OCD-compulsive spiral, the urge is to obey the strong compulsions. Not obeying the anxiety feels unsafe because we don't feel in control. Anxiety made me believe that I had to control my environment to avoid disaster.

In scrupulosity, the anxiety in my life was performance-based, and the anxiety and shame constantly downplayed the quality of my life. I had a strong need to control the world around me, which only increased my anxiety and fear and sent my head into a spiral that was difficult to stop. It's like your brain is a

14 [https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd#:~:text=Obsessive%2Dcompulsive%20disorder%20\(OCD\)%20is%20a%20common%20anxiety%20disorder,or%20images%20are%20called%20obsessions.\(no date\)](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd#:~:text=Obsessive%2Dcompulsive%20disorder%20(OCD)%20is%20a%20common%20anxiety%20disorder,or%20images%20are%20called%20obsessions.(no%20date))

15 By Melinda Smith, M.A., Lawrence Robinson and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. (No date) <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd.htm>

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hamster spinning on a wheel, spinning but getting nowhere. To create order and a safe place through the means of anxiety's control is an illusion.

The anxiety in religious OCD also needs to control God. I lived with a subconscious and fearful mindset that no one, including God, was capable or strong enough to take care of me. So, I toiled with great difficulty to control the safety of my world, where uncertainty, fear, guilt, and shame were the only things certain. I could not trust or surrender fully to God; he wasn't safe to trust. As much as I wanted to surrender, certain things were hard. I feared that if I surrendered my sons, God would take them away from me-as in death. This is a severely misplaced view of God's Character.

Second Timothy 1:7 (KJV) tells us "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind,*" so I know God did not give me that spirit of fear.

Underneath the fear of surrendering myself was mistrust, doubt, and pain issues that needed healing. The mistrust was that God cannot be trusted; his character was painted as a harsh God that is out to get you. In my mind to surrender meant I was giving someone control over me-giving my rights away.

The concept of surrender was impossible to understand until I learned to quiet the intrusive thoughts and the anxiety and began to see God as less of a threat than as someone who was just out to get me when I fail. To surrender is to rest and give up the compulsion of control, which releases me from the hard work of trying to oversee and be in charge of the world around me. When my mistrust and false distortions began to heal, my walk with God became the most beautiful and awesome thing I had ever experienced. Faith is real! I can give up the control

to compulsions that fed anxiety and fear. When my vision is restored, there is light and new life. I can keep going forward, knowing that God's goodness and mercies are chasing after me. Scriptures are my currency; I don't need to barter and perform for God's love.

Proverbs 22:4: says "Laying your life down in tender surrender before the Lord will bring life, prosperity, and honour as your reward."

I was clinging to a false sense of control when life was unpredictable. I can't control the outcome, but I can learn to control how I respond to it.

When you surrender and let go of trying to control the outcome, you will find peace and freedom from your anxiety. The key is to learn to manage the anxiety and not to control the anxiety as that leads to obsessive-compulsive behaviour. The more you focus on the anxiety the stronger it grows. Here are some helpful approaches that I use to manage anxiety.

1. Taking deep breaths helps to momentarily calm the nerves and reduces stress.
2. Journaling and being honest with yourself can be very beneficial. Writing down your feelings and thoughts help you understand them more clearly, to connect and rediscover yourself.
3. When you feel the anxiety heightening, stop, and listen to what is going on. This helps me to determine what triggered it. Learn to know your triggers and respect them. To respect them you may need to set boundaries with yourself and other people.

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4. Accepting and acknowledging that you're anxious is essential. Focusing on and fighting it only heightens the anxiety. Think management as opposed to prevention. To manage is to reframe your thoughts. To prevent it is to fight them.
5. Don't believe all the negative chitter-chatter that goes on in your brain; anxiety has a reputation for distorting reality. Instead, focus on positive self-talk. Challenge your thoughts. When the brain is anxious, it tends to produce all sorts of unrealistic ideas that are unlikely to happen. It is important to realize that the brain is playing games on you. Be compassionate towards yourself without judgement. Practice makes improvement and permanence. You're right, I did not say perfect, that should not be your focus or your goal. The goal is healing, not perfection.
6. Remind yourself to be in the present. Notice the beauty around you, like the birds or the trees, or engage in something that is meaningful to you. Sometimes, when I feel an impending fear, I stop and ask what am I fearing or anxious about? That's a helpful approach to living in the present and it distracts me from the fear and anxiety. Then I can say, right now, everything is fine, I'm safe, and there is no impending danger. It helps me to shift my focus from illusions to what really is, and it changes the body's reaction to a peaceful state.
7. Use a calming visualization. When my boys were little and couldn't sleep because of something that made them afraid, I told them to have happy thoughts. I use "happy thoughts" for myself. It gives my mind a break and reduces the power of the anxious compulsion over me. Remember to dwell on the anxiety will only grow the anxiety.

8. Physical activities are natural ways to reduce anxiety and stress. While engaging in physical activities, endorphins are released and aid in improving cognitive functions, depression, and anxiety. Pick an activity that you don't hate. I do aquafit, which helps both my physical and mental well-being.

9. Remind yourself that the intrusive thoughts are not yours, and you are not obligated to obey the decree of the anxiety. The anxiety does not define you, and it is not your identity, so don't call it "my" anxiety, it's not yours to claim. Trauma and anxiety cannot reside in a relaxed body and a calm body creates a calm mind.

FEAR

A healthy fear alerts us to real danger to which we react to make it safe. If your toddler runs onto the street and a vehicle approaches, you don't say, "O, it's going to be okay". You run to save your child, who has no fear of the oncoming vehicles. That's not the fear I'm talking about in this chapter. This fear is not crippling. The fear that I'm talking about holds us back and keeps us from achieving peace.

Do you feel fear is trying to swallow you alive? Sometimes, I know exactly what I fear, and other times I don't. I just feel fearful and anxious. Sometimes, we are afraid of fear itself. Fear and anxiety bombard humanity across the globe, and fear quickly turns to ruminating and obsessing.

We have so much to fear, at least countless unreliable sources tell us. Take the news, for instance; it sells fear. As soon as I feel pain, I can quickly jump from a small headache to "what if this

is cancer or I die”? I feared what could happen to the economy or my child. There are so many “ifs.”

Fear can be crippling if we don't learn how to deal with it. It steals our joy, hope, and peace. Our fears lie to us all the time. “Fear not”! is a command mentioned in the Bible more than any other command. Jesus knew we, as humans, are prone to fear. Satan is the author of fear, and he will do anything he can to take our eyes off the truth. I take comfort and courage in scripture when God tells me not to fear and he fights for me.

Second Timothy 1:7 (KJV)

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

Deuteronomy 3:22 (ESV)

“You shall not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who fights for you.”

Fear is not meant to be your controlling force; God offers his Peace amid a chaotic mind. Do not believe every anxious or fearful thought. Rather than thinking this is what we must live with, we must confront our fears and not let them hold us back. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act despite the fear we feel. It's making a bold move despite the fear. It's doing what is right in the face of fear and anxiety. The key is to master the fear, not get rid of it.

God's assignment will always frighten us, but it brings courage. Like the disciples in the following passage cried out to Jesus when they were overcome by fear, we have the same Jesus that we can cry out to for help when we are overcome by fear. A magnifying

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glass makes things look larger than they are; so, when we have anxiety and fear, our circumstances and problems are magnified out of proportion. Fear is a bully and lurks around the corner.

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's get in a boat and go across the other side of the lake." So, they set sail, and soon Jesus fell asleep. But a fierce wind arose and became a violent squall that threatened to swamp their boat. Alarmed, the disciples woke Jesus up and said, "Master, Master, we're sinking! Don't you care that we're going to drown?" With great authority Jesus rebuked the howling wind and surging waves, and instantly they became calm.

Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you fearful? Have you lost your faith in me?" Shocked, they said with amazement to one another, "Who is this man who has authority over winds and waves that they obey him?"

Luke 8:22–25

Storms are weather conditions that involve strong and gusty winds, dense clouds, and heavy rain, and sometimes, they involve hail and the crashing sounds of thunder. When the violent storms in your life of painful circumstances are numbing your senses, know that Jesus is in the boat with you. You can call on him.

Jesus has authority over the storm in your life. The knowledge that storms don't last forever gives us a means of coping with

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the storms in our lives. Regardless of our interpretation of the moment, God is always present with us.

Stop listening to the adversary, who is a psychological terrorist who humiliates and torments us. Fear makes us feel distant from God because we focus on negative self-talk that steals, kills, and destroys. These thoughts don't come from you. People who have a great amount of fear are not lazy, but the fear has taken away energy and immobilizes them. The kingdom that has been put inside us by indwelling of the Holy Spirit is greater than anything that tries to come against us. It is the only hope of unlocking what we need.

Love casts out fear! Manage, don't fight anxiety and fear.

“Encourage yourself. Don’t speak defeat over your life.”

JOEL OSTEEN

Shift your mind, and it will shift your life.

ELEANOR HASTIE

CHAPTER 5

DEPRESSION AND DECLARATIONS

“Before any great achievement, some measure of depression is very usual.”

CHARLES SPURGEON

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?”

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by persistent sadness and loss of interest. It impacts our behaviour, thoughts, and feelings, sometimes making you feel life isn't worth living. Depression is a bruise in your mind that focuses on the past and has unresolved trauma.

In one of my journals from years ago, I blame God for not coming through for me. I felt my dreams were lost, and in despair, I wrestled with the thought that it was too late. I feared the dark, dark mood sweeping over me. I said, “My brain needs

resuscitation.” I wanted to be light in a darkened world, but I was struggling with persistent dark, and hopeless feelings.

Proverbs 13:12 states it well. “When hope’s dream seems to drag on and on, the delay can be depressing. But when at last your dream comes true, life’s sweetness will satisfy your soul.”

As a teen and into my adulthood, I often felt sad--or if I’m honest, I was sad all the time--but I could not explain why. The best I could describe my feelings was as if I was at a funeral, and yet nobody died. At the time, I did not understand that I was struggling with OCD, which is one of the most distressing psychological disorders and is commonly associated with depression. It is a very depressing disorder with intrusive thoughts and urges to senseless compulsions.

Fatigue is often associated with mental health struggles, so our tiredness does not just come from doing too much. Often, we haven’t done enough to ignite our interest; everything that we once enjoyed or hoped to enjoy seems to have dried up which when our mood is low, makes it difficult at the best of times to resurrect dreams.

God took every punishment upon himself, so stop punishing yourself. ¹⁶To heal the inner child is called reparenting. It simply means that an adult is now taking action to the healing journey for the wounds we incurred as children. It may not be that our parents or caregiver have hurt us, but it may be any childhood trauma that has not been dealt with. It’s becoming aware and acknowledging the truth about the wounds we have from our childhood.

16 Jodi Clark , MA, LPC/MHSP (2023, November 27) <https://www.verywellmind.com/reparenting-in-therapy-5226096>

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Through much counselling, trusted friendships, healing prayers offered by the church, listening, and reading and growing close to my Father, learning about his true character of grace and love and practicing self-compassion I embraced the little girl, the teenager, and the adult I punished, pushed away, and minimized because I didn't know how to love her. To revisit memories can be painful, but it is necessary to understand ourselves and our responses to life.

Isaiah 53:3-5 (ESV) says,

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

DECLARATIONS TO SPEAK

Although I never met Joel Osteen, he inspires this part of the chapter during a difficult season with depression and anxiety in my life. I am where I am today in part because of Joel's messages of hope and promises. They are hope-focused and not focused on condemnation or striving to earn God's favour. I fought for hope. I wanted more; I wanted to go deep to experience the truth of the power of God. I fought to live and fought to live large which meant that I knew in my spirit that there was more out there to live for than what I was

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experiencing, and if God's Word is true, this was not how I was meant to live.

¹⁷Joel's pledge at the beginning of each sermon will be forever stuck in my sons' and in my mind as they often heard Joel's messages when they were little. "This is my Bible; I am what it says I am; I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today, I will be taught the word of God. I boldly confess my mind is alert. My heart is receptive. I will never be the same. In Jesus's name." Hearing something repeatedly etches it long-term in our memory. When it's a positive repetition it serves us well.

Positive declarations are announcements that transform and break your train of thought from a negative to a positive mindset. Our thoughts are reflected in our actions, so as we regularly speak them and over and over ourselves, they take root and bear the fruit of a positive outcome. As we speak truth and biblical declarations, we speak powerful truths over us and create a better outlook for our future.

I declare God is directing my steps.

I admit that sometimes I felt that God wasn't doing his job well when I felt desperate or stuck. When nothing seems to happen it's easy to get discouragement. In our waiting God is orchestrating His purposes for our lives. We make plans, "but the Lord chooses the steps to get you there." (Proverbs 16:9)

Psalm 37:23 (NLT) says,

17 Joel Osteen (No date) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Gqu1Ai7xNk>

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“The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.”

God is never against us. As we focus on God and not on our circumstances in a season when nothing seems to happen, we must not give up but continue to believe that he is working on our case.

I declare one touch of God’s Favor will take me to a new level.

Psalms 84:11 says,

“For the Lord God is brighter than the brilliance of a sunrise! Wrapping himself around me like a shield, he is so generous with his gifts of grace and glory. Those who walk along his paths with integrity will never lack one thing they need, for he provides it all!”

Pray for extraordinary things that require God’s blessing and his favour to bring them to pass. The enemy, the devil may foster harmful designs against us and wants us to believe it’s hopeless, it’s too late, your life doesn’t matter much, and he doesn’t care about you. Guard your mind against these baits. One touch of God’s favour can be the beginning of new things you have prayed for a long time in your life. He delights in his children. Just like a parent wants the best for their kids, our heavenly Father wants to give us good things. In our unbelief and doubt God’s favour remains for us to claim. His favour can push back the forces of darkness.

I declare the tide of my battle is turning.

The very moment I call to you for a father’s help, the tide of battle turns, and my enemies flee. This one thing I know: God

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is on my side! I trust in the Lord. And I praise him! I trust in the Word of God. And I praise him! (Psalms 56:9-10).

To turn the tide means to reverse a situation. God is the tide reverser. Often, our battle is the unpredictability in our lives. Give God your despair; when every other voice will tell you differently, there is the God of hope that fights for you.

I declare I am courageous.

Sheep live with fear and uncertainty every day. They follow; they don't lead. A lion leads. Sheep will settle for less than clean water when they are thirsty; they don't wait until they find clean water. The lion does not accept scraps and does his business fearlessly and competently. It's the mentality of the lion that makes him the king of the jungle. He's not the biggest or the fastest, nor does he have more luck than other animals. He is fearless.

