

Freedom From
DEPRESSION

In Less Than A Month

One Christian's Transformation
Through The Power Of God



David P. Dowling

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a story about my journey through and out of depression. The journey lasted over two years, but the recovery took less than a month once I discovered God's plan of healing for my life. It took me coming to rock bottom to find it, and now my desire is to share that hope and plan with you, so that you might find the freedom from your own depression as well.

Let me start off with a disclosure to this book right from the beginning. Although I have seen the plan that God led me to follow work for myself and many others as well, I feel I need you to know I'm no quick fix depression guru, nor am I a licensed counselor. Although I was credentialed in ministry, I do not claim to have any training specifically for counseling or any medical degree, or practice medicine or offer any medical advice.

Although I believe God can heal anyone, this book is not designed to be a cure all for any disease or sickness either physically, emotionally, or mentally. Its design is to allow you to follow my real journey out of depression, and to offer you the steps that I took as I followed God's plan.

Even though I have seen a good many people (some of whose stories you will read about in this book) find healing by following God's plan laid out in the chapters to follow, everyone is different and I cannot or nor will I guarantee anyone's success in finding freedom from depression. This is a book of my story and other successes as well. I know firsthand that depression is a horrible sickness that requires a great deal of energy to deal with and to become free from. Each person's success or failure in beating it is dependant not only on their own efforts, but also their motivation, as well as a host of other things beyond my control or the scope of this book.

With that said, I offer to you my story, a timeline of events as best I remember them happening. May the depression you struggle with either in yourself or a loved one be replaced with the joy of driving it out of your life forever. I offer the story of my success as a sign to never give up. I believe there is hope right around the next corner when it comes to depression, only it is hard to see because of the darkness in our mind. But I am living proof that God is still performing miracles and still cares about and deeply loves His children.

May this book renew your hope in God and your resolve to free yourself from depression once and for all. There is light at the end of the tunnel, my hope is that this book might help you find it.

CHAPTER 1

HOPE FROM WHO WE ARE

Hope! It is a small word with such big worth. So much so that people whether lost at sea, facing divorce or struggling through the diagnosis of cancer all look for it. The fact that you are reading this book right now also makes you one of the many seeking its ability to change the bleakest of circumstances into the brightest day. Maybe you're reading this book to learn its truths, truths that you hope to offer a friend or family member battling with the beast within, the beast of depression. Maybe those truths you seek are not for them, but for you. Either way hope wants to greet you with the longing of its love and offer you the freedom that comes from embracing it. In your mind right now hope may be only a shadow of the past, reserved only for the healthy. Hope may as well be a million miles off in space with no way to bring it back. Yet hope is still calling your name, it has called you to read this book, to give it one last chance before you give up on it altogether, and it is that one last chance at the point of desperation that can give hope the opportunity to not only make all the difference, but to make you whole again.

It may be that right about now you are saying to yourself "How can he proclaim to others so lost and hurting that there is hope when they feel so hopeless?" Well, let me start by saying that I once was like the many fighting the beast within. Day after day I lost valuable ground with the beast until it took me to a place where I no longer wanted to go, and to a point where I no longer wanted to live. My marriage was on the rocks, I isolated my children and friends from myself by driving them away. I would spend hours laying on my bed in the afternoon crying, only to face a darker day in the morning. Hope was a million miles away in my mind. Yet hope was right next to me, but because of my pain and my hurt which ran so deep I was unable to see it, let alone know how to make it part of my life.

I, like so many, was so confused. How could someone like me, a Christian, someone who believed, followed and had given my heart to Jesus Christ be so lost? I might have been able to

understand it if I were just pretending to be a Christian. Someone that was playing the plastic Jesus game, but in my heart I really was trying to honor, serve, and love the God who I knew loved me and sacrificed so much for me. But where was He? Where was God in all my hurt and confusion? WHERE WAS HE?

I felt so alone. Nobody could understand my pain. I didn't even understand it myself. All I knew was that I was no longer the man I once was, strong, confident, sure of who I was and who God was. In just a short amount of time, a few months, my comfort zone, which was normally the size of Cleveland, had now been reduced to the size of thimble. I was lost, but how I got here or how or if I would ever get back out remained a dark mystery to me. I brought pain with me wherever I went. It flowed out of my being the same way joy once did. For those who lived with me it was like walking on eggshells wondering when the next one that broke would send me into a fit of rage, or have me shut down closing the door to everyone around me.

Although I could not see hope back then, I cannot only see it now, but embrace it as well! In that lost darkness there is little that is recognizable. But nonetheless hope was still there, and looking back I also now know that hope traveled every dark day, caught every fallen tear, and understood when nobody else could.

Standing now on the rim of the deepest canyon that almost swallowed me, the pit of mire that almost consumed me I have finally come face to face with hope and His name is Jesus Christ. Not the Jesus I thought I knew, but the real Jesus the one I now call HOPE!

My struggle with the horrid beast of depression raged within me for two and a half years. It broke my strong will like a toothpick and crushed me like an aluminum soda can under the weight of a giant. Yet when I reached the place that was my lowest, the spot where I could go no deeper I cried out to God! The God that I had deserted, the God I left behind, the God I had forsaken, the God who I was angry with for allowing this to happen to me, but who had still not forsaken me. I cried out to Him and said "God I can't do this one more day." I begged Him to help me, to somehow rescue me! Little did I know that by the end of the next two weeks God would somehow, somehow break through the chains that bound me and restore me to the person

who I once was only with a new resolve, and miraculously he did it without continued counseling, and without medication.

A true miracle took place in my life and my being, but since the time of my healing I've seen this miracle performed time and time again in the lives of others as they were freed from the beast. A miracle I believe is available to those facing the beast of depression, especially those that call themselves Christians. My healing is why I take the time to write this book. To proclaim to you that there is hope, His name is Jesus Christ and he is right around the corner.

If you are like me you might be tempted to skip ahead to the back section of this book looking for the answer to beating the beast within. Unfortunately there is more than just one component to finding true healing and being whole again. You reach a state of depression through a process and therefore need to beat it through the same. I unlike others that talk about depression cannot only sense your desperation, but also can honestly say I know what you are feeling. But I would strongly encourage you to follow my journey step by step through the course of this book, that you might have a staircase before you with no steps missing, putting you and your steps up from the pit on sure footing. So read on!

MY STORY

I was born in 1959 and raised in Staten Island; New York. I grew up with two older brothers Larry who is seventeen years, and Ed who is fourteen years older than I am. So I was not only the baby of the family, but pretty much an only child as my brothers were off either working or going to school while I was still little.

In many ways I would say my family was like most families in America at that time, stable in some areas and fractured in others. Unlike today where we are finding more families fractured than stable. My mom and dad did their best in trying always to give to us the best they could. I remember my dad taking days off to drive me to the mountains to go skiing all day, or taking me fishing. Although neither of these things were his thing to do, he would still take me and read a book or newspaper while I got to do something I loved. On the same token I was also close to my mom. Being my dad worked many evening she would many times take me out to the Chinese restaurant (which I really enjoyed) for a special night out together.

I remember Sunday mornings when my parents would let me know that it was time to go to church. The only thing was they would be staying home in bed while I walked the 7 or so blocks to the Catholic Church in our town. When I returned I was usually greeted by a breakfast of hard rolls and butter and my Sunday morning TV shows like Flash Gordon and F troop.

When I was only a year old my folks bought acreage in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and built a cabin that would be our get away on most weekends. Eventually we made the move to Pennsylvania permanent.

It wasn't long after our move that I graduated from the local high school and sought my position along with the rest of the world in the workforce. After working at a job that was taking me nowhere I quit and decided I needed something more.

So after talking with my family and going through an extensive process I found myself in welding school. It was here that I would first be introduced to Jesus Christ. Although years prior I had attended Catholic Church and felt closeness to God every time I went to church, I lacked understanding of who he really was and what it meant to have a personal relationship with Him.

It was at this school that I met a man by the name of Rocky who was a follower of Jesus and who was not afraid to show it. He was my first real encounter with a Christian. As is the case in most places whether work or school there are always those that will hate you or at least hate what you believe. The people surrounding Rocky were no different, and as much as he was unafraid to share Christ, so were the people there at school, as unafraid to persecute him.

While he would be in the welding booth practicing, people in our class would tear up his Bible and throw it all over the classroom. Also, in our school there was this large tank about three foot square and three foot high. It was filled with water that we used to cool the hot steel plates we practiced welding on, and its water was chocolate brown from the rust and slag that came off the steel from this process.

One day I stood by as two other students took Rocky and turned him upside down and dunked him head first practically up to his waist in the filthy water. I can still remember the words he

uttered when they pulled him out a few seconds later. He said, "Praise the Lord." At this point I said to myself "Either this guy is a wacko or he's got something I need."

Being the fact that our school took place at the area Vo-tech school at night we took our lunch break around 8:00 PM. It was during one of our lunch breaks that Rocky asked "Dave, have you ever been saved?"

I asked him, "I don't know, is that like taking communion?" He went on to explain that it was so much more, and exactly what a personal relationship with God meant. He asked me if I would like to talk about it later and so after school we sat in my truck while I asked questions.

He went on to explain that in order to be forgiven of our sins we need to receive the gift of what Jesus did on the cross for each of us, and to accept Him personally as our savior. He told me the story of his conversion and how God transformed him from a drug addict to a man of God.

Rocky asked me if I would want to pray to accept Jesus as my savior. I told him, "If I do, I want to do it by myself." So I left him there at the school, him going his way and me going mine. Little did I know that the Holy Spirit of God was working on my heart. Rocky's words had made me look at myself and God was beginning to tug on my heartstrings. I remember an overwhelming need to open my life to God. Halfway home I remember calling out to God and saying, "God I want to give you my heart and if you want me you can have all of me."

Once I got home I immediately shared my new found faith with my Mom who told me "You're a good Catholic boy you don't need any of that Christian stuff." My spirit was devastated, yet I had some gospel tracts that Rocky had given me and I went into my bedroom and read through them. The next day I talked with Rocky and he asked me "Did you say the prayer last night?" I told him I had, but that I wasn't sure if it would stick.

GETTING STRONGER

As time went on I got involved in a church and my faith grew as I was challenged with all the newness of the Bible and my new relationship with God. Although I was 19 years old when I

accepted Christ as my savior and joined the church shortly thereafter, youth group at the church was still open to people my age.

I soon met John Lewis a true man of God who mentored me in many ways and was very instrumental in my rapid growth in my relationship with Jesus. With a combination of my outgoing personality and my developing maturity in Christ I began to take up different roles in the church. I was moving from least intense positions such as managing one of the church softball teams to eventually becoming an elder along with other key people in the church.

Along with church, I became heavily involved as a volunteer with the area Youth for Christ outreach. Eventually running evangelistic outreach clubs and finally going on to be the Executive Director, but now I'm getting ahead of myself. Church also not only helped me learn about my walk with Jesus, but was also the place where I developed a relationship with Gail who would eventually become my wife.

LOOKING BACK

Growing up, my family environment always screamed out to me that I could do anything and be good at it as well. I would watch and hear about my dad design and build things others could not. I watched my brother Larry do everything from repair boats, build fine furniture, become a top auto and bus mechanic, as well as a master machinist. As with Larry I also watched my brother Ed become a biology teacher, pay for his way through college, and even become an actor that appeared on a popular TV show. Although it wasn't told to me that I needed to be better than others, and I could do anything, it was in my mind at least understood.

Surprisingly this developed attitude, although it made me proud was still mingled with compassion. I felt in my being that I needed to live up to the rest of my family and their accomplishments. After all I was a Dowling and being the best at things was all I knew.

Little did I realize that this pride that I developed was more of a feeling of being invulnerable, rather than a feeling of satisfaction at a job well done. It also caused me to become judgmental of others, putting myself over them and expecting them to maintain my standards, standards that I was unable to attain myself. This is why God is opposed to the proud, because it causes us to

look at ourselves and become concerned with only ourselves in order that we might reach OUR goals and desires and not necessarily God's desires for us. It can make us blind to the best in life, because we are always striving for self gratification, and like a drug addict always looking for that high, we focus only on the moment and fail to see the path laid out for us.

In this case the only thing we are concerned with is a feeling of self achievement. The truth is that none of us can achieve anything on our own. In the gospel of John chapter 15 Jesus says, "*Apart from me you can do nothing.*" (NIV) In reality everything we have is achieved through the grace of God. Oh there may be many motivational speakers and even many preachers that will proclaim to you that you need to release the power inside of you, or think positive so that you can change your world, so you can prosper, so you can attain success, so you can meet your goals. But this type of thought makes everything about US, and can isolate us from God's best for us. You might be asking, how can striving to be successful and doing good be less than God's best for me? It can be if PRIDE of self is what we look to, to accomplish our mission instead of God's faithfulness. Look at the word PRIDE. What letter is smack dab in the middle of it, "I" meaning it is all about self, which is why I believe God despises it so. Look what it says here in the book of Proverbs chapter 16, verse 5, "*The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: they will not go unpunished.*" (NIV) The punishment we receive for our prideful hearts is many times brought upon ourselves by our own actions. Pride is a lack of dependability on God, it is the exact opposite of who he is and therefore leads us on a path opposite of God's.

It is this feeling of pride that takes us out of balance with the creator of the universe and can lead us to a cliff of despair, that with one little push can send us over the edge. What lies at the bottom of that cliff is a chasm of sharp rocks and mire called depression. It can ravage our bodies, our mind, our soul and every relationship including our relationship with God. So you might be able to better understand what I am trying to say, let me share with you my personal story of my walk off the cliff of despair. But before I do let me go on to say that the story of my journey downward was not the cause of any one person. Instead it was a mix of many people, timing, my pride and my expectations. People are human and therefore make mistakes (including myself) so the point of this story is to in no way judge others or point fingers of blame. The story is to be used only that you might identify with similar issues in your life and so that you might better understand the events that lead up to my fall into depression.