Have fearless courage. When surrounded by hyenas, the lion will never surrender or lie down and die. Maybe you're surrounded and buried by bills, grief, broken relationships, or you must stand up for something no one agrees with. Don't give up. You must keep fighting. Maybe nothing has happened for a long time, but if you don't give up you have the possibility of a breakthrough. Giving up gives you the guarantee of missing out on the life you really want. Regardless, don't surrender to your circumstances.

I declare when God breathes my way, every enemy is defeated.

Romans 16:20 says,

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“And the God of peace will swiftly pound Satan to a pulp under your feet! And the wonderful favor of our Lord Jesus will surround you.”

We give power to the enemy by giving him attention because we fear his powers, and we forget who fights for us. The enemy cannot overpower us if we don't let him. It's not easy, but the Lord God who fights for us defeated the enemy at the cross to give us victory to overcome the darkness that surrounds us. Greater is He who lives in me than who is against me.

I declare I am the apple of his eye.

Psalm 17:8

“Protect me from harm; keep an eye on me as you would a child who is reflected in the twinkling of your eye. Yes, hide me within the shelter of your embrace, under your outstretched wings.”

The story in Genesis 16 is about a slave woman named Hagar who belongs to Abraham's wife Sarai. Abraham got Hagar pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with Hagar, and she runs to the wilderness. Feeling afraid and alone, Hagar has an encounter with an angel that God sent to her. God saw Hagar at a crucial time of her life. The messenger tells her to return to Sarai.

After Hagar's son Ismael was born, Abraham gave them bread and water and sent them to the wilderness. God showed up again to Hagar when they ran out of water. Hagar sits away from her baby and prays that she will not see her baby die. God opens her eyes to see a well.

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Like God saw Hagar and he cherished her like the apple of his eye, so God also cherishes you and me and he sees every detail in your life. No one goes unnoticed. God knows you, and he can help you know yourself.

I declare if I ask, I will receive it.

Matthew 7:7 says,

“Ask, and the gift is yours. Seek, and you’ll discover. Knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

This verse has been profound for me in the last few years. We are invited and commanded to ask for what we want and need. Only someone that loves you will say this. Many of us have been reserved when it comes to asking God for things because we didn’t know our rights as his sons and daughters. I still struggle to ask for things that I want but that I can do without. But God is generous, and he tells me to ask like a cherished daughter in whom he delights. He has big dreams for us and so, we must ask and pray big prayers. He longs to give us so much more than we can imagine. It’s not humility to ask small.

I declare we will lend and not borrow.

Deuteronomy 15:6 (ESV)

“For the Lord your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.”

I declared this during financial lack. While this was not to get a rich-quick scheme, it turned my focus from a poverty mindset

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to a freeing and less stressful mindset. My husband and I and our two sons saw God's provision in unexpected ways. One example was after our oldest son graduated from high school, he wanted to go on a discipleship program through a local university. He was worried about the money for this program, and it included a trip overseas for three months. As worried as I was about the money, I told him to not let money hold him back from pursuing this dream. When I told him this, I was afraid, but I spoke it in faith. He had the entire amount paid for prior to leaving for a year. He was able to work and save up some money and he received money from family and friends. His grandfather who passed away just after his grade twelve graduation contributed towards fulfilling his dream for this program.

I declare God will resurrect my dreams.

Ephesians 2:10

“We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfil the destiny he has given us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One.”

When our dreams don't come to pass, it's easy to get discouraged. We must continue to believe that they will. We can trust God with the dreams he has placed in our heart. He longs to see them fulfilled. Don't strive to make it come to pass but continue to talk to Father God about your desires. For me, I needed to get unstuck first and that required healing from scrupulosity so I could gain the confidence to change my story of limiting myself to feeling empowered, from hopelessness to hope as we yield to God. He works on our behalf and opens doors that we cannot open. In his time God will release special grace to help you accomplish your purpose and your dreams.

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I declare I am a conqueror.

Philippians 4:13

“And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty.”

A skilful mariner has faced rough waters, so deep faith and greatness are born out of rough waters and adversity, and it reframes us to what is important in life. God has equipped and qualified each one of us to go through difficult situations. Failures and hardships often point us to our destiny.

First Corinthians 10:13 says,

“We all experience times of testing, which is normal for every human being. But God will be faithful to you. He will screen and filter the severity, nature, and timing of every test or trial you face so that you can bear it. And each test is an opportunity to trust him more, for along with every trial God has provided for you a way of escape that will bring you out of it victoriously.”

Sometimes, we have trodden down beliefs that we’re not capable or don’t deserve to rise above. We are not victims of anything that has happened to us unless we choose to be one. Victory is not circumstantial. Our victory comes through Jesus Christ. You must tell yourself that you are a victor even when you don’t feel it because that’s the truth.

I declare I will see the goodness of God.

In the dark night of my soul, when I was sad and depressed, questioning everything about myself and life, and searching for a deeper meaning of life and purpose, I had to believe that

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God would come through for me, and that I would see God's goodness for me. The following verses I use to encourage myself.

Psalm 27:13

"Yet I believe with all my heart that I will see again your goodness, Yahweh, in the land of life eternal!"

Psalm 42:11

"So, I say to my soul, "Don't be discouraged. Don't be disturbed. For I know my God will break through for me." Then I'll have plenty of reasons to praise him all over again. Yes, he is my saving grace!"

I declare He will not withhold good things from me.

Scrupulosity was harsh and withheld the reality that God could possibly want to give me a better life free from the intrusive and tormenting thoughts. That is not his character, his character is good.

Ephesians 3:20

"Never doubt God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you."

Remove negative self-talk and move into the expectancy of God. Expectation is a forward step. Don't let fear be your deciding force for your future; it will disempower you to some dark

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detours. We enjoy giving our kids good things; our heavenly Father will give us better things than an earthly parent.

I am engraved in the palm of his hands.

Isaiah 49:16 (ESV) is a promise of hope to us. It says,

“Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me.”

This verse indicates God’s commitment to us and how important he values our relationship. He is keenly aware of the obstacles in our life.

I declare that I will be prosperous.

Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV) says,

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

This verse was my lifeline throughout the intense battle with scrupulosity and depression, and it gave me a glimpse of hope.

God can turn the dry places in our lives into fertile and prosperous places. Contrary to scrupulous beliefs, God desires to prosper us and make us whole in him.

Joel 2:25 (ESV) says,

“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.”

Hold on to this promise. God's Word will ultimately stand in triumph, and your soul can prosper even in the wilderness.

I DECLARE I WILL NOT WORRY.

Okay, I admit it's difficult not to worry, but as I become more aware of my Fathers' love for me, I am also learning to trust on a deeper level. God is aware of every detail in our lives and what we need.

This is why I tell you to never be worried about your life, for all that you need will be provided, such as food, water, and clothing—everything your body needs Isn't there more to your life than a meal? Isn't your body more than clothing?

Look at all the birds—do you think they worry about their existence? They don't plant or reap or store up food, yet your heavenly Father provides them each with food. Aren't you much more valuable to your Father than they?

So, which one of you by worrying could add anything to your life?

And why would you worry about your clothing? Look at all the beautiful flowers of the field. They don't work or toil, and yet not even Solomon in all his splendour was robed in beauty like one of these!

So, if God has clothed the meadow with hay, which is here for such a short time and then dried up and burned, won't he provide for you the clothes you need—you of little faith?

So then, forsake your worries! Why would you say, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

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For that is what the unbelievers chase after. Doesn't your heavenly Father already know the things your bodies require?

So above all, constantly seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly.

Refuse to worry about tomorrow, but deal with each challenge that comes your way, one day at a time. Tomorrow will take care of itself."

Matthew 6: 26-34

¹⁸"If you find that your feelings are depressed do not sit down and commiserate with yourself, do not try to work something up but—this is the simple essence of it—go directly to Him and seek His face, as the little child who is miserable and unhappy because somebody else has taken or broken his toy, runs to its father or its mother."

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

When my niece Jewel was little, she visited me wearing a Band Aid on her forehead. When I asked her what happened she said, "I have a headache". She thought a Band Aid would cure her headache. If only it were that simple to stick a Band Aids on our fore heads to heal the bruise in our minds, Band Aids on fore heads would be a common sight in this world. To seek therapy and open up about depression demonstrates courage, not weakness. Don't suffer in silence. Depression is not your fault nor is it a lack of belief.

18 <https://wordsofgrace.blog/2008/05/21/lloyd-jones-on-emotions-and-happiness/#:~:text=If%20you%20find%20that%20your,his%20toy%2C%20runs%20to%20its>

THE VOICELESS GIRL

PART 2

LOOKING OR SIGNIFICANCE

“When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.”

RALPH ELLISON

“Healing may not be so much about getting better as about letting go of everything that isn’t you—all of the expectations, all of the beliefs and becoming who you are.”

~RACHEL NAOMI REMEN



CHAPTER 6

UNWORTHY

Feelings of worthlessness and insignificance arise when an individual believes they have no value. These emotions can be debilitating and lead to a negative self-image, which leads to hopelessness and self-blame.

A distinctive feature of scrupulosity is that it undermines or devalues the quality of one's life. While carrying a secret of how dark my battle was, I was prone to draw a negative conclusion about myself. This altered me and shrunk my self-worth. Feeling unworthiness has been a recurring theme in my own life.

I would severely criticize myself for minor details and thought I needed to live up to a perfect image, which meant striving to obey the letter of the law of the religion in the church. Other people's decisions defined much of my life; even when I didn't love it, I would try to obey. Rules in the church were seen as more important to follow than teaching the value of authenticity.

Self-confidence is reduced in OCD, and people find it challenging to trust in their abilities and their environment. Therefore, the power to act confidently in the world is diminished by the illness and their anticipation of danger. Not giving in to the compulsion to pray for and about everyone and everything felt dangerous. It's like you must spot all the potential and perceived dangers. Now, this may sound absurd to someone who is not

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familiar with OCD or mental illness, but it's darn real to the sufferer.

I doubted everything that was associated with me, my faith, the way I looked, and talked. I let the intrusive thoughts and continuous doubts devalue my self-worth. I struggled to be myself, so to feel accepted I tried to fit into everyone else's mold, and when I was asked a question, I based my answers on what I guessed they wanted to hear rather than trusting and valuing my instincts or my insights. Only to find out that what I, in the first place, had in mind to say was the correct answer. I lacked self-confidence, and therefore, I was indecisive to a fault in relating to people. I acted as though my interests didn't matter because I didn't want to risk being rejected. I acted out of a wounded self-esteem and pretence that did not work for the health of my well-being.

Feelings of worthlessness and doubt made it a challenge to be motivated to pursue my goals due to the distress it caused me. Not knowing who I was and looking for a sense of who I was, I tried to outdo others and became wrapped up in competitiveness and performance, only to not find what I was looking for. When I felt overwhelmed by circumstances, I felt powerless, but I had to figure it out on my own; I felt unworthy to ask for help as that would make me a burden to someone.

I did not know how to stand up to people who teased me about my weight as a child or people who used sarcasm as a means of walking over me. Sarcasm is confusing, insulting, and hurtful. I let it intimidate me, which produced shame in me.

I didn't know that sarcastic people are often insecure or have dormant anger. It can also be social awkwardness and is a form of being dominant. It's bullying and mean. They don't think

their words are as hurtful as they are to the victim; it's humour with hostility.

I allowed myself to be used as a doormat by people rather than expressing myself, which only intensified the feelings of unworthiness in myself. Eventually, this led to resentment toward the people walking all over me with their words and actions.

I also had weak boundaries. It takes courage to establish healthy boundaries. What I tolerate, I don't change. People often don't change their behaviour towards a person unless there are boundaries.

To set boundaries, I needed to find a sense of significance that I was worth having boundaries, and it is imperative to manage these complicated beliefs of unworthiness first. I find it squeamish when people falsely represent humility in the name of unworthiness. Humility does not agree with the devil when we say we're not as good as others or degrade ourselves. Humility does not minimize our significance and our value.

Over the years as I began to embark on my healing journey, I began to align myself with a clearer sense of personal values and what I enjoy. It led to developing a healthier self-esteem and empowerment of a healthier, functional self. This was not a fast fix at all for me, but with the help of people speaking truth with compassion and love I was able to grow in self-compassion and see myself in the light of God's love. I learned the art of soaking, which is sitting in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which has been life changing.

I have a favourite quiet spot in the house or outdoors when I soak in Jesus' presence which I like to call my sanctuary. I often

play soft worship soaking music and because I love candles, I will light one. The idea is to be quiet and turn your attention to what Jesus wants to say to you. Sometimes I ask him a question and I just listen. Sometimes I hear from him and other times I don't, but that is okay too. Soaking is about training our mind to be quiet in Jesus' presence. This can be a tranquil experience.

When I have boundaries, I don't need to justify why I do something. Healthy self-esteem can make decisions without everyone's opinions and explanations. Often when I can get past myself and focus on the truth of who God says I am the noises fade away. There is enormous power in believing the truth which then can produce change and it allowed me to walk in greater freedom.

Kingdom Truth: We're Qualified

Jeremiah (in Chapter 1 ESV) had a call on his life, and it's interesting how God approached him and spoke. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (v. 5). Jeremiah was surprised that God called him out and, as expected, gave excuses as to why he couldn't do what God asked. He said, "I'm only a youth and can't speak" (v. 6).

God then said: "Do not say,

"I am only a youth"; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not fear them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.' Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the **Lord** said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." (vv. 8-10).

To enable means that we feel sorry for a person, and we do things for them that they can do; by doing things for them we stunt their growth. God did not minimize or enable Jeremiah because of the excuses he made, nor did he disqualify him because of the excuses he made. Instead, he kept speaking possibilities to Jeremiah. God believed in Jeremiah; the principles God used in Jeremiah will aid us in uncovering the confidence necessary to surpass our own sense of inadequacy. God didn't create anyone that he didn't qualify.

I had beliefs that were deceptive about my self-worth. These lies were deeply rooted and challenged me every day to deception. At the same time, I argued with the dark lies that tried to diminish and disqualify me.

These are the darkest and most hopeless voices that can speak to a person. The last thing we want is to be stripped of self-worth, which blinds us to our purpose.

It took courage and hard work to step out and challenge the dark lies that had haunted me for years. Sometimes it felt impossible and downright discouraging, but with a lot of tears, prayer, and perseverance that which had been damaged began to heal. To tear down is much faster than to build up. I needed a lifeline of hope. I was not willing to cave into being wholly diminished. My dreams and aspirations kept me from going AWOL and compelled me to get help and see a counsellor for the first time in my early twenties.

I ask myself questions when I'm prone to feeling unworthy. Who is telling me this? Is it a "truth" voice? No! Jesus has put a mark of qualification on me, on you. Our worth and value come from the Father; he counts us worthy, and we must believe it. The enemy is the voice that roars at us to disqualify us; he is the

*Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is
the true self. Every other identity is an illusion.*

BRENNAN MANNING

CHAPTER 7

IDENTITY

“The reward for conformity is that everyone likes you but yourself.”

RITA MAE BROWN

When nobody tells us the truth about ourselves, of who we are in Christ, we are vulnerable to every lie we hear. Knowing and receiving the truth of who we are grounds us in healthy identity in Christ. Two strong voices that did not tell me the truth were religion and scrupulosity; both are strongly performance-based through striving.

When your religious belief system continually ingrains a sense of sin, it can be like living with a disapproving authority figure; when judgement emerges from figures of authority or an ingrained belief system, it can bring about shame, guilt, internal turmoil, and self-hatred. Many structured belief systems present two paths: one that is entirely good and one that is entirely bad. When you fall between these two, you find yourself repeatedly engulfed in feelings of confusion, incorrectness, disorientation, shame, falseness, and self-hatred.

Religion plus religious OCD created a perfect scenario for a messed-up identity. It messed me up nicely. But rarely did it

allow me to rest in my identity. It told me that I was never enough and must strive harder. I did that exceptionally well. Striving to perform to the compulsions of OCD and religious expectations was arduous work. External factors are projections of other people, media or culture and heavily influence our self-perception.

I did not know who I was without affirmation, and I focused on what people would think of me. This was very toxic to my self-image. Because my self-image was not grounded in the truth, I had a lot of toxic shame. My faulty identity believed that I had to dress and perform a certain way and lose weight to be accepted, which created insecurities. For many years, I lived with a damaged and distorted view of who I was. Much of my identity and value was based on other people's opinions and expectations of me. I felt that I was always expected to be prim and proper. I was good at looking put together but so troubled inside. Good behaviour was more acceptable than showing vulnerability and emotions and having my own autonomy.

My image needed to be identified to function as myself; that was not based on false perceptions of performance. Not operating in God's image of myself created nothing but confusion and turmoil, and I couldn't arrive at loving who I am and who God created me to be. These false attachments were confusing. After all, they compelled me to believe falseness, that I was unworthy to live. This created hopelessness and feeling of being stuck. However, I never gave up the fight to live and to find my identity and my purpose, which is vital to finding meaning in life.

The enemy distorts where we belong through various means, and he is the author of confusion about who we are. When we fail, we tend to define ourselves as inadequate and judge ourselves; failure is part of growth and does not define us as less

IDENTITY

than, nor do our circumstances define us or the family we come from, the church we attend or don't attend, our looks-ugly or pretty, our bank account or anything shiny. When we put our identity in our job, and we lose the job, then who are we? A nobody? No, we are somebody, and we can stand tall in our own skin because of who defines us. It is God who defines us as a people made in the likeness of his own image. When he made you and me, he said. "It is very good" (Genesis 1:31 ESV).

When our fulfillment comes from what we do or things we have, we have a misplaced identity that cannot satisfy us. When we need to impress and feel we owe people something, we have stepped out of alignment with who God made us to be.

When I'm blinded to the truth that I am created in God's image, I begin to judge myself and open the door to shame and judgment of myself and others, and I project self-condemnation and guilt on the world. An example is when I am constantly critical of myself, I'm critical of others. However, I let other people off the hook sooner than myself. By embracing who I am, I will positively affect how I view others.

False identity can be portrayed differently by different people. Some people brag because they must persuade people about who they are and how good they are. Others put themselves down because they feel worthless. Both are false identities. Both are withholding the authentic "self." When we withhold who we are, we withhold and steal from ourselves and others. Our false identity keeps the focus on ourselves.

COMPARING, DEADLY!

By comparing, we examine ourselves to find differences and then draw our conclusion based on our judgement of the person or thing. Comparing was a death trap to my identity, and it can be very invasive. I thought I fell short. I had a hard time inviting people over because my house wasn't perfect. I was constantly comparing myself to other people, which led to jealousy. Envy, jealousy, and resentment are powered by making comparisons and are often the result of emotional baggage in our lives.

Proverbs 14:30 says, "A tender tranquil heart will make you healthy, but jealousy can make you sick."

Unchecked envy and jealousy can quickly escalate to harbouring ill feelings.

I spent many years looking for my identity in the wrong places by comparing, so when I believed my house defined me, I was unhappy and jealous. When we try to be others and desire what they have and do, we trespass on their land; if others want what I have, they're trespassing on my land. When I'm blinded to the truth of who I am it's not my belief at that moment of what I feel or think about myself that defines me. The only thing that defines me is who God says I am.

So, I searched to find the missing pieces of myself. I ultimately found it in the Scriptures after I developed a healthier, nontoxic relationship with Scripture and developed a trust with God. The book of Proverbs in *The Passion Translation* talks about revelation knowledge. I love these two words. When I get revelation knowledge and the eyes of my heart are opened to see the truth of God's Word it is a beautiful thing. That is where I find freedom and learn to fall in love with his Word.

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Do you have an impaired and complicated relationship with your self-image? Avoid the mask of a perfection mentality. I was striving for an ideal of myself, which has been detrimental to myself, to who I truly am. It's an expectation of myself that has been dictated by scrupulosity. A perfectionistic view of yourself is not your accurate self-image; it's a distorted one and an impossible one to be. So, I struggled for years to be someone I was not.

My identity is not a perfectionist, and I intentionally work at removing that mask by reminding myself of who I am and who I want to be. I want to be the best and healthiest me that I was created to be. Some days it's easier to be unmasked than other days. But there is nothing more I desire than total freedom which is an ongoing work. The desire for approval by God and others and the fear of disapproval kept me covered up by hiding behind the masks. It is like dying a slow death.

As I grow in a rooted identity in Christ, I do not envy others as much. What I once wished I was or could do that someone else did, I realize, was an insecurity of not knowing who I was. All I was looking for was significance. You are enough just as you are; that includes your looks, your body type, and any judgement you hold against yourself about the aspects you don't love about yourself.

To destroy illusions, we must hear and receive the truth. The self struggles for definition and authenticity. Lack of self makes us anxious and insecure. What makes you feel alive? Give life to self, which can be restored by being compassionate with ourselves and through the blood of Jesus Christ and embracing the truth of who he says you are.

THE VOICELESS GIRL

We must grieve the false identity that we've masked through various means and replace it with an identity that is rooted in truth.

You formed my innermost being, shaping my intricate inside and my intricate outside, and wove me together in my mother's womb.

I thank you, God, for making me so mysteriously complex!

Everything you do is marvellously breathtaking.

It simply amazes me to think about it!

How thoroughly you know me, Lord!

You even formed every bone in my body when you created me in the secret place; carefully, skilfully you shaped me from nothing to something.

You saw who you created me to be before I became me!

Before I'd ever seen the light of day, the number of my days you planned in your book.

Every single moment you are thinking of me!

How precious and wonderful to consider that you cherish me constantly in your every thought!

O God, your desires toward me are more than the grains of sand on every shore!

When I awake each morning, you're still with me.

Psalm 139:13-18

Many people struggle with their sense of identity, often driven by a need to belong and feel significant. These false identities may seem appealing, but they fail to provide the genuine purpose and meaning we seek. I had difficulty tapping into my purpose because my identity was off-kilter.

These are losses that I needed to grieve, and I needed to reclaim what scrupulosity, religion, and people took away. They also needed exposure so I could change what distorted my identity. When I discovered and embraced who God says I am, I began to walk in freedom. Only Jesus died for us, and only he can set us free from sin; but that doesn't mean that we walk in freedom in every area of life. Being grounded in my identity in Christ empowers me to walk in freedom. That's what the world is looking for, for what's inside of me, and that's how I bring light into the world. I have a light in me that I need to let shine. This is my identity and my purpose. This is your identity and your purpose also.

“It’s not the situation that makes us unhappy; it’s our thoughts about our situation. Don’t believe everything you think.”

FIONA CHILDS

CHAPTER 8

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Emotional scars create blind spots in our perception.

Cognitive distortions are thoughts that are not based on reality and contort the internal filters that fuel misery, anxiety, and ill feelings toward self. It is rooted in self-blame, judgment, and shame. If things were not black and white, which they rarely are, I would jump to fearful conclusions about a situation, thinking it's hopeless because we base our assumptions on an event of the past.

Looking through my lens as a child in Belize, I see it was a hard place to live. Cognitive distortions were errors in my thinking that distorted how I saw myself and the world around me. In other words, they are ways of thinking that aren't based on evidence. Scrupulosity distorted my view of people. My perspective was blinded and extremely narrow as a child, I thought that everyone in the church community experienced the inner turmoil and the doubts that I did, so I projected my experience as everyone else's experience. This is something I've needed to grieve because a healthy perspective was stolen from me. What I thought was reality for them was not. It is learning to see people differently than how I used to see them. It discoloured the truth about people, and me. My lens needed cleaning; it needed healing. When I lacked cognitive harmony despite making the most logical decision or assumption I could

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in the given situation or circumstance it took a mental toll on me.

Cognitive distortions took my thought processes too far from reality. When I feared that one of my siblings would jump out the window to commit suicide, I took the intrusive thought to a place that was not reality for them. The cognitive distortions caused me a lot of fear. My thoughts were rooted in self-blame, judgement, and shame which produced toxic perceptions that needed reframing to experience healthy emotions.

If you have OCD of any subtype or live with mental health symptoms, you may notice that cognitive distortions often tend to cloud your perception. We often doubt our perception and lack confidence in our cognitive processes and decision-making, which keep us from taking risks or moving forward.

I lived with an absence of trust; living in a state of emergency is like sleeping with one eye open to prevent danger from intruding. Sometimes, when I have a lot going on, my nervous system goes on overload, and when the nervous system gets overstimulated, I'm prone to become hypervigilant and vulnerable to the environment around me; I can quickly get emotionally involved in other people's pain and chaos, feeling that I need to rescue them. This sets me up for burnout and the feeling that I have nothing more to offer.

This distorts self-worth; our value does not come from do, do, do, or carrying other people's pain that we were never meant to put on ourselves. As much as we care about people, we have no right to put them on our backs and carry them. I needed to set healthy boundaries to prevent me from constant burnout.

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

I was a rescuer with a saviour complex who had trauma and a high degree of responsibility growing up. Rescuers have a knack for seeing the vulnerable and trying to rescue and take on the burdens and responsibilities of other people. When my siblings began leaving home and became independent, I felt lost, my self-worth and my identity took a hit, and there was a shortage of people, whom I was dependent upon for my sense of value, to rescue in my world. They were not mine to rescue, and they were very capable individuals, but subconsciously, I needed them to be needed so I did not lose myself.

This distortion needed healing. God has not called us to be God or the Holy Spirit; we were never meant to be rescuers. My value is not dependent on my need to rescue and how many people I can rescue.

By healing and embracing our identity, we unlock the potential to fulfil our purpose. I want to die embracing who I am and having lived knowing my purpose. From the moment we are born, we have a purpose, but we often find ourselves searching for it because we are unsure of where we fit in the grand design of life. All of us are equipped with exactly what is required to be successful in life. We can learn from others but never become them or be dependent on others for a sense of value.

Be true to yourself and let God reveal himself through your distinctive personality. Give other people the gift of being themselves, and do not compare them to someone else. There is no greater joy than being our authentic selves; that is also where we will be influential in helping other people. Imitate God in love only!

The tragedy is when we channel our efforts into others and attempt to mimic their behaviour rather than embracing our

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own uniqueness, all in the pursuit of proving ourselves. We are somebody when we are all by ourselves; we can stand tall in our own skin. When we do not know who we are, we give value to the wrong things, and we fight to defend ourselves so other people will see our worth. When we know our value, we do not make people less important, nor do we need to compete. It matters that I know who I am; my value is not based on what I have or what I don't have.

I love becoming who I am! This was not the case for most of my life, as I did not know who I was or my purpose. I kept asking the purpose question: Why am I here? I wanted success; I knew that I was made for more, but I didn't know how to achieve the success that was built into me. I was stuck and lived below my potential. But when God created me, I came fully equipped. God wants to show himself through us. He said in:

John 14:12,

“I tell you this timeless truth: The person who follows me in faith, believing in me, will do the same mighty miracles that I do—even greater miracles than these because I go to be with my Father!”

When we tap into God's purpose for us, our dreams sometimes seem too big, and we are afraid of our own dreams. Culture tells us who we should be, but they don't know who we are, so they don't have the right to tell us who to be, and I have no right to believe what culture says. The culture is not my Creator; therefore, if I believe what culture wants me to be, I accept a lie, and I lose my authentic self. Culture is very strong at telling us to imitate someone else by controlling us which leads to an identity crisis and a fight within. We can make a

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

difference in this world when we use our gifts that are uniquely given to each one of us.

God's marvellous grace imparts to each one of us varying gifts and ministries that are uniquely ours. So, if God has given you the grace-gift of prophecy, you must activate your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesy.

If your grace-gift is serving, then thrive in serving others well. If you have the grace-gift of teaching, then be actively teaching and training others.

If you have the grace-gift of encouragement, then use it often to encourage others. If you have the grace-gift of giving to meet the needs of others, then may you prosper in your generosity without any fanfare. If you have the gift of leadership, be passionate about your leadership. And if you have the gift of showing compassion, then flourish in your cheerful display of compassion.

Romans 12:6-8

A good question to ask ourselves. What are the triggers that cause me to question my identity when negative emotions are the response to what someone says? When I feel bossed around or when I feel cornered, I cringe, and my emotions can easily become resentful. So, my identity is weak in this area. Some people need to have the last word, which is a sensitive area for many. What emotions rise within you when you encounter these people?

Knowing your identity in Christ makes you feel unbreakable because no matter what people throw at you, you know how strong you are in Christ, and that's all that matters.

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We stumble over ourselves about the false view of who we are when we walk in darkness. God's truth can set us free, and when we let truth soak into all the dry places of false identity, God's grace can open to us to be all we can be. God, teach me your ways so I can manifest you in a deep and meaningful way that is life-giving to others and myself.

We must set our worth on something immovable-God!



“Hope is the last thing ever lost.”

ITALIAN PROVERB

“You are not lazy, unmotivated, or stuck. After living your life in survival mode, you are exhausted. There’s a difference.”

NAKEIA HOMER

CHAPTER 9

HOPE AND HEALING

*A*s I was writing this book, I had this dream that was anything but restful during a night of tossing and turning. There was a giant garbage dump, like a landfill, and I was told to rummage through it to find all the missing pieces of myself. This was so I could hold each piece and look at it head-on for God to heal all of me. I took each challenge, pain, or hurt, looked at it, and addressed each piece. I took action to heal each piece as I found it. Then I woke up.