MY JOURNEY DOWNWARD

As I mentioned earlier, my walk with the Lord had brought me to a place of leadership within the church. I served as an elder on that board, whose job it was to help decide the spiritual matters of the church, including caring for the people, teaching, preaching, visitation and at times discipline when needed.

Our new pastor had not been at our church long. He was very outgoing and seemed very knowledgeable of the scriptures. So therefore he was well liked by most of the people who worshipped there. Little did I know that the road that lie ahead would become a rough one.

Serving on the elder board can put you in a position to see things most people at the church don't. It also causes you to be a sounding board for the people of the church who see things you may not. As time went on it seemed that some things just didn't seem right. We were noticing more and more that a woman that worked at the church and the pastor were spending excessive time together. Neither of their relationships at home were in the best of shape and we began to notice what I would call a dependency on one another to support each other emotionally. The problem although starting out small, began to escalate quickly and began to be noticed by the leadership of the church. As we talked about this situation we decided to spend some time praying, seeking God's wisdom in how to handle it.

As time went on the problem never subsided and we decided that we had to have a meeting with the pastor. Upon meeting with him we discussed the problem and shared our views of what we were seeing take place. We then asked him to take two weeks and get back to us in the form of a letter describing his thoughts about the situation. In the mean time, the elders met again and after much discussion came to the conclusion that one of three things would happen.

1. The pastor would admit his fault and ask for forgiveness, in which case we would grant him some time off to seek counseling and restore him back to the pulpit as a leader in the church.
2. He would shift blame or deny this as not being an issue in any way or that there was any wrong doing on his part.
3. He would resign his position.

Either way it was decided that he should step down from preaching until this matter could be resolved.

The weeks finally ticked by and it was our time to meet with the pastor and discuss with him the outcome of our meetings and his letter.

As we all sat down the pastor handed each of us a multiple page letter. As we all read through it together it was quite obvious that he was in no way accepting any fault for this matter and that in fact blamed some of us as elders for allowing it to happen. For the life of me I couldn't figure out how this could be so, but was not surprised by the content of the letter. He clearly went on in the letter to describe how he had developed an emotional connection with a church employee, but in no way seemed repentant for his actions or the results of them. After some talk we asked the pastor to leave the room so we might review his letter together.

Now after months of prayer and meetings it was decided that based on the results of his letter we would respond to it in one of the three ways listed above, but no sooner had the pastor gotten up from his chair and began to leave when an elder next to me turned to me and said, "I am not making any decision tonight." **WHAT?** How could he say that? What had we spent these last months in prayer and meetings for, but to develop a plan of action that was best for the church and the pastor and all those involved. And now it was suggested we not make any decision tonight. How could we let the pastor speak from the pulpit on Sunday after his admission of emotional involvement with someone at church? To say I was taken back would have been an understatement. Nevertheless I listened to each person's perspective of the letter one at a time. What I heard more than anything was that maybe the pastor didn't mean what he said in the letter and that we should give him the benefit of the doubt. What doubt? It was in black and white and typewritten for all to read plainly and clearly.

Someone then said "I need more time to pray about this." "Ok", I said, "how much time?" Figuring a day or two, as it was early in the week and we had time to decide about the pastor before Sunday. "At least two weeks" came the reply. Two weeks! Then I was told that we couldn't meet in that time frame and needed at least a month to pray, meet and decide. Through

all my objections to this I was pressured by the rest of the board. Feeling outnumbered and outvoted and to my dismay I relented.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

As I left the meeting that night and sat in my truck I felt a blanket of shame being draped over me. I felt that I had not stood for what I believed to be the truth and allowed others to sway my thinking, in essence felt I let God down and in a big way. The drive home was an unpleasant one.

Arriving at home, I knew what I had to do and even though it was late I made the call to one of the elders. I told him that my allowing the process to last into next month was wrong and because of the decision I made I would be resigning my position as elder from the church. This call prompted further calls from other elders to discuss the situation and after much debate they agree with me and decided to have another meeting to finalize the outcome. I informed them that I would not be there as I had already resigned and that any decision that they made would take place on their own.

A special meeting took place that Saturday the outcome of which would change the course of my walk with Christ and begin to initiate doubt in my life about being a Christian. The meeting took place as was expected and I was informed that the pastor would remain in the pulpit and continue to be able to preach. I was heartbroken, but knew I had to make a stand and not be swayed in my thinking again to abandon the Word of God as my map. I knew in my heart that if they continued to let the pastor stay without correction I would no longer be able to sit under the leadership of that church. So with much regret I took my family and left feeling that if people saw us leave it would draw suspicion that something was wrong and the truth might be exposed. After all you don't just up and leave your church family after years and years of serving, loving and worshiping together, unless there is something majorly wrong with either you or the church.

NOT THE CASE

I fully expected the phone to ring with people asking what had happened. In reality only two people called. I began to share some of what had happened until an elder called and asked me not to. I told them that I would direct any other inquires about what happen to them. I felt isolated,

alone and abandoned by my church family. I thought people would rally to my side and everything would be forced back into play making everything right. I was wrong. In fact just the opposite happened. Either people didn't seem to care, know what was going on, or they turned completely against me no longer talking to me and labeling me as a quitter! I felt I just couldn't go back. When the pastor resigned two weeks later the elders told the congregation that he had left for personal reasons instead of sharing that he was leaving for a disciplinary issue so that the church could pray for him. This further cemented my resolve to stay away.

Pride was now beginning to well up in me. That Dowling pride again. After all I was right. Even the elders I talked to agreed I was right, yet they just wouldn't do things my way, even though I felt I was following the Word of God. You see pride can change things to no longer be about the truth and more and more about self. Pride cries out for us to be the hero, instead of God. Was I right in what I did? I thought what I was doing was right and it probably was. But how I handled it lacked the wisdom of God and His compassion. I should have stood my ground but on the legs of maturity and understanding instead of pride.

TRAPPED

This whole situation left me feeling trapped. I began to ask myself how people I knew for so long and knew me could turn against me. I became angered by their lack of understanding or even their desire to understand neither the situation that lead up to this or myself. The more angry I became, the more I drifted from God. I think part of me was blaming Him for what had happened.

My anger over time grew to rage and the only thought was what these people, my so called brothers and sisters did to me, was all because I was willing to take a stand. I couldn't see past my own face, to see that I was blaming people for something I didn't understand or want to. As time passed, I felt myself falling deeper and deeper down the cliff of despair. Having my own business allowed me spare time between jobs, I would spend much of it lying on my bed staring at the ceiling, thinking of how I could get back at these people. I tell you now that the thoughts I had at the time I will not describe for I am embarrassed to know that I could think such things as

a child of God. But I wanted revenge. There is that “I” word again. I no longer wanted what God wanted. I wanted myself to be vindicated and justified in my thinking and actions.

The more I wanted revenge the more of a conflict it brought about in my soul because it was exactly what God didn't want. So finally in order to cope I turn my anger on myself, proclaiming that it was my fault, that I was a bad father, husband, elder, Christian. After all I had left my friends to deal with a major problem, my family was forced to walk on eggshells for fear I might explode on them with anger over the slightest thing, and God had very little room if any in my life as my anger had crowded Him out. I was a real mess and although I was very good at hiding it most of the time in front of people I was horrible especially when left alone to think.

CHAPTER 2

THE CALLING

About this time one of my best friends was the Executive Director of Pocono/Slate Belt Youth for Christ, a Christian outreach to youth. I had worked with Youth For Christ for many years as a volunteer, running clubs, and events for the ministry. Gary my friend asked me to come to his office one day and upon arriving sat me down to tell me the news that he was leaving this Youth For Christ to go to a different chapter in Southern Pennsylvania. We both sat there and cried for a while. I then asked him if he had anybody in mind to replace him. He said he had a few people, but that I was not one of them. “Good” I said because I didn’t want it. I had my own business doing mechanical contracting and was happy with it. About a week later Gary asked me to lunch and told me that maybe he had done me a disservice by not asking me if I was interested in his position. I told him that if God wanted me in that position he would pursue me like Joshua, Moses, or anyone else in the Bible, but at this point I really wasn’t interested.

A week or two later I received a job application in the mail from the board of directors of Youth for Christ. In looking it over I began to pray about it and as I did my heart towards that position began to change and soften. Remember too that during this time I was still majorly depressed and struggling with my anger and feelings. In spite of this I filled out the application and submitted it. Two months later through some miraculous events God had closed down my business and I was working full time in youth ministry.

I was still in conflict with all that had happened. How could I be effective in ministering to others when I needed to be ministered to myself? Why would God call me to ministry when inside I was mentally and emotionally sick? Little did I know that God was going to use this time in my life to prepare me to not only write this book, but to host seminars on God’s plan for beating the monster of depression. During and since my time at Youth For Christ God has used

me to help free many people from the pit of depression all through a simple plan he has laid out, but more about that later.

Even though I was ministering to kids and God was blessing the ministry through my staff and volunteers, I continued this fight inside me, which over time had grown far above my ability to handle it on my own. As a hunter I often thought of taking my rifle on a hunt deep into some swamp and committing suicide. I wanted to ease the pain in my own life as well as free my family from my anger. I remember one day when someone at the office said something to challenge a decision I made or something similar. I was on my way to a meeting, but instead cancelled my appointment and spent that time in my office with the door shut crying.

You might be thinking that I had really blown this whole situation out of proportion. After all was it really that big a deal? One thing you must remember is that if you are struggling with depression everything in your life including your depression is magnified ten times over. So it is often very hard for someone like a spouse who is watching someone go through it to understand that. Until I found myself in depression I always used to say about people struggling “Just shake it off and get over it.” When you are standing on top of the cliff looking down it is easy to say, but when you are at the bottom of the cliff looking up, it is very hard to do.

SUMMER INSTITUTE

As part of my credentialing for ministry I was required to spend two weeks during the summer at a college in Indiana that Youth for Christ rented. They called this training Summer Institute. During this time I would be taught ministry logistics as well as how to enhance my relationship with Christ and others. As I was training to do a bike ride to the shore with some kids in a few weeks I would rise early in the morning and ride about 15 miles before breakfast. The rest of the day was filled with meals, main assembly meetings, specialty ministry electives, wellness appointments and free time in the evening.

One of the things that happens to a person in depression is they often set themselves up for failure. The reason being is that it helps to justify their thought of themselves as a loser. Don't get me wrong that is not what their ultimate goal is. Their ultimate goal is to feel better, but being a loser is what they feel like, and what they are most comfortable with while they are in

depression. They don't know how to break the cycle of feeling the anger they have turned in on themselves so they must continue to fuel that anger. This is done by setting themselves up to fail. The more they fail the more they feel justified in being depressed. I know this doesn't make sense, but trust me it is real, especially to the person facing depression. The anger has to be maintained (which I will explain later), which is why depressed people are so tired all the time. It takes a lot of energy and fuel to become and stay angry for such a long time.

It was free time one evening and I was hanging out at the gym being there wasn't much else happening. Some guys wanted to get together a basketball game and they asked me to join. This should have been my first clue. The truth be known, I stink at basketball and tennis. Most other games with a ball I excel at, but not those two. Wanting to fit in and against my better judgment I accepted.

Now I stink at shooting the ball, for reasons I never could figure out if I aim the ball one way it goes crazy off to the side or something. So my best bet was to just play defense and if I got the ball I would pass it to someone who could shoot. The only problem was I wasn't very good at defense either. I don't remember the score, but I do remember at the end of the game one guy coming up to me and telling me I played good. I felt like he was lying to me. I didn't feel I was contributing much to the game, in fact I knew I wasn't very good. So instead of taking this guys praise as a complement, I took it to look further into myself and fuel my estimate of myself as a loser. I spent the next hour crying on my bunk.

Believe me when I tell you that depression is real and it destroys people from the inside out. It becomes like someone staying at a wilderness cabin in the dead of winter with tons of snow on the ground and no way out to safety down the mountain. When they realize that they are almost out of firewood they begin to panic and will start to burn up all the furniture in the cabin as well as the cabin itself in order to stay warm and survive. A depressed person will do whatever they can to manage their anger, even turning it on themselves, because it gives them a false sense of control. They feel that by remaining angry at the people that hurt them they are in control of the situation, even if those people have no idea that someone is angry with them. Because they couldn't control the situation or the rejection they received, or even the anger they felt towards

the people that hurt them, they turn the anger inward only to discover, or sometimes not, that it consumes them minute by minute.

A GLIMER OF HOPE

During one of our assembly times someone up front mentioned to the group that if anyone was facing anything or struggling with something they could meet for one session with a counselor that they had brought in specifically to promote wellness to those hurting. Thinking that things were not getting any better I decided to sign up and see if I could finally get some help. I went to the appointment and sat across from the counselor. I told him the story that lead up to me feeling so depressed. He listened intently and then began to share with me some tools I could use to help me in the way I felt. Because I was taking everything everyone said the wrong way (like the basketball player), he explained to me that I needed to begin by building a filter system. He held his hands together interlacing his fingers with each other but not placing them all the way together so that you could still see space between them. Then he held them up over his face like a catcher's mask and spied at me through the openings in between his fingers. He told me that if I did something and someone would say to me that what I did was stupid, I would immediately take it that they were calling me stupid and label myself as such. But in reality not I but what I did was stupid and that I had to weigh everything people said before accepting or rejecting it and I had the power and the right to do that. After all it was only their opinion they were sharing and I had the right to either accept it or reject it.