Denial is a coping mechanism and short-term relief from painful realities. It escalates stress and anxiety by preventing us from addressing each piece of ourselves that we find in the rubble. Running from pain or suppressing it will deepen the wound until we hit a wall. Our pain now has imprisoned us and moves into our body to do mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual damage.

Healing is a process. It is like peeling an onion, layer by layer, pain by pain, tear by tear. Each layer tells a part of our story, our pain, and the hang-ups we developed due to an unhealed wound we thought we could hide from and would someday just disappear. Each untreated wound creates a layer of the onion. Healing our wounds hurts as we face them head-on, but the only way is through.

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The enemy of seduction lies in seducing us to lesser things than the life we are invited to live through Jesus, who died for us to become alive in him. I have lived under the weight of a dark shadow of hopelessness that kept me from thriving. However, I had a strong belief that if what God said in his Word was true, I would not stay stuck. I pressed in and tenaciously fought for what I believed my Father had for me.

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the many Scriptures I held on to. *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (ESV).

Sincere hope is determined by who stands with us.

How can we have hope and persevere in the face of difficulties, in the storm clouds of life with little prospect of success? Hope is the anticipation of good and the expectation of it happening. Hopelessness has no expectation of good or success and it feels like there is no resolution. Hopelessness is full of lies and fear-based religion feeds the lies of hopelessness by telling us to perform and yet we never arrive to the standard of expectation.

Psalm 42:5 says, “So then, my soul, why would you be depressed? Why would you sink into despair? Just keep hoping and waiting on God, your Savior. For no matter what, I will still sing with praise, for you are my saving grace!”

A few years ago, as I was sitting and soaking in God’s presence, I heard my Father God say, “You always wanted to live.” This came as a surprise and a big relief to me, and it clarified how damaging the intrusive thoughts can be. It became clear to me at that moment that I always fought to live during the times when intrusive thoughts threatened suicide. These were not my thoughts, but I didn’t know that, so the fear was intense, and I

felt utterly guilt ridden for struggling with suicidal thoughts. I choose to live now with a lot more hope. That's partly why I'm writing this book. I have a voice now. Scrupulosity or religious OCD and religion stole my voice and distorted my vision of a hope-filled reality.

My source of provision was an encounter with Jesus, entering a relationship through authentic and honest experiences with Him, who is the Prince of Peace. We are all on a search to fill our emptiness. The goal isn't to avoid this world but to connect with our Father and experience life in his kingdom that we have access to. A lack of understanding of God's kingdom and who I was, left me vulnerable to lies about my position and placement in Christ. Hopelessness does not live in the kingdom realm. I was often more afraid of what the devil could steal than the trust I had in God that he would keep me safe and prosper my soul.

That is where I find hope. Because Jesus lives inside me, hope also resides in me because he is HOPE. Hope is a new language that my soul continues to learn to speak through the difficulties of my journey with the intrusive thoughts coming and going, but I can recognize them and not treat them like they are mine. Hope rises when I realize that I do not need to stay in victimization of the intrusive thoughts; they don't have to deprive me of life.

Matthew 24:13 says, "But keep your hope to the end and you experience life and delivery."

I do not believe that this talks only about dying and going to heaven. While we are on earth, he wants us to experience delivery and hope. Jesus is our ultimate hope, and we are to be an extension of Jesus hands, feet, and voice to others.

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Proverbs 16:24 says,

“Nothing is more appealing than speaking beautiful, life-giving words. For they release sweetness to our souls and inner healing to our spirits.”

The failure to address your emotional trauma may cause you to hurt people who had no part in your injuries. To heal, I had to stop minimizing and denying my pain and accept my humanity. The issues that we do not address cannot be healed. Articulating my own feelings and thoughts has been a challenge, but as I lean in, gradually, practice by practice, it becomes better.

God’s grace for us cannot be earned; it is undeserved favour that God extends to us. This was a difficult concept for me to learn. It is easier to extend grace to others than it is to myself. Scrupulosity does not let you off the hook by extending grace to yourself. Grace and self-compassion are two huge components missing when suffering from scrupulosity. It is an absence of grace where striving never ceases. It is a persistent feeling of anxiety, guilt, and uncertainty as your consistent companion. Having compassion meant I had to learn to understand myself. For most of my life, I beat myself up over everything that I did or did not do. I did not understand what grace was, and self-compassion was not on my radar. Instead of grace and compassion, I let guilt in. Things started to change when I became aware and mindful of my struggles and responded to myself with compassion, kindness, and support in times of difficulty.

By practicing self-compassion, I accept the best and the worst of myself. I don’t need to scold myself for my humanness, and then I am able to align myself with how my Father God sees me and receive the unmerited favour of his grace. Why would I speak less of myself than what God says about me?

To practice grace and self-compassion I needed to learn to be kinder towards myself and press the mute and volume buttons when voices in my head played negative, repetitive music. This has and continues to heal the hardness and harshness of how I related to myself in the past. It is also imperative not to condemn ourselves when we have fallen short. God never condemns us. He calls us to himself with unconditional love and without judgment. Some people talk as though God is sin-focused which is despondent-focused, but he is love-focused, and that is hope and joy-focused.

I love the story of Elijah. This is a story of compassion and grace. Elijah was terrified after a victory where he killed false prophets and Ahab told his wife Jezebel what he had done. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah that she wanted him dead too. So, he fled into the desert, where he prayed for the Lord to take his life.

“Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”

He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”

So, he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.”

1 Kings 19:5-8 (NIV)

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God did not scold Elijah when he was discouraged and wanted to die. In a dark moment, God showed up and sent an angel to strengthen him with food for the journey. Food is like a universal language of love when words are insufficient.

Hebrews 4:15-16 says that we are not alone when we face difficulties, and it encourages us that Jesus also has gone through every human form of suffering and is able to identify with us.

“He understands humanity, for as a man, our magnificent King-Priest was tempted in every way just as we are, and conquered sin. So now we draw near freely and boldly to where grace is enthroned, to receive mercy’s kiss and discover the grace we urgently need to strengthen us in our time of weakness.”

Grieving what scrupulosity has stolen has been an important part of my healing and continues to be, to this day. The good news is that you can be healed from trauma and religious OCD. We do not have to stay stuck. Grace can heal you of all that has been taken. I am not a victim!

¹⁹Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of psychological treatment. Psychological issues are in part based on faulty ways of thinking and patterns of unhelpful behaviour and instead CBT focuses on the here and now. CBT gave me tools on how to stay in the present, to calm my mind and relax the body. It has helped me to move through uncertainties with less anxiety.

In my twenties I went for counselling, but neither myself nor the counsellors knew that I had religious OCD. I did not dare to

19 <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/cognitive-behavioural-therapy#:~:text=CBT%20is%20a%20structured%2C%20time,reactions%20that%20cause%20them%20difficulty>.

say anything about the intrusive thoughts to anyone. I thought that was too horrible to mention, and I would be seen as a despicable Christian. My first counsellor Cindy left a lasting impact on me. She extended compassion, love, and hope to me and challenged my thinking, and this is where my view of God began to change. However, coming to terms that God is a God of love and grace took a long time.

It is productive to set limits for myself on how often I allow myself to do something. For example, if I prayed once, then I can choose to not give in to the compulsive repetitious behaviour of rumination over my prayer. When the intrusive thoughts come, I remind myself that they are not my thoughts. It is OCD speaking. The more I pay attention to these thoughts, the more intense they grow. I like to ask myself if these thoughts sound like Jesus. Jesus does not suck life out of me; he is the giver of life and freedom. He is not a ruthless dictator that misrepresents God's character.

Like other things in life, relapse is normal. It is not because of sin or that you weren't good enough as a person or as a Christian. Life is a twisty, winding road, and so is scrupulosity. Sitting back, relaxing, and saying I am completely over this struggle is unrealistic. While I've experienced much freedom and healing, I continually need to guard my heart and mind and give careful attention to the ongoing management of the disease. The relapse I sneaks up on me, and the intensity of it varies.

Sometimes I need to retrace my steps-in this case, my thoughts-and discover where I got triggered. Be honest, do not minimize and say, "Oh, but this shouldn't bother me" or "What's wrong with me?" There is nothing wrong with you.

MY TRIGGERS

Triggers can come from added stressors, sometimes it might even be the anticipation of exciting things. Especially if they are out of your normal routine, this can cause a degree of anxiety and therefore throw you off. I do well to prepare for events that will trigger me, both positive and negative, both physically and emotionally. Anytime there is an overload of stimuli it can cause added fatigue and stress and send triggers to where I am vulnerable. Knowing my limits and setting boundaries for myself like modifying expectation, learning to be aware of my triggers, and avoiding comparison is important to lessen potential setbacks.

Negative stressors depend on the individual's traumatic and negative past experiences and the repeat sensations that keep coming back when under increased stress, and then the triggers go off. The Bible talks about the renewing of your mind. This means to reshape old thinking and thought patterns so that when events come that trigger us, we can believe what God says about us rather than what the anxiety tells us. Anxiety gives us the worst scenario and shows no mercy. Renewing the mind isn't a one-time thing. It's a daily practice for the maintenance of our minds to guard against-in this case, our triggers-so they lose their strength or effectiveness.

Feeling a great amount of responsibility is a huge trigger for me. What has been learned well takes more time to unlearn. I was taught to be responsible at a very early age which I took very seriously, and I took that and made myself responsible for everyone else in the universe. This is a disaster burnout waiting to happen and it did several times. This taught me to say no and not feel guilt, (except on the occasion I still feel a little guilt). In religion, in society and especially in our first-world culture

our worth is often measured by how much we do and what we can accomplish. Rest is often viewed as lazy, but rest is crucial and who is to judge our need for rest that our minds and bodies beg for? We all need to run our own race at our own pace, and remember life is not a competition.

Hebrew 12:1 says,

“As for us, we have all of these witnesses who encircle us like clouds. So we must let go of every wound that has pierced us and the sin we so easily fall into. Then we will be able to run life’s marathon race with passion and determination, for the path has been already marked out before us.”

We often tend to be more concerned about running a rat race and keeping up appearances than respecting the limitations of an overloaded schedule. It is important to realize that you can control how much you take on and not allow life to dictate to you. Become comfortable with running your own race that includes rest and rejuvenation. I had to learn this to cope more effectively during a time of emotional and physical burnout; eventually I realized that I can, and I need to say no, and if I can’t say no, it is on me, and I can’t blame others.

Our culture, circumstances, and everyday challenges pound us into believing untruths, and we act like they have absolute power over us. But we can control how we want to respond and not allow them to control us, leading to distraught living. Our minds have been conditioned to think and react a certain way; we need to recondition our minds and reactions to truths and not illusions.

Romans 12:2 says to,

“Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes.”

Every broken area of our life can be healed. Grace and self-compassion allow us to thrive, not strive. The key to combating the OCD voices is with truth—the truths of the Scriptures. Faith takes what is appropriately mine without explanations or guilt. I am not subject to believe everything that anxiety and OCD speak to me. Instead, learn to hear God’s voice and his tone. It helps me to I ask. Does this voice speak love, hope, joy, and clarity? If not, it is not God’s voice speaking.

Do not choose defeat; it crushes your hope. Press into the resurrection power living in us. The journey to freedom can seem exhausting, dark, and hopeless. Do not give up or freeze in the face of hopelessness. Love walks ahead of you despite the suffering. God embraces us in the messy places of our lives. No valley that we go through changes the truth. We can trust God enough to control our situation and he will use it to the fulfilment of his designed purpose in us. Do not allow your circumstances to minimize you or define you. When you face obstacles, do not get discouraged because God is sovereign over your obstacles.

Encapsulated emotions scream to be released. If we hide them, we suppress negative emotions like anger, depression, and sadness. If we put them aside, one day, they will show up in our bodies. Our bodies absorb all the negative emotions in some way or another. Someday, when a situation arises, our pent-up emotions will explode with people who are not in any way guilty. That is the cost of being a victim. When I let others make

decisions for me, I feel like the victim. Ask yourself what you will do in each situation and in this problem so that you don't fall prey to and play the victim. It is helpful to journal about these situations. Writing down your thoughts and feelings helps you to understand them more clearly, and you will give less power to rumination. It is like confronting your brain, and it helps you to process your thoughts more effectively.

When we encapsulate positive emotions, it is like living on a lonely island all by ourselves with no one to share our happy moments with. Sharing positive emotions with others creates feelings of being valued and builds relationships. It impacts our happiness and well-being through connection with other people. Love is the strongest positive emotion. Love allows us to know others more deeply, and it allows others to know us. That is what we as humans long for.

People who are legitimately hurt may stay in victimization mode for a while in order to cope, but over time it becomes learned behaviour and leads to a sense of entitlement. Staying there stunts a person's growth and who they could become if they would let go of the victim mentality. When they take accountability, they become empowered individuals. Their productivity and relationships improve.

We were not born victims. We have the capacity to thrive when we step out of victimization as Romans 8:37 says,

“Yet even in the midst of all these things, we triumph over them all, for God has made us to be more than conquerors, and his demonstrated love is our glorious victory over everything!”

If you have mental barriers that keep you from living your purpose, from the things that you desire, listen to the lies that

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you believe, and ask God to show you the truth regarding the stronghold of the lie. The key to combating scrupulosity and lies is the voice of truth. The lie can be replaced by scripture or something that you know is truth, not illusion.

The enemy is the father of lies. The enemy's goal is to kill and destroy. In our weakest moments, he whispers lies to us. The enemy's goal is to lodge the lies in our minds and make us ineffective for God. When we act on deception, it becomes reflective in our behaviour. The enemy says. "Don't put your hopes up"; this will never happen. The Holy Spirit can co-exist with mental health problems and with the struggles in your life. Know that your mental health problem does not reflect who you are.

Proverbs 17:22 describes the human heart so well. It says,

"A joyful, cheerful heart brings healing to both body and soul. But the one whose heart is crushed struggles with sickness and depression."

In Psalm 34:18 the Lord sends a comforting message to those whose hearts are broken. It says,

"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed" (NLT).

I have learned what it means to heal, and I have learned how painful it can be to revisit difficult places and shameful memories. I have learned to move forward and upward from darkness that nearly consumed me. It takes longer to heal a broken bone than it takes for the bone to break. So, with our emotional pain and trauma, it takes time to heal. I often wished for a quick fix so all my emotional distress would

PART 3

CROSSROADS

*“Our crossroads in life are crucial junctures in the
unfoldment of our life purpose.”*

SUSANN TAYLOR SHIER

*“People will hurt you, but God will heal you. People will
humiliate you, but God will magnify you. People will
judge you, but God will justify you. Have Faith!”*

BIBLEGODQUOTES.COM



CHAPTER 10

CHURCH AND FAITH

When I was fifteen years old my parents decided to move back to Canada. Saying goodbye to friends was difficult. The first day of our trip, in a pickup truck and camper I felt like my heart would break in half. The first night we got a hotel in Mexico, and I had my first memorable answer to prayer. I was very distraught, everyone was sound asleep, so I knelt beside my bed to pray. I do not remember hitting the pillow, I fell asleep instantly. This was an impressionable moment in my early Christian life.