One real example the counselor (I'll call him Joe) gave was that he and two other people he knew (I'll call them Bob and Alice) had gone out to dinner. They were sitting around talking and Bob asked Joe because he is a counselor what he should do in a certain situation with one of the youth he knows. All of a sudden Joe got real angry and said "How should I know, what am I supposed to know everything." Now Bob could have gotten nasty right back at Joe or gotten really offended, but instead he evaluated the situation, looked at Alice and said "Sometimes when Joe gets tired he gets a little cranky." Joe went on to tell me that Bob's evaluation of him was correct, you see Joe was getting sick and spent the next day in bed. It would have been real easy for Bob to take the nasty comment that Joe said as something he caused or deserved, but instead he chose to look at it through a filter and rejected it as it being Joe's problem not his.

Although I don't remember much else about the meeting I remember taking this little gem home with me to help me, as in the story above to stop burning all the furniture in my cabin in order to keep from freezing to death.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Although I returned with at least one tool I could use to help my thinking, which because of my depression was broken at the time. I realized that even though I now had a tool it was like using a fly swatter against a swarm of stinging bees. That is because tools are fine and they do help, but I was trying to use head tools to fix a heart issue.

Although depression affects our brain and our thinking it originates in the heart. It comes from feelings of hopelessness, rejection or pride or a combination of the same or similar things that can either crush or harden our hearts. As the Bible states in Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23: "*Above all else guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*" (NIV) Without a properly maintained heart our wellspring of life produces bitter waters. Those bitter springs corrupt our thinking, which is why God works first on our heart renewing us when we come to Christ which in turn renews our mind and our thinking which renews our actions, what we do with our bodies. So the solution lies with a renewed heart, something none of us can correct without God's Holy Spirit.

But in my battle I hadn't yet come to understand this yet. So I continued to try and block my stinking thinking from my mind, but it all seemed so hopeless. By now I was firmly entrenched in the misery of my depression. The one thing I was beginning to realize though was the fact that I couldn't do this by myself.

I made an appointment with my family doctor. I told him I was depressed and asked him what we could do about it. He recommended some medication to help my brain function the way it is supposed to. I tried it, but found out that all it did was numb me, it caused my body to feel like I was living in slow motion, while my mind raced a hundred miles an hour. Clearly this wasn't working.

I am definitely not a doctor, but from what I understood about depression it is believed that there is a neurotransmitter called Serotonin which was released into my body from my intestinal area

and my brain to help combat mood swings caused by my bad thoughts. Some antidepressant medications affect the action of Serotonin, which is why they are used to treat depression. In any case this medication was not doing its job. So I tried another. This time it made my body feel like there were bugs crawling all over me. I couldn't sit still and began walking up and down my road to release energy until this feeling went away. That being said I decided that I couldn't do this anymore. Who knew what wacky side effect the next drug would cause? I figured it was better to go crazy slowly, rather than all at once. This is not to say that medication is not helpful in the treatment of depression, it can be, but it can often be a temporary solution to an ongoing problem. In my opinion unless the root of the problem is found and dealt with, medication just remains a band aid on a cancerous tumor. In any event it just wasn't working for me

LET'S TALK IT OUT

I had received a little hope and a tool to help me with my depression by talking with the counselor at Summer Institute. I thought maybe talking to a professional on a regular basis might raise me out of this pit I was in. I set up an appointment and went. I really did want to get better and I was really trying to take action. I was desperate and was willing to do just about anything I could do to help things along.

As I sat on the couch facing the counselor I shared the whole story of how I got to be where I was. It was clear to me the things I was angry about and I wanted healing as quickly as possible. Some people in depression that I have dealt with and talked to don't really understand why they are so angry and it takes a little time to find the root of the problem. I on the other hand was already blessed with knowing why I was so angry, so in essence I figured I was helping the doctor along and saving him and me loads of time. I asked him after sharing my story with him, how many visits he thought I would need before I would be alright. With a general answer he said, "I have seen some patients for as little as three visits, to people I have continued to see for years." This was not very encouraging to me. I was in a great deal of emotional pain and didn't think I could see myself dealing with the millstone of depression around my neck for one more day let alone years.

The counselor shared with me a general scripture, Romans chapter 8, verse 28: *“And we know that all things God works for the good of those that love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (NIV) And then our time was over. I knew the verse. I read it many, many times. I knew what it meant, I even had it memorized, but it just wasn't helping. I made and kept another appointment. This one seemed a repeat of the first and cost me another \$85.00 an hour. Don't get me wrong I would have paid plenty had it been doing me some good, but I didn't feel any farther along than when I started. I became overwhelmingly frustrated. Nothing had changed, nothing was changing and nothing seemed like it was going to change. I had hit rock bottom. There was no other place for me to go deeper.

COMING HOME

Now if you remember I was in full time ministry at this point and although God was using me to reach kids for Him, I was floundering in my personal relationship with Him. I hadn't spent any time reading my Bible in a long time and was in reality performing ministry totally on reflexes from what I knew, with no fresh fuel to keep me strong and focused. I dropped the ball, big time, but just lacked any desire to open the book I had so loved to read.

As I drove down a back road from leaving my session the reality of where I was spiritually and emotionally hit me. I was completely broken. My body, my mind and emotions couldn't take it any longer. It had been two and a half long years. I remember crying out to God, telling him that I couldn't do this one more day. I called on Him to rescue me and lift me up. I had turned back to the one source I had forsaken all this time, and God met me there in my truck with my heart completely laid open and bare. What took place next was nothing short of a miracle. There was a release that took place that day. I can't describe it to you except to say that I somehow knew God was intervening for me and leading me on a path back up the canyon. At times when trying to find this path on my own I felt like I was gripping the rim of the canyon and trying to swing my leg up to just get a hold, but would eventually tire and slide back down to the bottom again. This time I felt hope creeping back into my bones and although I didn't know how, I felt God was letting down a rope into my life to pull me up and out of my pain.

Upon arriving home I did something I hadn't in a long time. I cracked open my Bible in search of the answer to how to get home again. God lead me to a verse (I'll share it with you a little later) that with power and purpose changed everything. I'm sure I had read it before, but this time it leaped off the page at me like a game show sign blinking above a contestant's head. It was the answer and the first steps in the long journey home. I was on my way.

CHAPTER 3

BRINGING THE BLUR INTO FOCUS

As I said earlier my transformation back to a healthy state of mind and thinking was nothing short of a miracle. In just about two weeks God had restored me to the point I was striving to reach on my own for over two years. He did it by stopping my bleeding, and mending my heart so it could pump fresh blood back into my soul. He found the root of my problem and showed me how he wanted me to think and act about myself. He showed me the truth about myself, my situation and how he felt about me. It felt so amazing to be finally standing on solid ground at the rim of the canyon. He had brought me through, He indeed had rescued me, He answered my cry and met me the same way He can meet you or someone you know struggling like I was. But before I share with you exactly what God did for me and for many others that I have shared with, I need for you and me to visit the process that brought us to depression in the first place.

Each year for the past several years I had taught elective seminars for the senior high kids at our annual Youth for Christ Heatwave Conference. There were usually several good topics to choose from and I always tried to make my subject interesting and relevant to what the kids were facing at the time. This year when I was asked to email to the regional headquarters my topic and a brief description of my seminar, I did it without even thinking. Before I even knew what I was doing I wrote down a title something along the lines of “ANGER AND DEPRESSION WORKSHOP,” along with a brief description of how to learn how to deal with anger and get out of the hole of depression. I hit the send button and it was gone. Was I crazy? Sure God had restored me, but how was I supposed to teach others what He taught me. After all I wasn’t even sure how I got into my mess let alone got out. Everything was really a blur to me. So I did something I considered very dangerous at the time. Dangerous because I wasn’t sure I wanted to revisit the horror of my last two years. I asked God to show me not only how I got trapped in depression, but how I got out. As I sat at my desk God began to reveal to me the process of my journey both in and out of my depression. Like the largest forest fire, it started off with the smallest flame and grew from there.

Do you remember the Garden of Eden, when God comes to walk with Adam in (Genesis chapter 3) right after he sins? He says something extraordinary, He calls out to Adam and says, “*Where are you?*” (NIV) Was that because God didn’t know where Adam was? No! I believe it was because he wanted Adam to realize where Adam was, and what he had done to get there. He wanted Adam to realize that he was separating himself from God by sinning and wanted Adam to realize the changes that would come about because of it. In the same way understanding the process of falling into depression can keep us from following the path that leads us there if we know how to avoid it in the first place. Even though I am healthy now and have grown tremendously from my experience, I continue to watch for the pitfalls that can lead me back to falling if I’m not careful.

What God revealed to me are the four boxes that lead us into depression. I will cover each one in detail so that we might be able to see what was blurry, come into focus. First off I want you to think of a box with you in it. The inside of the box of course represents you. It is where you live and who you are. The outside of the box represents our expectations. Things we expect out of life, how people treat us, our job, and our abilities, anything we put expectations on. These are boundaries we set in our life. Some people’s boxes are very large while others are very small, but all of us have these boundaries. Let me explain.

Have you ever had someone, especially someone you don’t know or know too well, come up to you front on and get in your personal space? I think we all know what I mean by personal space. It is that area where we start to feel uncomfortable when someone enters it, and when they do we usually show one of two responses, we either step back to recreate the boundary again or push them back to reestablish the boundary in our life. We either fight or flight. So our box is similar in essence like our personal space and we create its size and shape by molding our expectation and limits into its edges.



You

But what happens when someone or something cuts through our box? It depends on how deeply they enter our personal area and for how long. Let's use some stories and some visuals to take a look at the first in our series of boxes.

FRUSTRATION

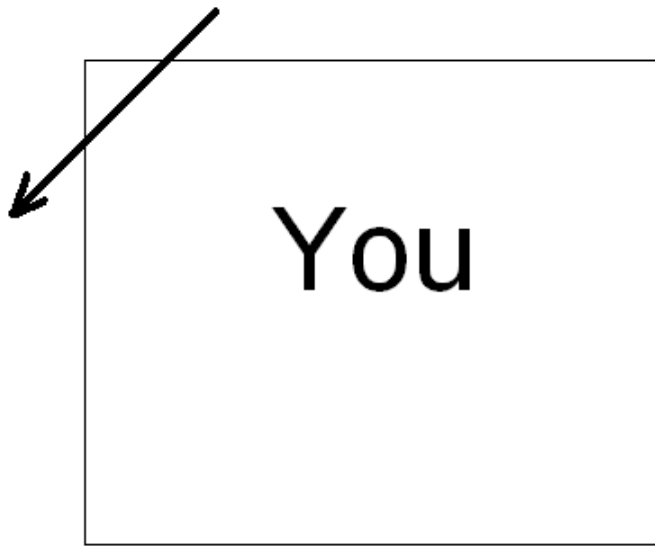
Let's say you have this awesome trip planned for you and a date. You plan on going to the shore to spend the day on the beach swimming and sunning and then out to dinner, dancing and home. You spent weeks planning out every detail when the day finally arrives. Your plan is to pick up your girlfriend a 6:00 AM head down the shore, park, unload and be on the beach by 10:00 AM. You have packed everything in the car the night before except the food in order to keep it cold. When you awake the day of the trip you realize it is bright outside. You look at your clock and it is blinking. You check your watch and it says 8:00 AM. Your alarm never went off because there was a power outage last night and you never replaced the batteries so the clock would stay set. This is the first arrow to cross through your expectations, but you take it mainly in stride and move on as quickly as you can to gain back the two hours you lost.

You hurriedly get dressed, call your girlfriend who has been wondering where you are and speed out the door. You're at her house in 10 minutes, pick her up and you're on your way. Not too bad of a recovery.

As you cruise down the highway suddenly you feel something just isn't right, and can feel the car becoming sluggish. You pull to the side of the road, and get out to check for the problem, only to discover you have a flat. Unfortunately the spare is buried beneath all the beach chairs and umbrella and food. FOOD! You forgot the food. In your rush out the door you forgot to grab the food and the cooler with drinks in it. UUUUGGGGGHHHH! Now you are starting to get angry. You unload everything, pull out the spare and change the tire. You lose another 45 minutes unpacking, changing the tire and packing again, but you are again on your way.

You notice down the road that your foot is pressing a little harder down on the gas pedal in order to make up lost time, and you see you are a little over the speed limit but not much. Several miles down the road you see lights in your rear view mirror. You pull over. The officer informs you that you were going 20 mph over the speed limit. WHAT! Seems the longer you held your foot down the more your speed crept up until Mr. Policeman was handing you a ticket for \$230.00. Now your anger is building again. All you want to do is spend a nice day with your girlfriend at the shore. Is that too much to ask?

Finally you arrive and get situated. Unload your gear and head to the beach. You'll buy food on the boardwalk and forget about everything that has happened before and make the day of it. An hour into your beach time you realize the wind turns cooler and soon you begin to feel water droplets hit your warm skin. You rush to pack everything up into the car and make it just in time before the sky opens up. Frustrated you sit in the car for the next several hours in the rain waiting for the restaurant to open for dinner. You feel like you can't get a break when all you wanted to do is enjoy the day with someone you love. The good news is you do get to go to dinner and dancing, before the long ride home.



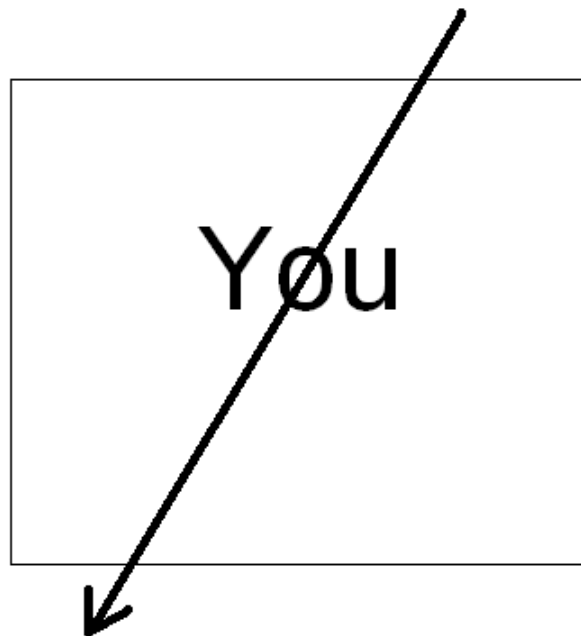
The first of the boxes represents frustration. The events of the day as they happened above are represented by the arrow that cut into your expectations of the day. All in all, you got through the day, and at most your frustration which is a milder form of anger lasted but a few hours and was forgotten. Frustration, although it can be controlling and overwhelming at the time is usually forgotten in a short amount of time. In fact we often laugh about it or tell in the form of a “funny” story years down the road. We have all had days similar in some way to the one above, but we’ve made it through. But as the boxes change and our personal space become pierced more heavily the game changes. Let’s take a look at the next box.

RAGE

Picture for a moment that you have been saving your money, and pinching pennies for years in order to buy your dream car without acquiring any debt. You’ve finally arrived at the dealership with your bundle of cash. You select your car and drive it off the lot. You take the highway in order to skip across town to show your friend your new baby. Leaning back in your seat you glance up into the mirror and notice a speck that is growing ever larger very quickly. Before you know it they are on you. To your left is a tractor trailer that has just passed you. The maniac behind you flies around you and tries to squeeze between you and the truck. But they

underestimate the space needed to make the maneuver and clip the front end of your brand new car on the driver's side. You lose control and the car spins a complete 180 degrees and slams into the guardrail raking the whole side of the car and blowing out two tires. Looking up into the mirror you see the cause of your situation fade ever smaller in the distance until they are completely gone. They never stopped, they never looked back.

The problem here though isn't your car, but the fact that in your rush you never called the insurance company to list your car with them. So even though your car runs and drives, everyday you step out your door to go to work you have to look at the mangled wreck down the whole length of the driver's side of YOUR car. Every day you are reminded about it, your anger grows steadily stronger. You can't get away from it and you can't forget it because each day you are reminded of the event that caused this. Your anger builds and there seems to be no release for it. This is what we call rage. Rage is far different from frustration. It occurs when anger has a chance to build because our expectations were dashed, not because something just cut the corner of our box, but because something or someone plowed right through the middle of it. There is no



easy remedy for it and it is usually something that was so tragic or devastating that it lasts with us for a time. Also it cut so through to the center of our box and there was no way for us to either

push them away or step back and in a way shrink our box so that the arrow could miss us. It would be as if someone invaded your personal space, but instead of you having the opportunity to step back or to push them away you were punched in the mouth by that person before you had any chance to react. When this happens you are left only with your anger. But what do you do with it? You hold onto it. It is one of the tools Satan uses to tell you that you have every right to be angry with the thing that hurt you and you should hold onto it because you might need it someday. When you do and you follow that prompting it becomes the beginning of the end, and when your rage builds it moves us to the next box.

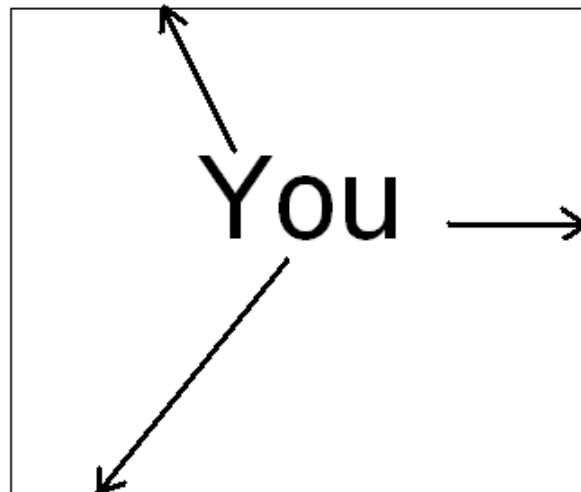
REVENGE

When we accept the lie and hold onto our anger because we feel rightly justified in doing so, it can often be confusing to know what to do with it once we have it. Anger in and of itself can be a good thing. It can protect you, say in the event that you are being attacked in a parking garage. It can provide super human strength in such a situation. But anger held over any length of time is no good for us. We were made in the image of God and as such beings we were never made to hold onto our anger. We were just not designed to handle the affects it can have on us when it is placed in storage for a later use. This is one of the reasons God's Word says in Psalms chapter 30, verse 5: *"For his anger lasts only a moment."* (NIV) And again in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 26 *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* (NIV)

God's plan for us is to reboot our human computer every evening, by either resolving our anger or dismissing it. Those are the choices He gives us, but regardless He wants us to let it go before the sun sets, and even in the process of being angry He wants us to never act out on it in a sinful way. When we break these rules we place our feet closer to the edge of the cliff almost taunting fate to push us off.

I remember a fishing trip I took several years back, when I went to Minnesota with my friend John Lewis. We were going to stay at his brother D's house and then travel north to the boundary waters to fish. On our return trip home we traveled along Lake Superior and came to a spot often visited by tourists and locals alike. It was a high cliff overlooking the lake and there were many

college age kids repelling and climbing up and down its face. I wanted so much to look over the edge, but figured as clumsy as I can be, I would probably launch myself headlong off the rim. So I laid on my belly and crawled to the edge to peer over, and with the view I experienced I'm glad I didn't press my luck. But holding onto anger not only puts us closer to the edge of the cliff, it also means our hands are too full to carry any blessings that God may want to lavish on us.



Revenge is a process of cooking down our anger and intensifying it. Ever heard of the phrase to “Stew over something?” This is the beginning of the revenge cycle. Ignoring God’s plan to purge us of anger and instead storing it up in our heart, so that we might magnify its power and in turn unleash it back on the people that hurt us. That is what revenge does to us. The longer we hold that anger the greater the punishment we want to inflict on the person or thing that hurt us. We want to pay back 10 fold the hurt we felt.

In teaching my anger and depression workshop and trying to help people see what revenge does, I ask someone from the audience to come forward. I then give them a paper covered straw, like the kind you would get from a fast food restaurant. I ask them to take the straw out and make a spitball from the paper and place it in the straw. When they do, I bend over, almost immediately to be shot in the butt. Sometimes people will just shoot me without any prompting, I guess they

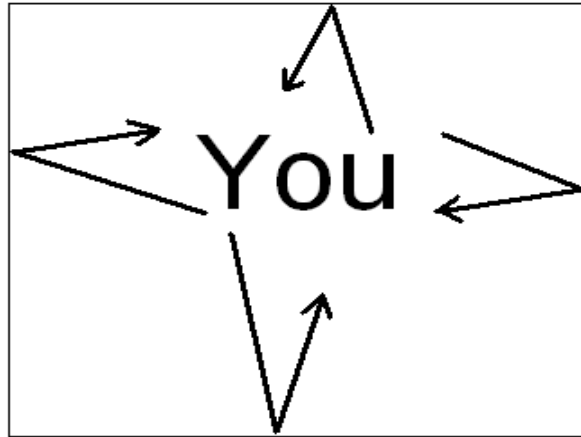
just can't help themselves. But when they do I explain to them that because they took advantage of me I get to take advantage of them, only I pull out a 1/2 inch piece of CPVC pipe and a push pin with a metal tip on it. I then shoot this pin out the pipe like a blowgun into a piece of cardboard, when it sticks they become a little worried and even more so if I ask them to bend over. I tell them that now it is my turn to repay them for what they did to me.

Although I never shoot them I do make my point about how the person planning the revenge always pushes the repayment to the utmost degree. The problem with revenge is that even if we spend hours contemplating how we would pay someone back and how severe we would be to them in their treatment, we don't because we can't. Unless someone has a true criminal thought process it just isn't in our nature, especially as Christians to hurt someone that badly. Therefore this causes an even greater conflict within us, a wrestling match with God. Although God says no, our pride says yes and we begin the struggle between good and bad, even trying to justify our revenge in our own mind. When we finally come to the conclusion that although we might like to, we cannot act out our thoughts, we therefore trap ourselves by moving to the last of the boxes in our final attempt to beat the anger monster.

DEPRESSION

We now have way too much time and energy invested in our anger. At this point we have accepted it like your son's bride is accepted into the family. It becomes part of who you are. You've rented a storage locker to hold onto it and now you are paying rent, depleting your income of good things in your life. As you have travelled through the boxes you have seated your anger deeper and deeper into your being. Even though you may have thought about releasing it using revenge as the means, you too soon come to realize that this is just morally wrong.

So what do we do with it? We seem stuck to it like super glue between two dry fingers. We can no longer try to push it outward so we do the exact opposite and draw it inward. We turn the anger on ourselves, because believe it or not it gives us a sense of control. We can still remain angry at the situation or person causing our grief, in fact if we don't we feel we have really become lost. This is why our relationship with anger becomes so important to us.



So we blame ourselves for the situation, the peoples response, the timing, the lack of action on our part, the overreaction on our part, our lack of foresight, or a hundred other things all pointing to it being our fault. At this point we have turned the corner backwards and taken full ownership of the problem. We have fully entered the realm of depression, and with it all its perks and benefits. It becomes a 24 hour a day ordeal. People as hard as they try can never connect with what you are going through, like someone who has gone through a bout with cancer (which I have) can never be understood by someone who has not. It is just not within their capabilities. But there is hope as I shared at the beginning of this book. He has never left through every journey of every box. He is the way home and His name is Jesus.

This may be hard for you to believe especially if you have been a Christian for a long time, but that does not make you exempt from dealing or falling into depression.

Many great men of the Bible struggled with depression, Elijah being one of them. In 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 1 – 9, we see Elijah running from Jezebel after he killed all the profits of Baal. After just getting done performing a tremendous miracle through God, he runs off into the desert after a threat on his life is made and this is what he says:

^{4b}“I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.” (NIV)

Job was also a man beat down and suffering. Listen to his words in Job chapter 7, verses 11 - 16, to see if you can relate to him:

¹¹“Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. ¹²Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard? ¹³When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, ¹⁴even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions, ¹⁵so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. ¹⁶I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning.” (NIV)

Does it sound like these men were depressed? I would say so. But they are not the only ones, the list goes on and on. Great men of God and even whole churches have gotten lost in their pursuit of God and in their lack of it as well. With this said you need to understand that even in the midst of your depression you are in very good company. These were men God chose to work through, and although they faced depression God sustained them and after a season placed both their feet firmly back up on the rim of the canyon. If there is hope for them, then there is also hope for you. I promise you hope is just around the corner if you are willing to seek it out. Let's go find it!

CHAPTER 4

FINDING THE ROOT

I own an old 1952 Ford 8N farm tractor that I bought from a friend some years back. It is a great tractor and I use it for snow removal and to brush hog the tall grass in my field. But tractors like any kind of machinery can be fickle. This one is no exception. Every now and then it gives me problems in the fact that it doesn't want to start.

One particular year I was having more than the usual problem in getting it started. It would turn over, but just wouldn't catch, not even a putt out of it. So I started my search to find the problem. I started with what I thought to be the obvious first and worked my way backwards. I first

replaced the points, condenser, spark plugs, spark plug wires, and distributor cap on the electrical system. I turned the key and again it turned over, but would not start. I checked for spark at the plugs, it was weak, so I replaced the electrical coil. Again it would not start. Now I was getting frustrated. Do you remember that word? Next I went to the extreme. I replaced the ignition switch, the whole wiring harness, voltage regulator, and carburetor. I had spark, I had gas flow and with the new carburetor I knew the mixture was right. Now she had to start! I turned the key and pressed the starter button, fully expecting to hear that wonderful sound, but all I heard was the winding of the starter.

In complete despair I drove to the Ford tractor dealer in my area to pick up some new plugs or something, and to ask advice. Upon arriving at the dealer I went inside and explained to one of the guys behind the parts counter what was going on, and what I had done to the tractor in my attempt to fix it thus far. He was puzzled. It had spark, it had gas and compression, but wouldn't fire.

He then referred the matter to a girl behind the counter and she got on the phone and called the house next door. "Is your grandfather there?" she asked. "Send him over here please" was her request and with that she hung up the phone. It wasn't long before an elderly gentleman entered from the side door of the building. He made his way over to the counter and sat down on the stool beside me. The girl who was evidently his daughter explained my dilemma, he then turned to me and began to ask me questions. I told him everything I had tried thus far to get the old girl going, but it had not worked. He sat there for a moment and then he looked at me and said "Did you replace the spacer clip underneath the rotor under the distributor cap?" I told him, "I had no clue there even was a clip there." He went on to explain that the clip went on the shaft of the distributor and then the rotor slides over the top of it. Although you really can't see the clip unless you are looking for it, it holds a very valuable position in that it takes up any slack in the positioning of the rotor so that the spark gets to the spark plug at just the right time.

He directed the man behind the counter to give me a clip and a fresh set of spark plugs. The clip was cheap, and the plugs didn't cost that much either. I also bought a new battery being I had already replaced everything else.

I installed the new battery, plugs and clip. I turned the key pressed the starter button and the tractor roared to life. I thought of the old man's comment to me just before I left. He said, "I wish I had a dollar for every one of these tractors I've worked on over the years!" That is because he was the founding owner of the dealership. Fortunately I could glean from all his years of experience, and come to find out that the thing I didn't even know existed was the root cause to my problem.

THE ROOT

One of the things I had going for me through me depression was the fact that I knew the problem that caused it. It was clear to me from the beginning what the issues were that were causing me to become angry. Unfortunately for many others their travel into the realm of depression is a blur and they have no idea how they got there or the reason they feel the way they do. Sometimes it is combination of knowing some issues, while others remain hidden.