Church and faith began to look a bit different here in Canada; sadly though, it was often confusing, and the high expectations to perform continued. The scrupulosity increased into my teens and early twenties.

I laid in bed many nights with a deep hopelessness. Intrusive thoughts of suicide scared me, and I felt guilty that suicide would even be on my mind I feared that my siblings all felt the deep turmoil I was feeling and was afraid that one of them would jump out of the bedroom window.

I was trying to feel my faith and have certainty that I was not doomed to hell. I tried to solve distressing thoughts about religion, but no matter how hard I tried, the thoughts would not go away. When I started going to church with my parents,

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I heard remarks by the preacher that I found highly distressing, and those would haunt me for an exceptionally long time. I, to this day, remember them, but they do not have a hold on me any longer. My perception of God was severely misled, tainted, and anxiety-driven at an early age by the belief that God is more about behaviour and punishment than he is about wanting a relationship with me even when I don't perform perfectly.

We had communion several times a year in the church; this created great turmoil for me. There was a high emphasis that we were to examine ourselves and be right with God and men. As a scrupulous sufferer, I took this very seriously and to the extreme. Religious OCD and anxiety increased during this time. It was taking a chance, hoping I was good enough to take communion, but if not, I would be doomed.

With scrupulosity, our understanding of God conflicts with our knowledge of the truth, and we have a severe misunderstanding of God's character, subsequently affecting our perception of safety and protection.

When I grew up, we only read the King James Version of the Bible, this was deemed to be the only acceptable version other than the German version, since the teaching was legalistic, I interpreted this version of the Bible through the eyes of a legalistic God and this version triggers accusations and condemnation. Every passage I read reminded me of judgement. The church culture had rules, regulations, and high expectations regarding how one should live and behave. This did not create a safe place for transparency and instead encouraged masking under performance. High religiosity added to my internalizing and masking of what was happening inside.

Scrupulosity's thought process is like raking leaves when the wind blows; every time you clear an area, the wind blows more leaves over, and you do it all over again, and again and again. All your work is done in vain and never gets completed. So it is with religious OCD: as soon as you think you have cleared one doubt away, there is another doubt. As soon as you confess one sin, it reminds you of another sin. The accusations against the sufferer are forever reminding them that they are not redeemable unless they take care of one more thought, of one more sin. These sins are false sins. This obsession comes at a significant cost to the body and the mind. They leave you tired, stressed, and exhausted from the rumination.

Rituals and rules are misplaced values that keep us busy performing, and they keep us powerless. Religion is like a competition; there's rivalry, contention, and opposition, and some sects believe that they are better than the others. Hence, all the divisions in the church in my younger years added to the turmoil amidst the already existing storm of scrupulosity. One friend told me that she had to leave the church because she wanted to go to heaven. This had me worried to no end. I wanted to go to heaven, too. Did that mean I would leave only to exchange it for more stringent rituals and regulations? Scrupulosity will promise God that I will make sacrifices even if it means embarrassment to make it to heaven. I told God multiple times I would do whatever he asked me to, and yet there was never clarity, just an overloaded conscience and a turbulent mind.

I questioned if the intrusive thoughts were the Holy Spirit. Me questioning triggered an obsessive search for that thought or feeling. It is common to be triggered by a sermon and ruminate over what was said and wonder, "Am I guilty?" I struggle to grasp

the obscure and want certainty over a minor issue that someone without scrupulosity would not be alarmed or obsessed about.

If there is a greater emphasis on rituals and regulation than love, we will have trouble reading the Bible properly and we will have a misunderstanding of God's character—therefore the true message of Jesus is misrepresented.

Although I knew that this was not true, I still believed that I was responsible for the world's salvation, which was brutal and a misguided perception of my responsibility. This is a blown-up cognitive distortion of religious OCD. One day, God asked me the question, "Do you think I'm not capable of this person's salvation?" It is in moments like these when God spoke to me that I found relief, trusted God, and grasped the freedom to let go of misconceptions and the heaviness of my misguided responsibility.

When a struggle persists over a long time, people tend to get resentful. In my case, it was towards the religious community. I expressed it through what I thought was anger. However, it was just hurt disguised as anger. It appeared free expression had to fit into a particular box and anything outside of that was not appropriate or mature. My experience with religion and legalism was that it could not give the hope for which I was searching. Hopelessness breeds contempt because it feels that there is no solution:

In scrupulosity, the predominant voice of the dictations is drowning out and diminishing the authentic voice. It is devaluing and gives room for self-hatred and hatred towards others-towards others because they were too dependent on me, and that added to feelings of overwhelm. This is because I didn't have a voice to value myself enough to set boundaries.

For me to understand kingdom values and know that God's character is good my heart had to heal. Then I can reflect in words that are life-giving towards others and toward oneself. In Proverbs 18 we find revelation knowledge on how our tongue can bless or hurt others and the effects that it will have on ourselves.

“Words of wisdom are like a fresh, flowing brook—

like deep waters that spring forth from within,

bubbling up inside the one with understanding.” (v.4)

“A fool has a big mouth that only gets him into trouble,

and he will pay the price for what he says.” (v.7)

“Listen before you speak,

for to speak before you've heard the facts will bring humiliation.” (v.13)

“There are two sides to every story.

The first one to speak sounds true until you hear the other side

and they set the record straight.” (v.17)

“Sharing words of wisdom is satisfying to your inner being.

It encourages you to know

that you've changed someone else's life.

Your words are so powerful

that they will kill or give life,

and the talkative person will reap the consequences.” (vv. 20-21)

I came to a crossroads regarding my faith when I was in my early twenties. We had another church split that was very painful. I always held it together, but this time I hit rock bottom, and I began to question church, faith and dare I say God. Church seemed like a charade. In my mind I had three choices. The first was to leave God and faith and to live in sin, after all what did church and God have to offer me? Nothing that seemed appealing at the time. The second was to end it all, hope was minimal to say the least. The third option was to get help outside the religious community. I chose to get help, for which today I am grateful. Going for counselling opened a whole new view of God and what being a Christian could look like. I was loved and accepted despite being broken. I gained hope and the courage to move forward in my faith.

Proverbs 20:30 says, “...Painful experiences do wonders to change your life.” God called me to rise to a higher altitude above my circumstances at this crossroads. He shone his light into the innermost parts of my being, into the dark and blind spots that needed healing.

When my faith was at a crossroads, it was my first time seeing a counsellor, so I did not know what to expect. I made sure that I wrote down all my issues in case she would deal with all of them in one hour. I had twelve problems written down. Little

did I know that I would see her consistently for a long time. I brought my Bible to the counsellor's office; how did I know that it was not a glorified Bible study where I got fixed in an hour? This had me worried. She must have been puzzled as to why I brought the Bible, because at the end of the session she asked if I wanted to share anything from the Bible. This was the beginning to healing my faith. I was not an easy client as she had to probe personal information out of me. I was significantly suppressed and did not know how to express my feelings.

We all face dark alleys of the soul. It is here we discover who we are and the hidden resources of ourselves and the faithful hand of Jesus. When you walk down a dark and frightening alley, and it looks like all hope is gone, someone who knows your name is there with you. Jesus is his name. Love reveals dark, blind areas in our lives so we can be healed and walk in freedom unshackled from past chains that kept us prisoners.

The road to spiritual recovery from scrupulosity is not an easy one, nor is it fast. Despite not knowing that I suffered from scrupulosity, there were people in my life who were compassionate and influential in my recovery and continue to be to this day. Courage is to seek help and not find your way alone through the dark alley of scrupulosity. Asking for help might be the bravest thing you have done in life.

RESTITUTION-, MAKING THINGS RIGHT.

I had misconceptions about what forgiveness and forgiving meant, and religious OCD adds another layer of complexity to the whole matter of forgiving and asking for forgiveness from God. I have struggled obsessively about whether I forgave others or not, and how could I know that I had genuinely

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forgiven? I also confessed my perceived sin regularly and asked for forgiveness from God. But as soon as I confessed, I knew that I would immediately feel guilty about another issue. So, the cycle of asking for forgiveness and repeatedly telling God sorry as soon as I had less-than- perfect thoughts towards somebody was a continual battle. These were fearful confessions driven by anxiety and spiritual perfectionism.

Instead of being discouraged when we have fallen or sinned, we need to learn what it means to have an advocate like Jesus. When we fall, he does not strike us down and send us to hell. Even good people fall, he knows our hearts intentions. We do not need to panic when we fall. It is by justification by faith that our sins are forgiven, it is not through self-sacrificing or through compulsive confessions. We cannot muster our way to holiness.

Psalms 37:24 says, “If they stumble badly they will still survive, for the Lord lifts them up with his hands.”

The Lord is the safe keeper of our soul.



If you're living under the weight of guilt, of shame, of condemnation, you're not flourishing. You're not ruling and reigning. Scripture tells us the righteous can reign in life. You can rule and have dominion, but if you're living in shame. You're not ruling, but instead being ruled.

BRIAN HOUSTON

CHAPTER 11

RELIGIOUS LIES

*M*y lengthy struggle with scrupulosity and growing up in a highly religious culture put a deep fear in me and a mistrust for religion and many churches. Legalistic religion has twisted faith and many truths in the Scripture that keep people in darkness, bondage, and boredom; therefore, it is dead and lacks revelation knowledge of the Holy Spirit to unlock the truths of God's Word. This sucks the life out of everyone who is caught up in legalistic religion. Legalism produces self-righteousness and pride and is dependent on obedience to the rules of the law rather than personal faith through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The harshness of OCD is harmful and full of condemnation and guilt. Although the martyrdom complex is not necessarily related to scrupulosity, it added complexity to the OCD. It lacks care and minimizes oneself and possible burnout by sacrificing one's own needs for others' needs. I found it difficult to set boundaries, which harmed me.

When I set boundaries, I respect myself and others. I, among many other people, felt guilt when I began practicing self-care because of our relief that we are unworthy, and we feel it's wrong not to put others first. What is crucial to realize is that if we run on empty, we have little or nothing to offer. Self-care leads to greater productivity and helps us to be grounded.

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I lived with a poverty spirit, a religious mindset that feeds hopelessness. It is not a money issue but a spiritual issue that money cannot solve. It makes dreams and prosperity seem impossible and focuses on past failures. It also limits what we believe we can have, which can cause us to be jealous because we place ourselves on the back row of life. Sometimes, I thought everyone else got to live my dreams but me. As I see myself the way God sees me and learn about his true character and plan for me to prosper, not just in money but in the barren wastelands of my life, I began to heal and be empowered to live and claim what Christ promised me.

Roman 15:13 says, “Now may God, the inspiration and fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him. And may the power of the Holy Spirit continually surround your life with his super abundance until you radiate with hope!”

Self-condemnation is very strong among scrupulous sufferers, so when condemnation is also preached every Sunday morning in the church Jesus’s true message gets lost, and the intensity of the OCD skyrockets.

Self-condemnation pushes you deeper into despair and unworthiness. It believes a lie of being unworthy and unforgiven. It is self-focused and takes our eyes off God. There is nothing righteous about self-condemnation. This was the root of me constantly feeling despondent. I never felt like I was a good enough human being. Self-condemning thoughts steal your joy and your energy.

Condemnation is the voice of the accuser. Jesus never came to condemn; he came to set us free from sin and death through the blood he shed because of his unconditional love for everyone.

RELIGIOUS LIES

He set us free from the weight of having to perform, but religion imposes a hard taskmaster. One Evangelist that our church brought in was considered a great man of God, he warned us against believing too much that God loves us, which will lead us to sinning more. This message could not be further from Scriptural truths. Jesus's love for humanity is what took him to the cross. Having a greater understanding of the love and grace of the Father draws people to him.

In the condemning approach, you either serve God out of fear, which keeps a person hostage in twisted religion, or you turn away, wanting nothing to do with a God that you cannot measure up to. God's attitude towards us is love. When we suppress who we are and hide behind masks we search for genuine connection and honesty in relationships. The urge for authenticity arises when we conceal our true selves. Religion lacks revelation knowledge to unlock the truths of God's Word.

As God's children, we are declared free indeed! To try and measure up for God is to keep Jesus in the grave; hence, we put our hope in the grave. When we put God and people in a box that limits both God and people. Not everyone fits the same box. God is limitless and desires to give us life in abundance.

By performing we wear deceiving masks. During COVID, we all had to wear masks. We began to ask questions like, "Where did you find that mask?" Or make comments like, "I like your mask," or we'd say we need one for every outfit. Some people complained bitterly about wearing face masks. The soul mask that people wear makes a very painful way of living. Legalistic and fear-based religion is comfortable with people wearing soul masks because religion is uncomfortable with love.

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The truth in Romans 8 has been transformational in my struggle with condemnation. The fear of hell does not have dominion over me any longer because I am a kingdom Seeker and Jesus declares me free.

“So now the case is closed. There remains no accusing voice of condemnation against those who are joined in life-union with Jesus, the Anointed One.

For the “law” of the Spirit of life flowing through the anointing of Jesus has liberated us from the “law” of sin and death.

For God achieved what the law was unable to accomplish because the law was limited by the weakness of human nature.”

Romans 8:1-3

“Are you weary, carrying a heavy burden? Come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. Learn my ways and you’ll discover that I’m gentle, humble, and easy to please. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear.”

Matthew 11:28-30

SHAME

²⁰When tree roots encircle the tree's trunk the tree is being choked. It gets strangled and suffocates the tree. It cuts off the flow of food and water to the tree. Stem-girdling roots can happen above the soil, which is visible, or below the soil, which is invisible. Just as a tree can have a complicated relationship with its roots, the lies we believe have a complicated relationship with our minds. Some lies are so deep in, like the ones under the soil and under the masks that it is cutting off nutrition to our hearts and minds. Lies we believe are despairing: I think I can't get out. "Why do I believe this lie? What are the root causes of why I believe it?" Negative self-evaluation often has its roots in childhood experiences that produce shame and self-doubt.

There are people who try and control you with intimidation. The goal is to guilt you into believing them and doing what they expect you to do. This hurts. I could not stand up to people, so it caused a confused belief system with others and myself that eventually resulted in resentment and shame. The core belief is that they are better than me. I believed this about people. That was a lie that distorted the truth and stunted my growth. "Do I want to rise above? Or do I just want to know that I'm equal and valued the same?" I want to value myself and be completely free to accept the beautiful truth of myself and them, even if it means seeing the truth of how they did me wrong and believing that I deserve to walk in freedom without making excuses for them. And be able to admit without self-hatred that I have what it takes to believe the truth about people who use intimidation to control.