After God delivered me from my depression, I went on to do my best to minister to people with their problems. The first thing I would do after introducing myself to the person I was trying to help, was to have them sit on the couch across from my desk and I would then grab a big yellow lined pad and a pen. Then just like the old man at the tractor supply place I would ask questions one by one about the person, their background, family, struggles, childhood and the list goes on. I asked whatever I could to find the missing part that caused them to feel dead inside and kept them from roaring to life again.

Roger's parents had called me right before Thanksgiving one year, their son who was home from college was really struggling and their thought was that he was suicidal. Even though I was on vacation, I decided to meet with him one evening at the office.

He sat on the couch across from me and I grabbed my pen and pad. I asked him how he was doing. "Fine" he said. "No problems?" was my reply. "No" he responded. I could see we were getting nowhere fast. It was time for questions and answers. This could take awhile.

I had learned from my personal counseling sessions while struggling with my own depression that meeting for one hour every week was definitely a slow way to solve anything. Each week I

would meet we would spend the majority of the hour hashing out the issue from the previous week that I felt we already covered, which would leave only minutes for us to discuss the next step in our progress. I knew in my heart and my mind that this was an emotionally tiring way to reach my goal to be healthy. I, just like so many struggling with depression, needed healing now, not years from now.

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

For many they got into their mess quickly and wanted out just as fast. So I developed a new approach to meeting with people (at least I haven't heard of anyone else doing it). Although I wasn't specifically a licensed counselor, I was credentialed under Youth for Christ to do ministry which often entails ministering one on one. So my approach was more of a ministry approach than a typical counselor approach. Instead of meeting with several people for an hour each throughout the day (I didn't have that many appointments to schedule), I would meet with one person and meet with them for as long as they could endure it or until we found the root and got them back on the track to health. Sometimes this meant an hour or two and sometimes it meant four or five hours straight in a meeting, excluding bathroom breaks of course.

I know this seems nuts, but because of people's desperation, I made a commitment to do my best to travel with them to the top of the canyon again if I could, by helping prevent them from stewing in their anger for another week before we could meet again. Regardless I never had anyone in all my sessions say that they had been there too long. Most of them were at rock bottom and didn't care what it cost, especially if it was only time they were spending as I never charged for my meetings but offered it as a free service as an outreach of our ministry to both teens and adults. I only wanted to give back to people the freedom God had given back to me.

The question process with Roger alone lasted over an hour. Then finally we found the root. He lied about the fact that he wasn't having a problem. His parents could see it, and others as well. But when we got to the issue it came out just the same betrayed by the reflections of his attitude and his voice.

As we walked through this college friends, and the normal stuff in life we then made a turn toward home and I asked him about his parents. He freely told me about them and his childhood

growing up, but I could sense the change in his voice and feel the anger about certain things he was mentioning. He was angry with his parents. Although they clearly loved him (or they never wouldn't have taken the time to call) he was upset with them. It seems they forced him do things growing up that they did not pressure other siblings to do. He felt singled out and more of an object or practice dummy than a son. As silly as that sounds to you or me it was devastating to Roger. Roger's feeling of abandonment and false feeling of isolation from his parents love caused him to carry his anger on for years, growing like a tumor until it was so firmly fixed within him that he felt he could never escape it.

WOW! You never can tell what triggers us to anger. The road to depression for each of us is caused by a different feeling, situation, or hurt. But I have come to find out through all the people I have met with and talked to struggling with depression that in most cases it boils down to some form of REJECTION!

The path of rejection can consist of many roads. The key is to find the root of the issue, the exact time and place in history where the rejection took place. For some people it may not be rejection that leads them to depression, but it is usually something close to it. Regardless, it is an event in your life that caused an emotional blow that you thought strong enough about to take ownership of. It is a situation that is painful, hurtful, or shocking enough to make it unforgettable in our minds.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MIND

Now that I am an adult and I look back on my childhood, I can't help but wonder why I remember some things so vividly and others I completely forgot about. I remember odd things, things like playing army with my neighbors and looking through my toy machine gun scope on the barrel. I see it so clearly. Or I can still picture the metal bar in my backyard that grew into the fork in a tree, or days at my Aunt Millie's marina fishing and crabbing. I remember a time there where I never wanted to forget that place. So as I sat on the end of the dock I tried to memorize a picture in my mind of the water and the shore line on the opposite side of the inlet, I still have it!

Although there are many memories that we retain that we never made a conscious effort to file away in our vast computer of a brain. There are many, like the memory of my aunt's place that

we deliberately choose to hold onto. The sometimes hurtful, and painful memories we experience through a life event are sometime the ones we choose, for whatever reason, to hold on to. Maybe we want the opportunity to work it out in our head, or it gives us that false sense of control we long for, especially in situations we can do nothing about.

Good memories are wonderful. We can pull them out from time to time like photographs and reminisce about our past. It makes us feel good inside. But by the same token bad memories that we hold on to do the opposite, and make us feel anything but good.

Have you ever noticed when someone is in a car accident, especially a bad one that they can usually remember everything right up to the accident, but not the accident itself. My son Caleb was one such person. He took my Jeep Grand Cherokee to church and then to the area flea market. On his way home he lost control of the Jeep on a curve, swerved across the oncoming lane, back into his lane, off the side of the road into a boulder, and flipped the car end for end with it coming to rest on the driver side of the vehicle as it smash through a post and rail fence. He was fine except for a small scratch on his arm, praise God! But he could never remember anything about the accident itself. It had to be pieced together by the police through an investigation of the skid marks and other details.

Is that a bad thing? No, it's a good thing! It is the way God has wired us, in order to protect us from thoughts that could damage us and our thinking. Which I believe is why when we retain those thoughts of negative emotional situations instead of letting them go, they often become suppressed and cloudy in our mind. Although suppressed they still remain a part of us and stay active like a computer program running under the radar. Those thoughts still affect our performance even though we can't truly determine why. This is why it is so important to find and understand the root to our depression if it isn't already known. It would be fruitless to continue to apply direction to someone that has no idea where they are going.

Picture a friend of yours was coming to visit you and got lost on the way. They would probably call you on the phone to get directions, and if that was the case you would probably respond to them with this question. "Well, where are you now?" You see in order to point people in the right direction we have to know where they are presently. This digging to find out where people

are, often took a good portion of the time spent with someone I was trying to help. But once the root was discovered it actually has the ability to jump start the process of healing, like someone kicking off the bottom of a swimming pool to reach the surface again.

If you are the one going through depression right now and don't understand what has caused it you need to take some time and revisit your past. As painful as it may be, start as close to the present and move slowly backwards all the way into your childhood if necessary. Take a pen and paper and write down each event that you can remember that was hurtful no matter how small or insignificant you feel it may be, but that you still remember. Remember our goal is to find the clip like on the tractor. It may not be visible, it may be locked away. In which case it might take someone like a counselor to help you pry it loose, and discover it. If you already know or have an idea what your depression stems from, you are miles ahead of the game. If when going down the list there are certain items that really strike a chord with you, or cause you to feel anger just thinking about them, then BINGO, you found at least one of the roots to your problem. Continue to go down the list. Go over it several days in a row or longer if necessary, until you feel you have found the triggers to your feelings. Then once discovered you will be ready for the next step in healing, and finding your way back to the top.

EXPOSING THE HURT

For almost all of the people I ministered to dealing with depression it was not very hard to expose their hurt. It usually just took a little time. Let's look at Keith for an example. Keith was having trouble in his marriage. I had known him a number of years. I had just finished doing some work for him (I was still moonlighting as a contractor) and as I was about to leave he stood outside by my truck. I could tell something was wrong. I had noticed too that in the past years I had worked for him, he always made it a point to send his wife away for the day that I would be working at his place, even though he was there.

I asked him what was wrong. He began to share that he and his wife had invited a pastor traveling to the area to come and stay with them for a while. As time went on he noticed the pastor and his wife were becoming more and more friendly. The pastor would sometimes sit with his shirt off and with Keith's wife out on the deck. Keith thought this was rather inappropriate

behavior, but just placed it in the back of his mind. Not long after that his wife told him that she would no longer be staying but would be moving out with the pastor in order to be with him. Keith was devastated! The fact that Keith expressed committing a violent act towards this man was not unexpected. I told him we had to meet, and to come to my office. I told him to call me.

When Keith arrived at my office I knew that the pastor and his wife were a primary issue, but I didn't want to assume anything so we spent the time looking through his past to answer the questions, like that of our lost friend, "Now where are you?" Keith started at his childhood and progressed slowly but steadily to the present, listing many of the hurtful things that happened to him along the way that helped mold him into who he was now.

Among the things listed where the fact that he was sodomized as a youth by one of the neighbor kids on his block (what an overwhelming burden to carry especially as a youth), he was also rejected by his father, and later in life he was ousted from a job position by a group of pastors, to name just a few of his bad memories. These hidden gems although suppressed were not inactive in shaping Keith into the man he now was, BROKEN! Many of the things that happened to him were private and he never told anyone of what had happened, choosing to bear the full burden on his own shoulders. We think it is our fault and our responsibility. Like the old adage "I got myself into this mess, and I'll get myself out." Wrong! When horrible memories like this become integrated into our life we might feel we can take care of it, but in reality only God alone has the power to deliver.

As we talked about the issues he acknowledged that he had sent his wife away the days I worked in order for him to safeguard her, to prevent just such an event like what had happened with the pastor. He loved his wife, but because of all the other rejection in his life he was trying to control her and was holding the reigns so tight they broke, and he along with them.

The next couple of hours we spent revisiting those hurtful memories and finally put them in the trash where they belonged. Don't get me wrong, even painful memories can be beneficial to us if we use them by learning from them and then letting them go. It is when we make them captive in our mind and refuse to release them that we become the one bound, and not our thoughts. Later that day when Keith left my office he was a different man, and on his way to full restoration. In

fact he told me several months later he would never forget that day in my office that changed his life.

Oh, and what about Roger? He gave me a crushing hug and left my office with a new resolve. The following week I was visited by his mom who brought me a box of candy and told me that she didn't know what happened that night, but that her son was a totally different person. He came up and gave her a big hug once he got home. Everything about him had changed. She was extremely grateful for having her son back.

Whatever happened that night with Roger and that day with Keith were extraordinary, yet they were just two of the many lives I would see changed for the better over the next few years. But the one thing I need to express is that it had very little to do with me and all to do with God. He is the designer of our souls the only one that can fix our hearts. All we are capable of doing is pointing others in His direction. God is the true healer as spoken of in the words of the famous preacher, C. H. Spurgeon **“The Lord knows very well that you cannot change your own heart, and cannot cleanse your own nature, but He also knows that He can do both.”** (All Of Grace by C. H. Spurgeon - page 55).

CHAPTER 5

KICKING OFF THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL

If you are struggling with depression right now, you are probably feeling like I've been dragging out the solution to becoming whole again. Believe me I know your motivation to get there, but you must remember this is a process. Just like you got into this place through a process, there is a process for rising out of the muck and mire as well. But the good news is that in this chapter we will start the process of turning the corner and heading back up the canyon. Hopefully leaving everything bad behind, and filling ourselves with new and wholesome beliefs. I say hopefully because as much as some people are hurting they will still refuse to let go of the hurt. They want to remain in control. Like a pilot in a death spiral who refuses to bail out, but instead thinks he can save the plane and himself by pulling back even harder on the stuck yoke.

It is time for abandoning all the bad memories and replacing them with a new way of thinking. Remember a couple of chapters back when I told you how I prayed to God and asked Him to save me? Right after that I did something that I hadn't done in a while, that was to open my Bible. I asked for God's wisdom to direct me to read what I needed to hear, and show me the path to take back home. And do you know what? He did!

The thing I had been rejecting all along, the Bible, held the words of truth for me and they hold them for you too. Let me show you where God took me on my journey and where He can take you also.

THE THINGS YOU DID AT FIRST

After the point where I reached rock bottom and cried out to God on my trip back home from the counselor, I took myself to a quiet area and opened up the Word of God. Cracking that book open again after such a long leave of absence made me feel like I was in the movies when they open a big book with what seems like an inch of dust on it, its pages old and fragile. Its readers

were looking for some secret answer to crack the code that would assure their escape from their dungeon. That is what it felt like to me.

I prayed and asked God to guide me. I don't remember exactly how or what I prayed, I only knew I needed God's help. To my disbelief I opened the Bible to the book of Revelation chapter 2. What? The book of Revelation? God, Really? Although I was in my end times, I didn't feel there could be anything there for me. But I was operating on my wisdom and not God's. After all I was the one depressed not Him. So I began to read on. It was the passage written to the church of Ephesus. This is what it said:

¹“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶But you have this in your favor: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitians, which I also hate. ⁷Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (NIV)

When I got to verses 4 and 5 the words sprang off the page and smacked me right in the face. That was me!

⁴“Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” (NIV)

I had become so engrossed in myself and my pain that I had turned my back on God and had forsaken my first love. Like I talked about earlier, I was working hard for God. I was in full time ministry. I was preaching, teaching, planning events and outreaches, yet I was bone dry empty inside. But as much as I thought this was pleasing to God, it wasn't, because I had forsaken Him

as my first love. All my works and deeds meant nothing because although I was serving the King, I wasn't spending any time with the King.

When I looked at this passage further I came to realize that the church of Ephesus was a church with great love for all God's people and had faith in God, in fact Paul the Apostle mentions this in the first chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians. Here is what he says in chapter 1, verses 15 - 17:

¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (NIV)

Looking at that passage I realized something. In the 30 or so years between the writing of the book of Ephesians and the writing of the book of Revelation that church had forsaken their love of God. After all in the book of Ephesians Paul states that they had love for all the saints or God's people. In order to truly love others we must love God first and the love of God must flow through us. It was almost like someone tied a knot in a fire hose and tightened it over time until only a trickle flowed from its end.