20 <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/girdling-roots#:~:text=A%20girdling%20root%20is%20a,of%20sap%20in%20the%20tree>

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I call lie attachments bonds that I had with people that hurt me or were unhealthy, but I thought that I had an obligation to them. I was too insecure to not feed into the anxiety to recognize toxic attachments. When I have a strong lie attachment with people, I find I hate myself for it. Often the victims will feel that they must have deserved it or it's their fault. Lies need to be exchanged for the truth.

The first lie began back in the Garden of Eden with a snake that very cunningly and artfully persuaded Eve. Unfortunately, a lot of people are very cunning at artfully wooing others to believe lies to their advantage. I don't need to be intimidated by any opposition that comes against me as it says in Philippians 1:28-30

“And then you will never be shaken or intimidated by the opposition that rises up against us. Your courage will prove to be a sure sign from God of their coming destruction. For God has graciously given you the privilege not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him. For you have been called by him to endure the conflict in the same way I have endured it—for you know I'm not giving up.”

Whether it's people or circumstances in life. Life is not a competition. It's living with courage and never giving up knowing God will never leave you or forsake you.

Proverbs 29:25 also says,

“Fear and intimidation is a trap that holds you back. But when you place your confidence in the Lord, you will be seated in the high place.”

PERFECTION AND SHAME

Religious intimidation and perfection shame a person. Religion without grace makes us believe if we don't measure up to all the expectations we have failed. Shame! Shame is a feeling of being unworthy and a heaviness about being unacceptable. What crushes the soul is more hopelessness than pain. I don't have to believe the feeling of shame. Shame is very toxic and becomes harmful when we internalize it. When we worry about what other people think there is shame attached to our identity. This can lead to negative self-talk and affect how we view ourselves. Deep shame believes that we're defective. It can show up in our bodies both emotionally and physically if not dealt with effectively. It's been a major factor in my depression.

It is powerful when God heals shame. I remember an incident when I was filled with shame from head to toe after an encounter with someone that I was very intimidated by, believing that I was not good enough for this individual. When I spoke to them, I froze; what I said was not what I meant to say. Since speaking up was already scary for me I was disappointed in myself and deeply humiliated. Later that day as I wrestled with the intense shame, I literally felt shame from head to toe.

Then God very clearly spoke to me, he said, "There is no shame" When God spoke, there was a hush, and shame had to bow. I was freed from the heaviness of shame.

We can step out of shame into our belovedness. In God's kingdom, there is no shame. We are invited to come as we are. He is love, and love cannot shame us; instead, the love of Jesus and his grace covers our shame. Shame is a barrier in how we view ourselves and what we believe about ourselves. The

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devaluation of shame is self-perceived, meaning others didn't put it on us, but we see it as that.

Perfection is greatly overrated in religion and in the world, it's messed up people's minds into a constant striving for an idealized self that would one day measure up and be perfect. That was me. Imposed perfectionism and failing to live up to that standard set me up for disappointment in myself. Labels can leave lasting shame and confine us to those labels that stunt our growth by keeping us living small. What label are you wearing that others have labelled you with or maybe you labelled yourself?

The story of the woman at the well in the Bible, in (John 4:5--30), is a beautiful story of healing shame and accepting the outcasts. Jesus was weary from a long journey and told his disciples to go into Samaria to buy food while he stayed back at the well. A Samaritan woman showed up to fetch water. She was shunned from the community because she had been married five times and was now living with a man that was not her husband. What surprised her was that Jesus, a Jew, would ask her for a drink of water. She questioned Jesus why he would ask her, a Samaritan woman for a drink? This is what Jesus replied, "If you knew who I am and the gift that God wants to give you- you'd ask me for a drink, and I would give you living waters" (v. 11). The woman found Jesus's comment strange because he had nothing to fetch water with.

The next surprise that the Samaritan woman had was that Jesus knew her past, he knew exactly how many husbands she had. The woman asked Jesus about the right place to worship. Jesus told her that the place where you worship is not important but that the worship comes from the heart. This confused her. She knew the Anointed One was coming and could tell her

everything. Jesus told her that he was the one that she is looking for. When she understood this, she ran and told the entire city that she met the man who could be the Anointed One.

That day, the Samaritan woman met Jesus, the Anointed One that she was waiting for, and she received the life-giving water that only he can give. She stepped into her belovedness in the Father and was freed from the shame of being shunned by her own people and the shame and guilt of her past. When Jesus redeems you from the shame that you have carried for many years, he does not redeem you partially; he declares you free and forgiven and the case is closed!

Religious manipulation is negotiating control over someone for your personal advantage without revealing your true intentions. This compromises the feelings of the person being manipulated. The victim is shamed if not obedient. Churches and individuals can be manipulative, often using Scripture to their advantage and not for the other person's good. It's a type of bullying. People with shame think they deserve the bad things that happen to them, or they deserve what people do to them.

To heal from shame required me to acknowledge the shame, be honest, and have the courage to meet myself from a place of my belovedness in the light of God's truth. I needed to forgive myself for taking the bait of people's tactics to shame and take advantage of me. I learned that God does not hold me in shame, and I no longer need to receive shame.

GUILT

Guilt is different from shame and condemnation. Guilt is not a bad thing, it's a response to our conscience. It's taking

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responsibility for our sins and wrongdoings. When we confess our sins and wrongdoings, we are freed from guilt. The enemy takes advantage of our sensitivity to guilt, and shame when we have done nothing to deserve it. When we have false guilt, we are being deceived and lied to by the enemy. When guilt, shame, and condemnation have weighed us down for too long we view ourselves through a heavy and distorted lens that affects how we see ourselves and how we think God sees us: unworthy.

False guilt keeps an OCD sufferer in a continual state of unease and lack of clarity that hovers over us. The voice of God comes with clarity: the enemy is the evil one that lures people into confusion, condemnation, false guilt, and shame.

The goal is to quiet the intrusive thoughts, so they are not empowered by ruminating. This requires self-compassion and grace replacing the lies with truth. We also need to accept that we are human.



“Seeds of faith are always within us; Sometimes it takes a crisis to nourish and encourage their growth.”

MYLES MONROE

CHAPTER 12

TESTS

“Now that I’m a Christian, I do have moods in which the whole thing looks improbable, but when I was an atheist, I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable.”

C.S. LEWIS

Life is unfair. Where is God when terrible things happen? And why does he allow terrible things to happen? Most of us have asked this question at some point in life. Why do some people who have suffered much suffering not give up on God and faith or remain bitter? Questioning is not rebellion or doubt; it’s part of growing when we face adversity. God is okay with big questions, and we can trust him with our questions. When we’re in a crisis, we often question our faith; this does not make anybody a bad or a weak child of God. How can we have hope and persevere in the face of difficulties, in the storm clouds of life with little prospect of success?

Scriptures give many examples of believers who endured a great deal of adversity that we can learn from. The emotional transparency of David is impressive to me, and he is a great example to us when we find ourselves in a dark or frenzied situation that seems hopeless. He was a man of intense emotions

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and felt deep despair and abandonment. Here are a few examples that portray his honest and raw emotions.

Psalm 13:1-2 says,

“I’m hurting Lord-will you forget me forever? How much longer Lord? Will you look the other way when I’m in need?”

How much longer must I cling to this constant grief? I’ve endured this shaking of my soul. So, how much longer will the enemy have the upper hand?”

In verse 6 David ends in a song of praise. He goes from grief to praise.

“I will sing my song of joy to you, the Most High, for in all of this you have strengthened my soul.”

He did not disguise his feelings behind religious masks and behind the fear of what people might think. He did not fear vulnerability with God. He expressed every raw emotion without apologizing for feeling pain or joy.

I often hid my emotions behind appropriateness and tied them up in a bow before I came to God. Feelings are not right or wrong. The Psalms illustrate emotions that I resonated with, and they taught me to be vulnerable and express my emotions to God.

Jesus is our most significant example of being resilient in suffering. Even Jesus continually went to his Father for strength to face the suffering God called him to fulfil. No one suffered as Jesus did. He took humanity’s sin and every kind of suffering we will ever face upon his shoulders, carried them to the cross, died

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for us, and rose again on the third day. Jesus defeated the devil and his power that day; the devil cannot control us if we don't let him. Jesus knew why he must be crucified and kept his focus on the end. His resurrection was his vindication.

Job, a God-fearing man, is another excellent example of a resilient Bible character in the middle of suffering. Satan, the adversary thought Job only served God because God had blessed him with much. God permitted Satan to test Job's faith, but Satan could not kill him. Job had sores all over his body; he lost his property, livestock, his seven sons and three daughters, and his wife left him. His wife, when she saw him covered in dust, asked him if he persisted in integrity and told him to curse God and die. Despite this test, Job did not walk away from God, and his faith remained strong. Faith was his only hope.

He said in Job 13:15

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;

I will surely defend my ways to his face.” (NIV)

Job's vindication was God's faithfulness to him. God blessed Job with twice as much as he had before his suffering, and Satan lost the battle.

Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:10--18 has touched me deeply and encouraged me to come with my raw emotions to God. She was questioned by Eli why she was drunk to which she replied, “No my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk no strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation” (v. 16 ESV).

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People in the Bible experienced the same emotions that I do today which I draw strength from. God never resisted them or shamed them or told them to suck it up. When I express my raw emotions of despair or sadness or anxiety to God, I gain inner strength and hope to keep going. God keeps track of my sorrows and bottles up my tears. (Psalm 56:8)

I like to watch America's Got Talent; I'm always blown away by the people that come on the stage. Many of them are there because they faced great tests in life and were resilient in their fight to overcome. Adversity has changed their perspective and appreciation for life. One gentleman was wrongly imprisoned for much of his life. His voice was awe-inspiringly powerful and conveyed a sense of unbreakable resilience. When he was asked how he could handle the injustice in prison he said he sang. Praise was his powerful weapon!

Faith is a seed that exists within each one of us. Our faith in God is the most powerful weapon that we possess which produces confidence and boldness in life. Faith is also what threatens the devil the most. Faith is our powerful protection from the enemy and its forces. God is faithful and he guards us against the evil one. When we lose faith, we lose everything. Faith is as strong as the tests it survives and becomes evident when we face tests and challenges in life.

I know people who feared that they lost their faith because of discouragement or going through a period of depression and doubt. This is what the enemy wants you to believe. Just because you go through a difficult time and fight to overcome does not mean that you lost your faith. God is the keeper of your soul; he knows the battles that we come against.

Ephesians 6:16 says,

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“In every battle, take faith as your wrap-around shield, for it is able to extinguish the blazing arrows coming at you from the evil one!”

When we are tested, it's not because we have sinned or because of demonic activity. God's strength and power is revealed in tests that we encounter. In John 9, Jesus and his disciples encountered the blind man; the disciples asked who sinned, his parents or the man. Jesus replied, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (v. 3 ESV) Jesus healed the man.

Why did I not give up on God when religion and scrupulosity dictated such a harsh and graceless God that I could not trust? I somehow knew that there was something very deceiving about my distorted views, and I was determined to see the truth about God's true character and His love for me. If faith is lost, everything is lost.

Another reason why I did not give up on my faith in God was my curiosity and my yearning for more. I somehow knew there must be more to a faith in God than my suffering with scrupulosity and how the church portrayed God and faith to be. I was looking for something that was genuine and not covered up by masking behind religion and performance. Religion didn't work for me any longer. Although my journey to healing my faith has been difficult, the concept of what it means to live in God's kingdom has been the number one healer in my life. I know and experience God's love for me at a much deeper level. This is where above anything else I seek God's heart and purposes for his glory. God has been the “good thing” in my life.

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One of the reasons I believe people give up on faith is the misplacement of the source of their faith. When the source of our faith is in people, church, or our circumstances, we will be disappointed. When you have been hurt by religion, it's easy to blame your religion and the church. Many people have gone through great disappointment in the church. The church has not always been good at convincing people that God and faith are worth fighting for, as was my experience when at the crossroads. This is why some contemplate giving up on faith. People wander astray when the importance is more about religion and legalism, where the emphasis is placed on obeying the rules rather than about loving people and teaching about God's grace and unconditional love. Without revelation knowledge, people lose sight of the focus in their faith.

There is a lot of legitimate hurt that we should not undermine. To move on and not stay victimized and blame the people and circumstances that we placed our faith in, we need to heal our faith by grieving and restructuring who we place our faith in. This is often when people press in hard and faith in God becomes their true source of hope. Our vindication is a faith that will not disappoint, and it's alive. Your faith is only as secure as what you have placed your faith in.

Since this chapter is about tests, I decided to ask others for their stories on why they didn't give up on God during their greatest times of pain and hardships. These are family or friends who have been through some very difficult and traumatic experiences. I summarized some of the answers as the responses were similar.

When we're in a crisis, we need help from the kingdom; there, we have the resources that we need in times of crisis and adversity. My son in his twenties said, "I knew nothing good would come from abandoning God. God has been the good thing in my life

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in my lowest times.” This is using the resources of the kingdom. Every obstacle we encounter in our faith journey, despite its obscurity, is accompanied by a divinely crafted solution. The crises in our lives God sees as opportunities for growth. Can God trust you and me with the tests that come our way?

This person said that she did not give up on God and her faith because her experience with Jesus was real. Sometimes, she felt like giving up, but she said she couldn't give up on the love she experienced in Jesus. Her faith was in the source that could withstand the storms of trauma and disappointments. She needed help from pastors and counsellors for support during many periods of grief she experienced throughout her life.

One person told me if a person feels that they have a purpose, it is hard to give up on faith and God, as was his experience. In his darkest times he still felt that he had a purpose to live for. Some are fortunate to have a family with values and support that aid in keeping their faith in God.

Another person said, “He is still a Christian despite the legalistic church that disappointed and hurt me deeply; I knew there was a God and Creator. The handiwork declares the works of God,” he said, which made him believe above and beyond the negativity of religion that there is a God.” He gave up on church as he grew up, and the church lost its importance to him. He finds more meaning in less conventional meetings.

At one point, as he was contemplating the whole faith thing, he found God's Word to be the only trustworthy source; any alternative did not seem as reliable or accurate as the Word of God. Because of his religious church background, he still put too much emphasis on legalism when reading the Bible, leading

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him down a dark path of wrong choices. He now has a resilient faith because of deeply experiencing God.

She experienced a great deal of tragedy in her life and questioning how God could allow this bad thing to happen, she said, “If I turn away from God, where else would I turn and then what?” The other option was worse and would take her to a darker place than she already was in.

She did not experience Christians in her life and in the church who represented God’s love well. Her faith began to heal when she embarked on a lengthy journey of restoring personal trauma, pain, and religious hurts. She found people who represented the love of God well and was moved towards that love. She began to replace religious and destructive mindsets with the truth that God loves her.

Note: the inner turmoil can be huge when you begin to restore your faith and heal from legalistic religion. The high emphasis on following and obeying the leaders in the church distorts our view of God and promotes devotion to leaders over God. This devalues personal feelings and beliefs. Essentially this creates mistrust of self, guilt, and confusion over what is truth. For example, it can feel wrong to not believe something that man-made religion has made us believe is the truth even though it is not biblical truth. As, I’ve mentioned before fear-based religion is a powerful way to control people. This is very toxic; this keeps people in bondage, suppressed and downtrodden. This not only effects people’s spiritual health but also our mental and physical health.

First Peter 5:10 says,

“And then, after your brief suffering, the God of all loving grace, who has called you to share in his eternal glory in Christ, will personally and powerfully restore you and make you stronger than ever. Yes, he will set you firmly in place and build you up.”

Second Corinthians 4:17--18

“We view our slight, short-lived troubles in the light of eternity. We see our difficulties as the substance that produces for us an eternal, weighty glory far beyond all comparison because we don’t focus our attention on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but the unseen realm is eternal.”

His presence is enough to get us through every difficulty. God wants to meet us in our pain and in your pain, God is still present. Even though God’s presence feels distant, it remains constant. Out of his presence, we do life alone. If you think the price of winning the faith fight is too high, the price of regret is higher.

THE TEST OF FORGIVENESS:

Forgiving someone that I felt had wronged me wasn’t easy, but it was essential to my healing and moving on. First, I had to know who to forgive and move out of the compulsive behaviour that was dictated by the intrusive thoughts and the persistent false guilt. When God reveals sin, it comes with clarity that he will not confuse us with false guilt. To forgive I needed to understand what forgiveness is and what it is not. I do not forgive for the other person’s sake; I forgive so I can walk in freedom and in obedience to God. When I don’t forgive, I carry other people on my back, and that is a heavy burden. Imagine if I don’t forgive three people and what weight that is on my

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body. That would drain anybody of their energy, and so does unforgiveness; it depletes us of our joy and peace. One thing that has been difficult for me to learn is when I know that I have forgiven, and the feeling disappears I need to stand on the truth rather than allow my feelings to dictate to me. The enemy wants nothing more than for me to live in unforgiveness and make me believe that I did not forgive.

Other misconceptions I had about forgiveness were that I should not feel the pain of the hurt if I forgive or that I condone what has been done to me by forgiving. It is not forgiving and forgetting, however the hurt or the memory can fade away in time when I don't keep the hurt so close to my heart.

Forgiveness heals. Forgiveness does not let the offender off the hook or relieve them of their sin and wrongdoing. Forgiving someone does not make them free of the guilt; it sets us free. It releases us from resentment and the heavy weight of unforgiveness. So, I choose to forgive!

PART 4

RUNNING INTO FREEDOM

“The greatest fear in the world is the opinion of others, and the moment you are unafraid of the crowd, you are no longer a sheep; you become a LION. A great roar arises in your heart...the roar of freedom.”

OSHO

I got married to Michael in my thirties, we have two sons, Robert, and Andrew. My husband was not raised in the same culture as I was. The only thing that he knew about Mennonites was that he thought the men were supposed to have short hair. He prefers longer hair. But this is not true for all the Mennonites across the board. There are many sects.

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At this stage in life, I had experienced some healing, but I still did not know that the monster in my life had a name. I struggled with what my role was in a marriage with the stringent teaching from my past that women are to be submissive because I was quite independent and lived on my own before I got married. As my identity became more grounded in the truth of who I was I did less striving to fit a certain mold as a wife. Michael always allowed me to be who I wanted to be and to pursue healing and freedom.

Several years ago, I went for religious trauma counselling, and I still did not have a name to the missing piece of my life that I struggled to find. I only discovered a couple years ago that the intense struggle was called scrupulosity, or religious OCD. This discovery escalated my healing. I had to address and face the issues of the disease. I admitted that I have OCD and that it is a mental health issue.



“Hold fast to dream, For if dreams die, Life is a broken-winged bird, that cannot fly”.

ANGSTON HUGHES

CHAPTER 13

IMAGINE

“At that time the disciples came to ask Jesus, “Who is considered to be the greatest in heaven’s kingdom realm?” Jesus called a little one to his side and said to them, Learn this well: Unless you dramatically change your way of thinking and become teachable like a little child, you will never be able to enter in. Whoever continually humbles himself to become like this little child is the greatest one in heaven’s kingdom realm.”

MATTHEW 18:1--5

*I*n this passage, we must understand that the realm of the kingdom of heaven refers to the sovereign rulership of God here on earth. It also refers to a child’s simplicity, honesty, and humility; we are to be like children in the kingdom realm on earth. We lose our child-like trust and complicate our way of thinking when we grow up, and somehow, we manage to complicate what is simple. We need to learn to feel and live like a child again, allowing ourselves to dream, create, imagine without judgment, embrace spontaneity, and not worry about other people’s thoughts.

When we fail, it can trigger feelings of worthlessness. The fear of failing can keep us from moving forward and it often stems from a lack of understanding and confidence about how we

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can deal with something, or we believe that we should do it differently. To fail is not bad. We must get up again, and again and try again. Cherish yourself. Don't push the child in you away. Become like a child and imagine again.

I struggled for years with barriers that held me back from accomplishing dreams and aspirations, both personal and career accomplishments. I wanted to be a flight attendant, or wished I could have gone to the best pastry schools in the world. Trying to fix the intrusive thoughts kept me busy and exhausted and uncertain about my future. It's like I was never certain about anything so then how could I move ahead with dreams in a whirlwind of doubts. Listening to the fear of failure and my critical inner voice made it difficult to be proactive.

All these years when I saw my dreams as hopeless and lost, God was birthing something good and beautiful in me to dream and imagine big things again. The seed never died. God resurrected my heart to imagine again, and he stirred my heart to dream again. For me, imagining is an antidote to hopelessness and depression. We must persevere and hold on to the dreams that we know are our purpose, even when they seem impossible. There may be just a tiny flicker of hope left, but that flicker can grow into a bright flame in your future if you keep moving forward and upward.

Despite our circumstances, God has given us seeds for potential. The enemy uses the circumstances in our lives to lie to us and kill the seed. We need to stop living where we can't flourish and instead grow and move into agreement with what God says about our potential, where our potential is celebrated. Another tactic that we use that holds us back is reasoning, we can reason ourselves out of why it shouldn't work, why we don't have what it takes. Pharaoh in the Bible wanted all the firstborns dead so

he could kill Jesus the Messiah who was destined for greatness. Pharaoh felt threatened that his power would be taken away when he heard about the birth of the Messiah. Likewise, the enemy wants to kill the potential for greatness that God has put in us and steal our joy.

Proverbs 13:12 talks about the complexity of our hearts when the longings of our hopes and dream are postponed.

“When hope’s dream seems to drag on and on, the delay can be depressing. But when at last your dream comes true, life’s sweetness will satisfy your soul.”

We were not meant to strive, we were meant to be fully alive, alive to possibilities and the things God our Creator has for us. Many live like victims of the rat race they are in. There are things in life that we can’t change, but there are many things we can change that we have come to believe we have no power over. We fall victim to what the world and religion make us believe, to perform, and to keep up with the Joneses. To continue in this state we become stressed, burned out, and we get stuck in exhaustion and settle for existing, rather than thriving; this comes at a great price to us. When we’re in stress overload, we begin to feel hopeless and helpless about our circumstances and dreams. To change our life, we must change our thinking.

The insatiable longing of my dreams would not go away. My dreams were too big for me, but those are the dreams that God wants us to dream. Some of my dreams have changed, but the dream and desire to write a book never went away, so here I am doing what scares me the most. When dreams keep coming back, don’t you think it’s God speaking? He created us to reign for greatness and not for smallness. We feel comfortable living in smallness because we’re afraid to venture out from where it’s

comfortable. I cannot allow small-minded people to hold me back if I want to succeed in my dreams. I had people tell me what they thought I shouldn't do or what I should do. I've had to learn that other people's opinions of me are none of my business. I need to run my race that God has laid out for me at his pace. God created us for imagination which is life-giving when we let it flow. We should not suppress something so beautiful as our imagination. Our greatness is in our imagination.

Our imagination is a gift from God and an invitation to dream and opens possibilities to us. In Ephesians 1:18 it says,

“I pray that the light of God will illuminate the eyes of your imagination, flooding you with light, until you experience the full revelation of the hope of his calling—that is, the wealth of God's glorious inheritances that he finds in us, his holy ones!”

My excitement flares up like a kid in a candy store when imagination is talked about as a God-given freedom that I can enjoy. By nurturing my dreams and imagination I nurture my soul. It's important to value yourself and step into the new world that God invites us into through imagination and not live and believe in your limitations.

Imagination is our creativity and inspiration. When you have inspiration don't push it aside or minimize it. It may lead to an open door to something you have been waiting for, even though it is not yet reality for you today. Confronting situations requires a creative ability. Through imagination, we are empowered to envision what is yet to come, which is an important element in planning and effective decision-making. Every business begins with an idea and imagination.

TALENTS

Jesus often teaches through parables-telling stories through imagination. I am a visual person, so the act of storytelling aids in my memory retention and enhances my ability to recall information. It's like a mystery box that opens our senses and allows what is in the dark to come into light. Jesus taught through more than 40 parables, so when the people walked away, they could remember what they heard Jesus say and have an a ha moment where they get it and understand the message that Jesus was teaching through storytelling. The parable keeps feeding the memories of people long after they hear it.

Talents are the abilities or knack of a person. To undermine our talents is to undermine our Creator God. He's given us something that we're each responsible for and that we are good at, even if you don't believe that you are good at something, you are! It's very toxic to compare your talents to other people and don't let caution and fear hold you back and keep you from being accountable for your own talents. God cannot multiply your buried talents.

²¹Myles Monroe said "The wealthiest place in the world is not the gold mines of South America or the oil fields of Iraq or Iran. They are not the diamond mines of South Africa or the banks of the world. The wealthiest place on the planet is just down the road. It is the cemetery. There lie buried companies that were never started, inventions that were never made, bestselling books that were never written, and masterpieces that were never painted. In the cemetery is buried the greatest treasure of untapped potential."

21 Myles Monroe (No date) <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9196732-the-wealthiest-place-in-the-world-is-not-the-> .

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That's where many dreams and talents are buried because people did not have the courage to rise to their potential and live their dream.

Make time for the things that inspire you and that make you feel alive. Choose to live in the present, where you find peace and time for dreams and imagination to flow. God is not a mediocre God; his plans for me are not mediocre. He's passionately pursuing you and me.

Have the courage to pursue your dream. It is not too late to thrive. Sometimes our timing is different from God's timing, and we see God's patience as a closed door, and we get discouraged. To expand ourselves we need to step out to where it's uncomfortable. Without tests, we cannot establish our dreams or work towards achieving them. The first day I ever went for counselling, my counsellor Cindy drew me a powerful picture of what trust means. I was at the top of a cliff. Below were rocks and Jesus was standing on the rocks. Jesus had a string attached from him to me, ready to catch me once I let go and jump. All I saw was the rocks and what they could do to me if I jumped. I would die!

Letting the fear of what could happen hold us back prevents us from moving forward, and we seize opportunities that could lead us to the freedom that we're looking for. Jump the cliff and trust God to catch you and recover your life. Don't choose defeat. Your next level of hope lies just beyond your next comfort zone. Staying in our comfort zone we become stale and remain in our self-made prison. The moment that you make up your mind that you are going somewhere you become a threat to the enemy. The enemy likes to keep us small and mediocre at best.

He works overtime to undermine our faith and our capacity to believe in God and thrive.

Do you fear dying with dreams that you have not lived? Are you willing to take dreams to the grave? As I align with kingdom concepts, I am empowered to live the purpose that I was born with. Fear is not an option in the kingdom. Remember change begins in the mind and God will show you the way. Beginning to take steps and unlock dreams that seem impossible can be daunting. Overcoming adversity takes courage. It takes courage to step out and grab the keys to your future. But not grabbing the keys will take your dream to the grave. Ask God for those hidden dreams planted in your heart and the unborn promises, and the courage to jump.

Isaiah 58:11 says,

“The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.” (NLT)

People wrestle to know their purpose in life. God created only successful people. Trauma, pain, and religion blind us from connecting with our purpose, and we get stuck, feeling like there is no hope. Connecting with our purpose requires healing, then we can move out of being stuck and victimized. God’s plan for our life is success. God is committed to our success in the kingdom because his name is on the line. He is the one who is always faithful to keep his promise to us, he cannot lie. We are the ones who doubt him and limit God and ourselves in our search for our purpose. When we live in our God designed purpose, we will find fulfilment and meaning in life. Our purpose is our motivation to get up in the morning.

Proverbs 19:21

“A person may have many ideas concerning God’s plan for his life, but only the designs of God’s purpose will succeed in the end.”

²²Paulo Coelho said, “We must never stop dreaming. Dreams provide nourishment for the soul, just as a meal does for the body.”

Take time to imagine!

Dream big! What are your dreams that feel too big for you and that won’t go away? Those are the dreams that you need to pursue. Myles Monroe said, ²³“Don’t be pushed by your problems, be led by your dreams. Govern your life by priorities not your pressures.”

What is the dream you have pressed down and never allowed yourself to dream?

22 Paulo Coelho (No date) <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/480064-we-must-never-stop-dreaming-dreams-provide-nourishment-for-the#:~:text=Sign%20Up%20Now-,We%20must%20never%20stop%20dreaming.,we%20have%20to%20continue%20dreaming.>

23 <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1537521/Myles-Munroe-Don-t-be-pushed-by-your-problems-be-led-by-your-dreams-Govern-your-life-by>

IMAGINE

I imagine...My dream is...

What is keeping you stuck and afraid to pursue the dream?
What are the obstacles, the barriers that you need to remove?
What are the lies you believe?

*“When we trust God by taking our hands off our work,
what we give up through Sabbath ultimately benefits
those around us.”*

— **SHELLY MILLER**

Shalom is what the kingdom of God smells like.

LISA SHARON H

CHAPTER 14

THE SABBATH, SHALOM

Six years ago, I left my job as a cook due to health reasons, in a kitchen where we cooked for more than 130 elderly folks. After I left my job, I heard God calling me into a Sabbath. When I say I hear God speak, I do not mean in an audible voice. It's more like a strong impression; it's almost like a heart vision. When I talk about the Sabbath, I don't mean the one day a week when people go to church for an hour: I'm talking about a Sabbath rest about Jesus's restoration and healing. I was tired and felt used up physically and emotionally, which Jesus wanted to breathe life into. In his kindness, he called me to enter into a Sabbath lifestyle, shalom, to stop and cease striving. Having an inflated sense of responsibility to fix and a distorted view that I had to rescue at all costs left me exhausted.