Somehow, and some way they had gotten lost just like me. A whole church getting lost! WOW! If it was possible for a whole church to lose its way then how easy would it be for just one person? I was gaining a new perspective to the fact that I had to make some changes in order to renew my heart. But where was I to start? The next verse in Revelation held the key. In verse 5 it says:

Repent and do the things you did at first. (NIV)

First off what does repent mean? It is a word we hear all the time in Christian circles. But most of us might only think of it as being used for someone who was a sinner and is just coming to Christ. But here God uses it to tell the church, his people to repent. Roughly it means to stop moving in the direction you are going in and to turn 180 degrees and go the other way. The second part of that verse is another statement that stood out to me, do the things you did at first.

What things? At first what? When? Well after a short time thinking about it I came to the conclusion as you might have as well, that God meant for me to stop moving in the direction I was going and to turn around and go back and do the things I first did when I first became a Christian.

THE TUNNEL OF LOVE

So what was some of the first things I did when I first came to the Lord? To be honest there was one main thing that was my focus back then, and now remains my focus again, even into today. What was it? It was my focus of how much God loved me. This feeling of being loved was something lacking in my life growing up. I was fat, my ears stuck out (they still do), in fact my own grandmother told me that I looked like a taxi cab coming down main street with the doors open. What she said wasn't very nice, but it was true. Also my eyebrows grew together to make one big one, I also wasn't the smartest, fastest, or most popular. So the one thing I was looking for was someone to love me for who I was. This was one of the contributing factors of me surrendering my heart to Jesus. Not only had God created me, He designed me to look and act just like I do, and then on top of all that He chose to love me. He chose to love me before I accepted his Son's gift on the cross. He chose to love me in the midst of my sin, and he chose to love me for me.

So I began the next few days looking into all the verses that I could think of that talked about God's love for me, and even some I hadn't learned yet. I chose to make a conscious effort to stop reliving the hurtful issues of my past and instead substitute those devastating memories with these verses about God's love for me instead. I was doing what the scripture was calling me to do. Stop moving forward, turn around and go back and focus on God's love for me, the thing I had done at first.

It is impossible to think of two things at once. As much as people think they are gifted at multitasking, I beg to differ. Sure people can do two, three or even five things at the same general time. Like listening to the radio, writing out checks, talking on the phone, etc. But in reality all they are doing is focusing briefly on one thing for a split second or two and then turning that thing off and picking up the next thing and so on and so on. We are just not made to

do five things at once which is why when we choose to give our focus to something, the other interest will lose out.

That is exactly what I found out was happening to me. As I focused more on God's love for me, my despair was starting to take second place, and as I made God's Word real in my life and spent less time dwelling on the issues of the past that held me captive, they were being driven farther and farther out of my life. Something else that was important was happening as well. God's love for me and my understanding of that was trumping my need for the approval of other people and their opinion of me. In just a couple of days I had turned a major corner in my life and my struggle. Slowly I was headed home again.

So how was my understanding of God's love for me changing things? Well I started as the verse in Revelation stated. I went back to the verses that I first learned as a Christian. We all have verses we memorize, usually they are our favorites and usually because they mean something to us. Maybe because they got us through one of life's storms, or gave us comfort at the death of a loved one, or gave us strength when we needed it. So I applied the same principle in my search for God's love for me. I started with the verses I already knew. But I did something a little different. I actually read them, and broke them down to look what they were really saying. Let me explain. If you are like me, or probably many of us for that matter, we read scripture and even memorize it like we used to do homework in school. We would read a chapter or two in a book because that was our homework assignment. So when our parents would ask did you do your homework we could honestly say, "Yes." But if they asked us the dreaded question "Did you understand it?" In most cases we would be forced to say "No." Why? Was it because we lacked the ability to learn? No! What we lacked was the focus it took to comprehend its true meaning. We were in such a rush to finish that we missed a very important step along the way.

That is why I was backtracking. To look at these verses again that I thought were so important to memorize in the first place. One of the first ones I looked at was John chapter 3, verse 16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV)

I began to break the verse down and make it personal. After all God desired to have a personal relationship with me. Why should His scripture to me be any less personal? So what does it mean when it says that God so loved the world? Does it mean He loved the mountains, and the oceans and sky? Although God looked on all he created and saw that it was good, the word world in this verse really means the people of the world. After all He wouldn't give His son as a sacrifice for the dirt, but only for the beings he created in his own image in order to rescue them from eternal damnation and reconcile them back into a right relationship with Himself. So if the word world here meant the people God created, that would include you and me. So in order to make this verse personal and being I was one of the world or people maybe I should read it so that it might be applied to me more specifically. So for me it read. For God so loved Dave Dowling that he gave His one and only Son, that if Dave Dowling believes in Him he shall not perish but have eternal life (Dave Dowling paraphrase).

This made me think of the complexity of God's love for me. That God had created the universe with everything in it. That He had ordained the timing of history orchestrating the time and place where each person would be born and where they would live as it talks about in Acts chapter 17, verse 24 – 27 saying:

²⁴“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any of us.”
(NIV)

Again making me think about the talents and abilities he placed into me and the most amazing fact that He created a plan to sacrifice His Son Jesus in my place in order that I might live eternally with Him. I soon found myself looking through the book of Psalms chapter 139, verses 13 – 18:

¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. ¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you. (NIV)

These verses became my favorite of all the passages I would study in the Bible. Let me explain to you why. First off it shares with me how special I am to God. How detailed God was when He created me. He knit me together. Ever watch someone knit or crochet? Hours upon hours of linking each loop together. You don't just create an afghan in one evening's time. I've watched my wife crochet baby blankets and such for hours, creating each loop a link, on and on and not just the same color but a mix of them. All woven together and not just color, but design as well. They are a sight to behold, and so are you and I when we were created. Even if I do look like a taxi cab coming down main street with the doors open because my ears sticking out.

God invested time, and purpose to make me that way. Plus we miss a very important factor and that is that God isn't concerned so much with our bodies as he is our heart. God spoke this to Samuel when He sent him to anoint David as king. 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 7:

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (NIV)

I was never little, even when I was born I was 10 pounds. I played football in high school and loved it. I was given a natural strength by God. Although I wasn't built like a body builder or a weightlifter, and I wasn't all that strong in my arms compared to some of the other guys that worked out. But my legs especially were naturally gifted to be strong, which would come in handy when in my business I needed to wrestle cast iron boilers into place by myself.

I remember working out one day during high school on the leg press of what was called the universal gym. It had stacks of fixed weights on it. You would move the pin up or down on the stack to adjust how much weight you would want to try and lift.

One day for the fun of it my friends and I decided to try something. I got on the leg press which has a seat with a bar in front of it with an upper and lower place for your feet. The lower placement was for normal lifting, but if you put your feet on the upper level it became much harder, because of the lack of leverage used to lift the weights. I placed my feet on the bottom rung, having put the pin all the way down and pushed, 500 pounds lifted into the air. Then I took my feet with my legs locked and one at a time quickly moved them to the upper rung, this made the weights feel more like 750 pounds. Then both my friends, each weighing about 150 pounds stood on top of the stack of weights and held on. I let the weights slam to the floor and with all my might pushed them back up again, not just once but at least twice. If my memory serves me right and my calculations were on, then as a teenager I had leg pressed the equivalent of over 1,000 pounds. Even I didn't believe it, and up until this point I have told very few about it.

I remember another time I was at a supply house to pick up items for my heating and air conditioning business, when one of the guys behind the counter suggested I enter the contest they were holding today. "What contest was that" I said. It seemed they were giving away a 12 volt cordless drill kit to the person who could throw an air conditioning condensing pad the farthest. These pads were almost 3 foot square and made of a light concrete mixture molded around a Styrofoam base. You would place them outdoors to support heat pumps or air conditioning units. They probably weighed about 8 to 10 pounds, or so I would guess. The person who threw it the farthest that day so far, placed it at 54 feet from the throw line. I finished my business gathering my stuff and then decided, ah what the heck, I'll give it a toss just to see how I do. After all it was free to try. I had thrown discus in high school so I thought I would use the same principle with this. I grabbed the pad and stepped up to the line. I spun myself in a circle one or two quick turns and released the pad, it not only flew straight but it caught the wind and lifted as it went. I walked out of that supply house that day with a brand new drill with a throw well over 60 feet.

So why am I sharing these stories? It's not because I'm bragging, but as I write these two stories they bring back memories of a time when God allowed me to do some things better than I

thought I could do them myself. This was all because God designed me that way. Because of God's grace to me, through some natural abilities, I learned I could be good at some things after all. God designed me that way and he designed you to be good at things as well.

Depression had stolen my thoughts about myself, saying that I was unable to contribute any longer to this world. Please don't get me wrong I'm really not mentioning these things to brag or build myself up. I learned a long time ago that the Dowling pride needs to be kept in check. But I want it to cause you to see how fearfully and wonderfully you are made yourself.

There are so many wonderful things you were created for to enjoy. Strength was only one gift God granted me. But when I contracted cancer twice in a period of two years my 290 pound frame shrunk to the size of only 143 pounds. My strength was all but gone. In fact I had to have my kids take the lids off of the Tupperware style containers for me, and couldn't even break a half pound of spaghetti in half to put it into the boiling water. But I am on my way back up again and although I only weight 161 pound as I write this I know that God has designed me for even greater things. He has instilled in me the ability to build and design things like houses and equipment, to preach, and tell stories, to organize mission trips to Africa and other places, even the ability to write this book and so much more. These were all built into my design by God. You are built in just the same way, but gifted in other areas. Each of us created special and unique for a purpose and a time. Loop by loop and link by link you were knitted together for great things for God. God took delight in His creation of the earth and he takes great delight in His creation of you. So much was His love for you that he was willing to sacrifice His Son's life in place of yours. WOW! If that is not love I don't know what is.

Even though God spoke of the detail of my creation in this passage in Psalms 139, my all time favorite verses come at the end, specifically verses 17 and 18:

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast the sum of them! ¹⁸Were I to count them they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake I am still with you. (NIV)

These verses became more real to me than any others I have encountered either before or since. The more I read these verses and deciphered its meaning the more impact it had on my health and well being.

One of my all time favorite things to do is go saltwater fishing, either from a boat or from the shore. I live in the Northeast part of the country, about two hours from Sandy Hook, New Jersey. For both me and my brother Larry, who is my fishing buddy, this spot is our go to location to fish. We go in search of many different kinds of fish from bluefish to striped bass and everything in between.

In a sense then, it was my love of fishing that brought me my understanding of God's love for me, and these verses alive. You see these verses above tell me that God's thoughts of me are so precious because when He thinks of me, His thoughts about me outnumber the sands and no matter what happens I'm still with Him.

When I go to the beach to go fishing and stand at the ocean's edge, I can look to my right and then again to my left and all I see is sand. But that is just one beach, and does not include the sand under my feet that may go down 40 feet or more. If I would continue south down the Jersey shore from Sandy Hook I would hit other beaches like Brielle, Point Pleasant, Ocean City, Cape May and then over to the state of Delaware, to Lewes beach, Rehoboth, Slaughter, Ocean City, Maryland. Then through every beach south of there to Miami, the Florida Keys and along the Southern shore of the United States. That doesn't include the West coast or points north of Jersey, or any of the other beaches of the world. Double WOW! Can you even begin to fathom how much God thinks about you? Can you even begin to understand the depth of His planning, or the complexity of the paths of travel He has laid out for you, with people you have yet to met, or children yet to be born, all revolving around you!

God even goes to the extent to say that even the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matthew 10: 30). That verse means exactly what it says, that all your hairs are numbered, not counted. What is the difference? First off it would be physically difficult to count the hairs on someone's head. I suppose if someone had the time and the focus to do it, it possibly could be done. But I mean you would have a hard time of it. You would either have to pluck each hair out individually or shave them all off being careful not to cut any in half in the process and then count each, one by one. Numbered is a whole different ball game. God says they are numbered because if all your hair would fall out for one strange reason or another, God would know exactly what hair would go in each follicle, a humanly impossible feat. Yet God concerns

Himself with this, something we might relate to as unimportant. But it is not just our own hair He has taken the time to inventory, but the heads of everyone in the whole world.

I know you may be struggling right now, but you need to take these next steps as an exercise in faith. I want you to reach for a biblical concordance. There is probably one in the back of your Bible, especially if it is a study Bible. If not you can go online to look up a Bible website like www.biblegateway.com with keywords or passage look up. Turn to the word love and begin a journey in the next few days to research all the verses pertaining to God's love for you. Dissect them, tear them apart, I challenge you to do so. Let His words breath life back into your soul. The reason why is because you will need them on the next steps to healing. It needs to become the foundation on which we will build a staircase back to the top.

This was the start of my journey back home into the arms of God. His love was no longer something I would dream about, no now it was becoming real to me and in more ways than I could imagine. God loved me through everything, my inability to play basketball, my lack of faith, what people thought of me, my mistakes and even my sins. I was learning that God was big enough to bear it all and still love me in the process. I still had a long way to go but this was a huge step in the right direction.

CHAPTER 6

ALMOST THERE

My wife Gail and I built our own home. Once we got going on it, it still took us 10 years to finish it, although we did save a considerable amount of money doing almost everything ourselves. One of the last major projects I did on the house was to build a large dormer into the attic area of our home to provide two separate bedrooms, for two of my boys. Not long after we finished the project I notice a damp spot on the ceiling of our master bathroom, which is below the boy's rooms. Going up on the roof I could see where the problem was. When I shingled the roof I failed to lay down ice and water shield membrane, and metal flashing in the valley where the two roofs came together. I had shingled a roof like this before without any problems, so I thought this practice would be acceptable for my own roof. I was wrong. I lifted the shingles in the valley one by one and ran a bead of asphalt down the valley under each shingle. That stopped the leak and everything was well and good. That is, it was for the next two years or so. Now the roof is beginning to leak again. But because I am still recovering from my bouts with cancer, I don't have the ability to replace any shingles, so it has to be patched again. But I know in my heart that eventually I will have to do the right thing and tear off the old shingles and install them again using the right methods.