Shalom is the kind of peace that Jesus offers, making the kingdom of God present in our hearts. After I left my job, I discovered what the quiet beauty of restorative shalom meant. I began to recover myself from a distorted identity of striving and fixing and learned to move out of my prison to where I was known, to a place where I was invited to flourish, and to a love that holds no records of wrong. In shalom, I am connected to the healer and find my completeness in him. Close to Jesus is

where I learn to trust, and life is not cluttered or complicated. He offers us his peace during our anxiety. Psalm 46:10 and John 14:27 says the following:

“Surrender your anxiety. Be still and realize that I am God.”

“I leave the gift of peace with you—my peace. Not the kind of fragile peace given by the world, but my perfect peace. Don’t yield to fear or be troubled in your hearts—instead, be courageous!”

Matthew 11: 28-30 says,

“Are you weary, carrying a heavy burden? Come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. Learn my ways and you’ll discover that I’m gentle, humble, easy to please. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear.”

Contrary to religious beliefs in that day, you could not heal on the Sabbath according to the religious laws. He had the authority to overrule the Pharisees’ laws and regulations to reveal the Pharisee’s hypocrisy, and he challenged the religious leaders about doing good on the Sabbath.

In the following scriptures we see Jesus exercising his lordship over the Sabbath.

Luke 14:5

“Jesus said to them all, “If one of your children or one of your animals fell into a well, wouldn’t you do all you could to rescue them even on the Sabbath?”

Luke 13:16

“If you do this for your animals, what’s wrong with allowing this beloved daughter of Abraham, who has been bound by Satan for eighteen long years, to be untied and set free on a Sabbath day?”

Shalom. Listen. “Be still and know that I am God.” To sit in God’s presence takes practice, but the experience softens your heart and is transformational. When you sit in his presence, listen for God to speak. Ask him where he was during a traumatic or difficult time. Listen to the soft, small voice that will speak in love, peace, and hope. When God speaks it’s always in alignment with his Word.

God revealed the scene where I was babysitting at eight years old, sitting on a stump several times in my adult life. God reveals pain and trauma to us to heal, restore, and redeem our pain. One day, sitting in the presence of a friend and Jesus, I asked, “God, where were you that day when I sat on the stump babysitting?” I got this picture in my mind: he pulled me aside on a porch swing that seated two; both me and Jesus. He watched me tenderly as I played in front of his feet; I was in a beautiful blue dress. He watched me with utter delight in his eye. While I was close to Jesus, I was carefree like a child in the presence of her Father. I was a carefree child. This was the beginning of healing this deep-settled trauma.

The next time I was also a child in a blue dress. This time I needed to grieve my childhood. Both scenes were healing. Grieving can bring a feeling of peace and closure and can help to bring back and restore painful and traumatic scenes of the past. Feeling and expressing emotions can be a powerful way to

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heal old wounds and move forward. The blue dress for me was a symbol of the innocence, beauty, and joy of childhood, and in this moment, I was able to reflect on how loved I am. I had the same color blue dress as a child that my mom sewed for me. It was my favourite dress.

To trust is rest; those are two things that are impossible for a scrupulosity sufferer. The intrusive thoughts tell you that you must manage your grace. To enter the Sabbath, we must learn shalom-that grace requires nothing of us and that striving for grace is in vain. Jesus cannot die anymore for us than he already did. So, when we strive for grace, and we think his grace is not big enough, that's pride and unbelief. His grace is free and sufficient in every area of our life. It's sufficient in our own sufficiency where we have lifted ourselves above Christ.

To receive grace, we must yield to God's way of thinking because our own thinking limits us from receiving grace that we cannot earn. When we think we have to earn grace, we are blinded, and we strive to earn grace. When you buy a gift for a loved one, you go to lengths to pick that perfect gift that you know they want. You give it to them, but the next day, they give it back and say I need to earn it to keep it. They repeat this daily, and you know that your loved one has misguided beliefs about what it means to receive. This would cause some concerns; how do you think Jesus feels when we try to earn grace when he has paid the highest price? It's a gift we receive by faith, not by another good performance.

In the story of Mary and Martha, we find Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus while Martha is distracted and busy worrying about the details of entertainment. I used to empathize with Martha's resentment that Jesus didn't seem to notice that Mary

left Martha with the duties in the kitchen. But Jesus said Mary chose the good part. Mary sitting at Jesus' feet is a picture of humility, trust, worship in awe of Jesus, and prevents her from being distracted while she is present with Jesus. The point is not that Jesus disapproves of good hospitality, Jesus challenged Martha and asked her. "Why are you upset and troubled, and pulled away by all these distractions?" (Luke 10:41) Our "good" activities often keep us distracted and busy from the wrong place. Jesus cares about restoring our spirit, body, mind, and soul; he invites us all to rest in his healing presence and sit at his feet.

Ask God to give you the courage and strength to relinquish striving that pulls you away from the Sabbath rest that he is asking you to enter into. As you practice entering into his rest and sitting at the feet of Jesus, shalom will nourish and flourish your soul. The benefit of Sabbath rest is that we learn to let go of control and let God take care of us. We give up striving to be God in our lives, and this is setting us free from unnecessary toil. In his presence, I am not overwhelmed by the overwhelming needs around me.

*Through misplaced religious values,
we undermine the mind of Christ.*

BILL JOHNSON

CHAPTER 15

KINGDOM MINDSETS

“In God’s Kingdom, everything is a paradox. We give in order to receive. We die in order to live.”

GRAHAM COOK,

The concept of kingdom teaching by Myles Monroe and others have been transformational in my faith-healing journey. Coming from a harsh concept of God and faith due to scrupulosity and church, this concept has empowered my faith with the excitement of how alive faith can be.

²⁴Michael Dalton explains the Kingdom of God like this: It is like a family that has a Father and a Son, a house and a field. The Father lets us know that he has a Son who is our entrance through the door of salvation. The house is about what God has given us to enjoy, but the focus has been so much on the door, that the house which is the kingdom has been ignored. Many people remain stuck at the door through religion. That is the reason why some preachers and people can’t talk about the house because they never experienced the house they stayed in

24 Michael Dalton (2023, January 6)<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6u2YlcMUu3Q-o2023>

the door. All they know is salvation. So, what good is it if we don't enjoy the house?

The door is important, but we're supposed to live in the house, not in the door. If we remain in the door and don't step in further to our rights and privileges, we cannot experience the house or live within the overflow of the Father.

The field is the world where we plant and produce to become an effective remedy to a situation on earth. We are all anointed to effectively change the world. What we learn in the house will determine how far we step past the door and what we plant in the field.

Like myself, many people don't understand that we are invited, or even allowed to enjoy the house with all the blessings and the rights we have in the house, where our Father lives. In the house our Father has free gifts available to us that we don't have to strive to obtain. In the house, the Father wants us to be authentic and it's a safe place where he invites vulnerability with our feelings no matter what they look like. The kingdom of God loves every human being on earth, no matter what they have done, or where they have been. Our sins are covered when we step through the door and our thinking is renewed as we spend time in the house with the Father.

We are to live on earth by bringing heaven down to earth by loving people who are not like us; they may not look like us or smell like us. Our environment must have the atmosphere of heaven so we can extend the kingdom, the house of God to others as God extends the house to us. Here we make room for people.

Jesus's first public statement was "Repent." (Matthew 4:17). To repent means to change our thinking, to stop thinking like the world thinks. As I understand kingdom concepts, I see an invitation of love rather than judgement by the three-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-to come as I am, and it's a safe place where I'm learning to trust him on a deeper level. Jesus said, "You will seek me and find me." (Jeremiah 29:13). This is applying to more than an invitation to get saved, it's more than your ticket to heaven. It's entering into a whole new relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit while we live and encounter life daily with all the challenges that swirl at us. In each situation when we seek him, we will find him to be enough. We have been given keys to unlock kingdom values here on earth to live in righteousness, peace, and joy that the house offers.

When we have been wounded spiritually for various reasons, our faith often comes to a crisis, where we begin to ask deep questions. While this is not a comfortable place to be, it is often the pivotal point where it takes us to a deeper faith, where the question of why we serve God has profound meaning. The strict hell-fire teaching made me believe God's wrath is more significant than his love. It is a harmful and unbalanced approach and overshadows the meaning of the true gospel of Jesus.

The emotional pain from religion and scrupulosity caused an imbalance and a mixed view of church, religion, and trustworthiness of Christians. How could I heal spiritually from religious trauma when the wrath of God plagued me, and I had to measure up to him? Faith intertwined with high religiosity was not convincing me, so I desperately searched for the profound meaning and purpose of my faith in Jesus

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Christ. Understanding grace and love were big hangups, so I was determined to find and experience what that meant.

The word surrender carried a fearful and apprehensive connotation for me until I understood God's character of good intention for me. I thought if I surrendered everything to God, he would take my boys from me, as in death. That made surrendering a bleak prospect. Some people's children die, and we don't know what the future holds for our kids. I lacked trust in God's character, and I feared that he was out to get me where it would hurt the most just to prove something to me. It wasn't love; it was punishment.

After all, I doubted that God was kind to me and strong enough for me when I was the one holding myself together. One day, God taught me in the best possible way about what this passage meant in Matthew 6. I saw God as trustworthy and safe. I surrendered my sons to God with an expectancy of being alive. I got it, and I aligned my thoughts with kingdom thoughts. The Holy Spirit is the mediator of God's reign in the lives of his followers. God's character is good! It's trustworthy!

He is setting me free from a long struggle of scrupulosity. Love does this! As I shift my thoughts, I adopt new ways of thinking that shift my life into a new reality where I experience love and freedom in Christ. Jesus died to give me something. He did not die so I could perform. Love did this.

The road to spiritual recovery from scrupulosity is not an easy one nor is it fast. Some key healing moments include the time when Jesus gave me the picture of when I sat on the stump babysitting, or the time when he showed me that I always fought to live and did not want to die.

In the midst of anxiety, a peace settled over me as I sat in his presence or read Scripture, or when I listened to a message of hope or the time when I met with my first counsellor Cindy, through my present church, and through family and friends that I get to do life with, and my husband Michael who stood by me and allowed me to become who I wanted to be. These were people in my life who were compassionate and influential in my recovery and continue to be to this day.

Because I didn't know how to take my position in Christ with authority, I was prone to discouragement. I lived there for many years. I was timid and didn't know I had the authority to reign. That was forfeiting what I longed for, which was authenticity. We all want to be real; we long to be genuine, but our carnal mind rages war against the new mind. We are afraid to be genuine because of the lies the enemy throws at us about ourselves.

The concepts of the kingdom are the primary themes found in Scripture and lay the groundwork for understanding God's plans, promises, actions, and motivation. God is king! Learning about kingdom concepts and the grace and love in this kingdom has been the thing that has given me hope. In the Kingdom, I experience grace, and I can minister grace to other people.

In the kingdom life is not a competition and we must give up man-made religion as a means of truth, which will open the door to living out of an overflow of joy rather than discouragement and boredom. Yes, religion creates boredom. To live in God's kingdom, I adopt mindsets like the king with his values and the truth that I am loved. "I am to reign on earth" is a Kingdom mindset that collided with the OCD; it's a core belief that I'm not worthy. God has called us into so much more than we think or imagine.

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Religion does not have a place in the kingdom of God.

As a citizen of God's kingdom here on earth, I cannot allow circumstances and fear and shame to rule over me.

God is sovereign over his kingdom, and through the Holy Spirit, we get our information about the king. We receive the Holy Spirit the day we receive Christ. He comes in full, not in measured amounts. Receiving more of him is impossible as he is a whole being. All the power that I will ever need is already in me--in us. It's our lack of faith that keeps us searching for the truth that is already in us.

And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, at times we don't even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words.

God, the searcher of the heart, knows fully our longings, yet he also understands the desires of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit passionately pleads before God for us, his holy ones, in perfect harmony with God's plan and our destiny.

So we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together for good, for we are his lovers who have been called to fulfil his designed purpose.

For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him."

Romans 8:26-29

John 14:12 says,

“I tell you this timeless truth: The person who follows me in faith, believing in me, will do the same mighty miracles that I do—even greater miracles than these because I go to be with my Father!”

As we come into agreement with what God says in the Scriptures as truths, and adopt those truths, and not the opinions of ourselves and of other people our minds are transformed to think like Jesus. When we shift our minds, it will shift our life. The enemy tries to blind us and keep us in darkness about our rights in his kingdom. He whispers lies that we are not free or that we are unworthy. Our access to kingdom power is not based on feelings; it's based on truths. As a kingdom seeker, I have everything I need to unlock that which belongs to me. To not take what belongs to me is like the person who would deny an inheritance that a parent would leave them.

As I align my mind with kingdom truths, I am less afraid of taking risks and of making mistakes. To choose not to make mistakes or take risks is also choosing not to live and thrive in his kingdom. As I learn to align my thoughts with the truth of Scripture, I change the atmosphere around me. Without failure, we won't have success.

The kingdom of God is everywhere, and I'm learning not to be as anxious there. I don't worry about money like I used to because I seek the One who said, “So above all, constantly seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, then all these less

important things will be given to you abundantly.” (Matthew 6:33). My understanding of who I am in him and

who he is for me is more grounded. When we focus on the kingdom, as Jesus focused on the kingdom, we can walk in true freedom and impact this world in a way we didn't before.

Jesus died to give us something. It is in rest that we receive, not in performing. The Holy Spirit cannot anoint the mental reasoning that we muster up. The purpose of faith is not to acquire things but to move the obstacles that are in the way.

The word reign in (Proverbs 4:4) caught my attention. When I reign, I am victorious. To reign means to rule, so circumstances do not rule me. When I reign, I'm bold and choose not to let adverse circumstances rule me. Ignore distractions. Distractions are always knocking at your door. The question to ask is. What am I easily distracted with, and what am I distracted to? Sidetracks can lead to darkness and confusion where clarity does not exist. (v. 25).

My new reality is that I am experiencing God's love and grace for me more profoundly. His character is good, and he is not asking me to perform in his kingdom. Here, I run free, and when I fall, he catches me and reminds me of his constancy in my life, where I don't need to fear intrusive thoughts. I keep running into freedom, love, kingdom power, and where I can thrive and fulfil his plans for me and my calling.

The battle may be relentless, but so is God. To learn to walk with God and explore who Jesus is, is a process. Healing is a process; it takes time, but you must never give up hope. Continue to press into the kingdom, where hope and truth will always abide.

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