Trust me when I say that just placing a patch on something will almost never bring about a permanent fix. This is especially true with depression. If you truly want healing you have to follow God's plan back to health. You can't miss any steps and you can't bypass anything. You have to be willing to work at it, and your success or lack of it depends on just how badly you want it. Lets grab some tools and rip off some shingles so we can build things back up the right way.

SURRENDER

I was teaching at a Heatwave Conference with Youth for Christ with several hundred senior high students at Wildwood, New Jersey. I was teaching an elective seminar on “Anger and Depression.” This day as I was doing my talk and illustrations I noticed that the main speaker for the conference, the one that does the main sessions was sitting in the room along with the others. After I was done everyone began to funnel out the door, everyone but Carl the main speaker. As the last person left the room, Carl got up and closed the door. He turned to me and said, “I am so angry.” We sat down right there on the floor and he began to share his story with me.

He had worked at one of the area colleges teaching there. He and his wife had decided to become missionaries to Spain, so he resigned his position at the college in order to pursue their next path in life together. But directly after this his wife informed him that she would not be going. He later found out that she was having an affair with his best friend that worked at the college as well. Soon after, they separated. He had given up everything and now was struggling with what to do. What career to move towards, what to do with his family and especially what to do with his anger. We spent the next good while going over everything, both issues and the solutions.

Carl was in the same spot I had been in. He was in ministry, sharing God’s Word, but doing it all from reflexes from past years of experience, and I told him so. I told him that unless he was willing to surrender he would never be able to allow himself to be led by the Holy Spirit, that everything he spoke from that stage tonight would only be done by working on reflexes. Surrender meant giving up on what is broken, to stop trying to patch it and tear it off and do it right. It means relinquishing our falsehood, and replacing it with what we know in our heart to be true.

We spent the rest of our time going through a typical session, crying and praying together. That night as Carl spoke in our evening session something was different. He was digressing slightly from his regular message style and began to speak about his brokenness. He went on to tell the story of his wife leaving him. He brought a message that spoke of his abandonment, his struggle and how God met him and how God could meet any kid there that night feeling the same way. Carl was no longer running on reflexes. His message carried truth, honesty and the power of the Holy Spirit. As he walked off the stage and down the side isle I meet him half way in this journey to reach the back of the room. We hugged each other and he looked at me and said,

“How was that?” “Great” I said. Carl had turned the corner and was headed for greatness once again. Had his circumstances changed? No, not at all. In fact the times ahead that he would face would be very rough. So much so that I partnered with him for a time to stay in touch and commit to praying for him as God worked him through it. What had changed though was his reintroduction of God back onto the throne of his life.

So what does a session of surrender look like, and how do you build it into your staircase back to the top? Let me walk you through the process.

Almost every session I had with someone usually started with the pen and paper and question and answer period. This was critical in determining where they were and what they were going through. It also allowed us to find the missing issues if they were not known at the time. From here we would walk through each of the boxes, one by one along with the stories of how each box and our reactions towards anger affected us. We would then look at the reality of God’s precious unfathomable love for us. How He thought about us constantly. How He planned our life, our being, our spirit and soul.

THE EVENT

In following the next step in the journey, I would have that person close their eyes and do the painful thing of taking me back with them to the very point of their pain by revisiting the issue or issues that went on to create their depression. I would ask them to recreate for me the exact place and time of their experience. I would tell them this is no different than the many, many times they have been there before, only this time they would be taking me with them and it would hopefully be for the last time.

I would ask them to describe to me where they were in detail. I wanted them to paint the picture so vividly with every detail that even I felt like I was there with them. If it was in a room, or a park or wherever, I would ask them to start with them looking to their left and panning to their right, describing every detail along the way. The color of the wallpaper, was there a window, how big was the room, etc. I would ask them questions about anything I wasn’t clear on. We would dialogue about what was happening and what was said. I’m sure if you are going through depression you have a spot of history like this anchored in your mind that you revisit over and

over again, trying to make some sense of it or grab some controlling factor you have missed before.

As I would continue on with them, having them describe for me everything taking place, I would tell them to stop right around the time when everything was coming to a climax. I wanted them to freeze frame the moment. Whether there was action happening, or things were quiet, I wanted them to freeze that moment in time. Then I would ask them to do something for me. I would ask them to again start on their left and moving slowly around the room I would ask them to look for somebody. I would ask them to look for Jesus. In all my meetings with people there was only ever one person that told me they couldn't see Him in the event taking place. Everyone else said they did. Maybe he was standing by a door, or at the foot of a bed, or to their left or right, and even for the person that said they couldn't see Jesus they told me they felt His presence. Then I would ask them to describe for me what type of expression was on Jesus' face. Almost always it was a look of sadness. Then I would ask them to open their eyes and look at me.

GOD WAS THERE

The reason I would take people through this exercise is to show them that Jesus was there all during their traumatic event. He saw every painful moment of it, and experienced it first hand, just like they did. That is the kind of God we serve. He knows everything about us, our delights, our shortcomings, and our life changing events either good or bad. He walks with us through every door, every path. He consoles us and gives us comfort, but only if we allow him to. God is a gentleman and does not force His way into any of our lives, instead He waits patiently to be invited in. He longs for us to welcome Him into our situations, to partner with us in our hurts and in our victories. One thing I realized through the healing that took place through my own depression was that if God was big enough to share all my successes then he was also big enough to share in all my failures. Our failures are never something God never saw coming.

Picture you are driving home one night in the fog and there is a curve in the road that you don't see until it is too late. You swerve, but skid off the road into a ditch with the car lying on its side. You cry out to God for help, and this is what takes place:

GOD: "Is that you?"

YOU: “Yes God it’s me!”

GOD: “Where are you?”

YOU: “In the ditch over here.”

GOD: “What ditch, where? I can’t see you.”

YOU: “Over here in the fog by the curve.”

GOD: “OK! I finally see you, what should I do?”

YOU: “I don’t know. Just get me out of here!”

GOD: “I wish I knew you were coming through here tonight so I could have been there for you!”

We would be foolish to think that that is how God operates. We would be stripping Him of His deity, making Him into a finite being like ourselves. The truth is God sees our lives, all of it and all at once. God has no limits of time or space which allows Him to see our whole lives from beginning to end.

If you have ever gone to a parade and have stood on the sidewalk to watch it, then you realize that you only see a small part of it as it goes by. God on the other had views the parade as if from a helicopter, seeing the whole thing at one time. This affords Him the opportunity to orchestrate life for all of us, all at the same time, even defining future events before they happen.

So understanding that God was there in your event and knowing that it was no surprise to Him, carries a great deal of weight or at least it should. This means that He not only can identify with you and your struggle, but is also willing to come along side you, because He loves you that much.

So where does surrender come in? It comes in the form of turning over the event to Christ Jesus, to deed over to Him all rights and privileges that go along with it and to relinquish any claim to that piece of property from this point forward. You are probably thinking, “I don’t know if I can do that.” This is the hard part, but not as hard as the final part in the healing process. Which

means we have to deal with the event first before we can move on. In order to finish the course we need to conquer the event by signing it over to God, who freely accepts it as badly damaged as it may seem. You see God can do far more with it than you ever could. You could only worry about it, become angry over it, and allow it to tear you down. Still there may be some of you that say "I'm not ready for that." If that is true than you have stopped your ability for God to heal you right in its tracks. For until your motivation changes and you release this event to God, you will continue to wallow in the prison of despair.

Let me share with you a true story about Reginald the III. Reginald was Duke of Guelders from 1343 to 1361 and again in 1371. He had a brother Edward that opposed Reginald and a fight broke out between the two brothers. Reginald was captured by Edward and was imprisoned in a castle. While imprisoned he was given rich foods to eat and although he was already very large he grew so fat that he could not even slip through the normal size door to his room to escape while it was open. His brother Edward died in battle in 1371 and Reginald the III was finally released, but he was so fat by this time that the door had to be widened by tearing down the walls around it to allow him his freedom. He took his place back on the throne, but only for a short while as he died a few months later. (Facts gathered from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_III,_Duke_of_Guelders).

What a sad story. Another version of the legend states that Reginald's brother Edward imprisoned him in a room by building a stone wall with a normal size door on one side. Edward then expressed that he was willing to give Reginald his kingdom back if only he could fit through the doorway and ask that his kingdom be returned. But Reginald never could. His love for food and his desire to feast on it outweighed the advantages of restoring himself to the throne (a weakness Edward took advantage of). In the end instead of denying himself the food offered to him, losing weight and walking on his own accord out of his dungeon, the walls had to be torn down around him to provide his restoration How many of us going through depression are like Reginald. Until we hit rock bottom we so often refuse to surrender our anger, and hand it over to Jesus. I'll be honest with you, time is running out no matter what age you are. Unless you're willing to surrender your event over to Christ you will never be able to approach the final level of healing. The time to act is now! God's Word says in John chapter 10, verse 10:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)

God wants us to have life and to the full, or abundantly as another version states, and he wants us to have that abundant life not just when we die, but starting right now! Don't shorten the full life open to you just for the asking because you are too FAT with anger to turn over possession of your event to Christ. The Devil, like Edward, wants to steal your position of royalty away from you. He wants you to gorge yourself on a feast of anger that he has laid before you. He holds it out for you saying "Take this, its anger and you might need it, it's OK." He whispers to you, "You have a right to be angry at those people and the event that happened." LIES, LIES, LIES! Satan is the king of lies! But if you are a Christian then you are a child of the King. Don't sell your birthright like Esau (Genesis 25: 29 – 34) did because of his selfishness. Selfishness tells yourself that you still have to be in control. Selfishness like that of Esau, because he was more concerned about the present than the best for him in the future.

Go through the exercise of revisiting that life changing event one more time, and look for Jesus. See where He was that day, and remember how He looked as he looked at you. Spend some time in prayer today, even if you haven't talked to God in a long time. Tell God exactly what you are feeling, He already knows, remember He was there. Cry out to Him if you need help in turning over the event to Him, He will help you. Reach down in your heart and think about all you have missed to this point. Was it worth it? I doubt it, and I'm sure in your heart you feel the same way. Make it your number one priority today to hand over the deed to your event to God today before the sun sets. God will tear down the walls to your cell no matter how "fat" you are with anger. You will be on your way and one step closer to what you have to do next.

CHAPTER 7

THE FORGOTTEN ART OF FORGIVENESS

I received a call at home one night while with my family. The parent on the other end of the phone was very upset. Her daughter had just pulled a steak knife out of the draw and held her husband a bay with it while she ran out of the house. The parents were having an ongoing and increasing problem with their little girl. I gave them some advice to get through the night and then I made an appointment to meet at their house the next morning.

I pulled into the driveway, grabbed my Bible and started to walk through the open garage door next to my car. Just as I was approaching the inner door I was going to knock on, the mother came out. She told me her daughter was inside. Then she looked at me and my Bible and said “You are going to use that?” “Good luck!” she said and then she left. I thought someone besides the daughter was going to be home, as I never like to meet with someone of the opposite sex alone for obvious reasons. It just isn’t good practice. But I didn’t have much choice in this matter, so I cautiously went in.

The girl, a senior high teenager was sitting at the dining room table. I went over and introduced myself, and sat down at the table. She was clearly angry and probably resented the fact I was there. After all, here I was a stranger butting into her life without being asked. She stared out the sliding glass door opposite of me and wouldn’t even look my way.

I started the session in the usual way, with questions and answers, but this wasn’t working too well. I needed an active participant on the other side of the table and I just wasn’t getting it. I decided I needed to show her I could identify with what she was feeling. So I began to tell her some things about herself that I guessed she was feeling based on what I had gone through myself. There was a shift in the chair and she started to look directly at me. This was a good sign. I had made a connection. Then it was her turn to share and she began to open up to me. It was clear, very clear what the events were that led her to her state of anger. She shared with me

different stories, the climax of which being a fight that took place between her and her dad. The fight escalated to the point where there would be an impression ever etched in her mind of that day. It was something she would never forget, and felt she could never forgive him for.

In the course of the next hour or so we walked through the healing process. The one I've laid out for you so far in this book. She walked with me through it step by step, absorbing it all like a sponge. But was she motivated enough to take the next and largest step? She was! I think she was tired of living on the bottom end of life, if you can even call it that, and was sick of the tension she faced on a daily basis with her family. It was time.

At first she balked a little at the idea. If my memory serves me right I don't think she had ever given her heart to Christ or if she did she was still very young in her faith. I remember asking her to give Jesus a fair chance in her life and she did. She then went on to complete the journey in her healing with the hardest action anyone going through depression must face, she had to forgive. She had to forgive her dad, her mom, the others that hurt her, and finally herself.

I can hear some of you now! "WWWHHAAATTT! ARE YOU CRAZY?" "Dave, don't you realize the hurt those people caused me?" "I can never forgive them, no not ever!"

I can honestly say I know where you are coming from. Remember, I was there. I had let my anger stew for so long that it even turned into hatred. I told you I would envision doing horrible things to those people that hurt me, things I'm even ashamed to talk about. But forgiveness of others carries with it and indescribable freedom, one that you have to experience to believe.

FORGIVENESS IS FOR YOU

If you catch nothing else between the pages of this book catch this. **Forgiveness is not for others, forgiveness is for YOU!** That's right! When you truly forgive someone, and I mean truly forgive them, there is an instant release physically, emotionally, and spiritually. There are very few things in life that work the same way with the same power as forgiveness. But again it has to be sincere, not like when you were a little kid and did something wrong and was told to say I'm sorry. Remember how we used to tell the other person we were sorry with that snappy, snotty "sorry" short and to the point but not very real. Unless we make a conscious effort to

surrender to God and forgive others, we will either half heartedly try to forgive, taking the resentment back again over and over, or hold onto our unforgiveness carrying it with us to our grave.

The girl I talked about above (I'll call her Judy), made a daring and difficult move in trusting Jesus enough to surrender not only her heart, but her anger as well. You see we have one of two choices in life, that's it. We either trust Jesus, or we don't. It is like being half pregnant, it is impossible. You either trust Him or you don't.

So in forgiving you are really saying this is your plan for me God, and I'm trusting you enough to surrender the only control I have over these people, with the hope that you will catch me when I do.

Picture for a minute that you are hanging from a bar hanging over a cliff. You've been hanging there a long time and your tired, very tired. You keep losing your grip, but quickly recover it again. You don't know how much longer you can hold on with your sweaty hands. Suddenly you hear a voice, it is the voice of Jesus. He says to you calmly, but clearly "Let go!" You look at him. He looks straight into your eyes and again he says "Let go!" "I can't" you cry out. "Trust me!" comes the reply. By now your arms are burning, your muscles cramped. "Trust me!" the voice echoes again. You want to hold on, but can't do it for one more minute. So you relent, and trust Jesus and what He is telling you to do. You open your fingers releasing your grip and let yourself fall, only to find that you were only six inches off the ground.

You've been holding on for no reason! That is what unforgiveness is like. Showing someone a lack of forgiveness does nothing to benefit you in any way. It is a total waste of time and energy to hold onto anger in that way. I know I've been there and so have many others. But I have also seen the miracle that occurs when someone moves through that process and truly forgives.

Judy was one of those people I'm talking about. As hard as it was she made the choice to forgive those that hurt her, especially her dad. Soon after she did, we ended our session and I left her house. The next day I received a call from her father. He said to me, "I don't know what happened, but my daughter is a changed person." "She was late for school today and would just skip out on her class when that normally happened, but today she even went to class late." She

also spent time with her dad telling him of the hurt she experienced from the events that took place. She also told him that she forgave him for everything, embracing him in her love and showing him how real that forgiveness was. She was free, free at last.

Another girl Carol I met at a conference I was at was struggling and I could see it. I guess I'm just naturally drawn to people facing depression because I was one of them and can see it in them. We sat out on the main balcony of the hotel where I and other staff were staying. We talked, and talked and the issue of her hurt sprang to the surface like an anchor buoy that was held underwater and released. The story she shared was that she was on a retreat with a bunch of kids from her youth group. It was an all night type event, they were all in one big room and all the kids had fallen asleep. She was sitting on the couch next to a youth pastor talking, when he draped a blanket across both of them, and then began to do inappropriate things to her. Things were brought to light but nothing ever transpired from the investigation.

She carried a host of feelings with her from that experience, each one of those feelings stealing from her the precious moments of her youth. Smothering her, and keeping her from growing up into the person she was meant to be, a person meant to live a normal life, not a life encumbered by someone else's sin.

Again we traveled through the process and came all the way to forgiveness. One more step was all she needed to be free. But she wouldn't do it. I pleaded with her to "let go." But she wouldn't. I can still see her face and how she shrank back up against a wall away from me and another staff person, almost cowering from the fear of the unknown. It wasn't unknown to me anymore. I had lived the release, the power, and the freedom of forgiveness. I knew what it was she was afraid of, but I also knew how foolish and unwarranted it was. As much as I tried to get her to trust Jesus and move through that final step, she wouldn't. "Now is the time" I said. I told her, "There are people here now to help you do it." "NO" she said. My heart went out to her but there was nothing I could do.

Once home I was contacted by her mom, she thanked me for spending time with Carol. She told me that Carol returned home feeling much better than when she left and wanted me to know that, and to thank me. As pleased as I was in getting such a nice contact, I was still brokenhearted

over the fact the Carol although she might feel she made some progress, would only continue to be placing patches on a leaky roof. The problem with this is that when you are depressed, it rains all the time. Forgiveness is a new roof, which God is willing to install free of charge. All we have to do is ask.

So I ask you are you ready to be healed? Are you willing to trust Jesus all the way and let go of both the events and your unforgiveness? If you are, then let me show you the way!

THE BANK ROBBERY

Almost all the sessions I can remember, where I have ministered to people dealing with depression have wound up on the floor. I know that sounds strange, so let me explain it. When someone comes to the end of our time together and finally is ready to take the big step of forgiveness, I will ask them to get on the floor with me. I will ask them to kneel down and then drop onto all fours like a dog. I always am on the floor as well usually facing opposite them. Then I ask them this question, "Do you know why you are in this position?" I usually receive an emphatic "No." I tell them they are like this because if they were in a bank during the time of a robbery and there were gun shots they would immediately without a word being spoken drop to the floor in this position. It is a position of submission and surrender. It is universal and expresses to the robbers that you are willing to listen to them and do what they say. So getting in this position is now a symbol that you are willing to surrender to God in the same way.

I then ask them to tell me what is in their hands. "Nothing" they say. "That is right" I tell them. There is nothing in their hands because they have willed to no longer carry the anger that was given to them in the beginning. It too is a symbol of openness and release.

Then I ask them to close their eyes and I tell them this story I heard from a speaker many years back:

I want you to envision that you have been stranded in the desert for several days now. Although you bury yourself in the sand to avoid the sun during the day and travel at night when it is cooler, you are still suffering from sunburn and dehydration. Sand has worked its way into every crack in your body. You are totally exhausted, totally spent. Your legs are like lead weights. You rise

and fall making your way over one sand dune after another. Finally you make your way over one dune in particular and catch the glimpse of a broken down old shack and an old hand pump well along side it. Crawling that way on your hands and knees you collapse totally wasted and pass out.

Several hours later you come to, and as things come into focus again you spy the house and well 50 yards in front of you. Crawling with every ounce of your energy you finally make it to the well. You pull yourself up and pull up and down on the pump handle, but nothing happens. You slouch back down to the ground, ready to give up. Then your eye catches something under a rock a few feet from the pump. Crawling over you can see it is a bottle with a cork, and it appears to have water in it. Desperately you reach for it and pull it out from under the rock. It is water, but before you drink it there is a note attached to the bottle, you read it thinking there might be something wrong with the water.

Here is what the note says:

“To whoever finds this bottle:

The water in it is not for drinking, it is only to be used to prime the well pump as the leather washers become dried out. There is only enough water in this bottle to prime the pump, if you drink any of it you will not have enough left to get the pump working. Pour all of it down the hole in the pump and work the handle, you will have all the water you need, it has always worked. When you are done please fill the bottle back up and place it under the rock for the next person.

Blessings, Desert Dan!”

So now you have a choice you can drink the water in the bottle, but that really isn't enough to sustain you and pull your body out of dehydration. Or you can pour it down the well and pump the handle to try and get fresh water into your bones again.

Forgiveness is just like that. If we are willing to trust and do as God says in forgiving others we receive a bounty that will quench our souls. But instead we continue to drink from the bitter

water in the little bottle. That water represents all our hurt and emotions we have placed there during our depression. We fill it up with our anger and drink from it again. If you are willing to finally let it go, God is willing to replace that bitter water with a wellspring of life.

If what you truly want is to be whole again, and you are ready to take the next step, then I want you to take the bottle in your mind and take out the cork. Then I want you to go over to the pump again and slowly pour the water down the priming hole. Remember what a bottle sounds like while you are pouring it and it is sucking air back in, Glug, Glug. I want you to take your time and go real slow now, this is important. I want you to think about each glug that bottle makes and I want you to realize each of those sounds represents a person you are willing to forgive. Each time the bottle glugs, I want you to mention to God the name of the person you are forgiving and what you are forgiving them for. Pause between each person and picture the hurt they caused going down the hole with the water. Why because it will become a place where you can never pull it out from again. It will make your forgiveness real and it will make it final.

As you travel down your list try to be as thorough as you can, forgiving each person one at a time and pouring their hurt down the hole. When you come to the end of your list and can no longer remember anyone else, then is when you forgive yourself. You deserve your own forgiveness. This will release you from your feelings as a failure and let yourself know you are ok. Then finally ask God to forgive you for taking so long, for doubting His love or whatever you feel on your heart to say.

REFRESHMENT

Now picture pumping the handle as the water in the bottle does its job on the leather washers. Suddenly and without warning you receive a blast of fresh water from the nozzle of the pump, then another and then a steady heavy stream. You stick your mouth under the faucet guzzling as much water as you dare without getting sick. Then you stick your head under the flow and it becomes a time for washing all the grit out from your hair and niches of your face and arms. Moving your whole body under the cramped opening you saturate yourself with the cool freshness from the ground. For hours you bath in it, drinking and allowing your body the refreshment it has longed for. Finally you fill the bottle back up and place it under the rock. As

you look up you see a figure, but the sun is in your eyes and you can't make out who it is. You draw closer only to realize it is Jesus. But this time He is smiling. He is thrilled at your willingness to trust. He takes you gently by the hand and you walk only a short way over the next dune where things slowly become greener until you enter a lush valley with trees, a lake and tall grass. You are finally home.

Next I tell them to open their eyes. It was usually hard for them at this point as most of them had been crying and sobbing, sometimes almost uncontrollably. There was a dark spot in my office floor right in front of my couch that I am sure was caused by people who would pour out tears and sometimes mucus from crying so hard. It was always a reminder to me of God's grace and love.

Then I would ask them how they felt. The smile on their face usually told it all. Many would start to laugh, something they hadn't done in a long time. Then we would stand up and they would give me a hug and laugh again. Smiling and sniffing. It was like the reunion of two lost friends, and it was, only it was them and Jesus.

Find a place to be alone, and take your list of the people who hurt you with you. But this time you won't be carrying them back with you. The well is waiting to be primed, the bottle is full, your hands are empty, and you are kneeling before the most high. His arms are open and He is waiting patiently to receive you back home. So come forgive, get clean again, get your thirst quenched and cry and laugh like you never have before. Come on home God is waiting.

CHAPTER 8

FINALIZING YOUR FORGIVENESS

If you have followed all the way through the steps of healing we have talked about in the prior chapters of this book and taken the right actions, then the chances that you are at a point of renewal are very good. Forgiveness is by far the hardest and most difficult step to act out on, because it requires letting go of the control we felt we so desperately needed to keep. If you have made that step, I am extremely proud of you! You have accomplished what most people only wish they could do! But forgiving people by releasing the hurt they caused down the well as we talked about in the last chapter, although definitely the largest step, it is not the final one.

After I had made it all the way to this point in my healing I felt absolutely wonderful. I felt like I was finally out of the hole I had been trapped in for so long. I felt a true release, like someone being able to stretch their legs after being cramped in a wooden box for so long. I knew it wouldn't be long until I was back to normal again. I was feeling great, that is until I got the letter in the mail.

THE LETTER

It came to the office of the ministry I was working at, and it was addressed from the church I had resigned my position from. I opened it up and read it. The letter went something like this:

“As a missionary you probably know how important it is to maintain the financial support of your ministry. As a supporter of your ministry we feel that there is some unattended business that needs to be taken care of in order for us to continue to support your ministry. We feel that you and the elders of the church need to reconcile for our relationship to continue. Please contact me so we can set up a time to meet.”

The letter came from the new pastor at the church I had left, and that was the basic gist of the letter, and pretty close to how I remember it reading. I was blown away, and I was also hurt in

the fact that the church was using their support to the ministry I worked for to try and leverage me into getting together with the people I had just forgiven. Wasn't it enough that I forgave them? Now they wanted me to reconcile with them too! Couldn't we just let things go at that? After all, it took everything I had just to release them by forgiving them, now what did they want, for me to say I was sorry too, and that it was my fault? I thought I had done enough, evidently God didn't think so.

I was starting to fall back into the same trap again. I had just made it to the top of the canyon and now my feet had slipped off the edge and I was dangling again. I felt manipulated, like I didn't have a choice, either I would get hurt or the ministry would get hurt, at least that is what was going on in my mind. As much as I didn't want to, I contacted the pastor and made an appointment.

We met at the local diner and started off with the normal small talk, before we got down to the business at hand. I shared with him what had happened, a story he had already heard from the elders. I told him "If the elders had something against me they should have contacted me and told me so, after all that was scriptural" (Matthew 18: 15 -17). I had already forgiven them why should I have to go to them. I didn't have a problem with them anymore, and I just wanted to be left alone so I could heal. The pastor looked at me and said something to the affect "What is most important here is that you both reconcile with each other." After some more talk, I decided to meet with the elders, but I told the pastor "If our meeting turns into a tribunal, I'm leaving." He assured me this would not be the case.

One of the things I failed to realize was that God also talked about another side of the coin I wasn't grasping and that is the passage found in Matthew 5:23 -24 which says:

²³"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Back then I felt that if they had a problem with me that it was their job to come to me, but now looking at scripture it clearly shows that that wasn't the case. God lovingly provides every

avenue in His Word for His children to reconcile, but sometimes for whatever reason we just don't see it. At least I didn't at the time, but I do now!

THE ELDER MEETING

I was a little nervous over the meeting, but as I walked through the door I wasn't going to show anyone that I was. The room was full of elders, some new and some that had been serving when I left. I took a seat at the end of the table by the door (in case I had to leave in a hurry) next to the pastor. In reality my fears were totally unmerited. As we talked it was clear this wasn't a finger pointing session as I had suspected. It really was for the purpose of making amends and drawing us back together. We discussed the reason for me leaving only briefly at which point I told them that if I had to do it all over again I would still make the same decision. Everyone seemed to understand that, in fact later I was told by one of the elders that the pastor was really in support of me, in what had happened and the stand I took.

One question I was asked was, "What would it take for you to come back to the church?" I said, "God led me out of this church and he would have to lead me back again." I wasn't trying to be arrogant about anything. I really was just trying to protect myself from being hurt again. Once the meeting ended, we all hugged one another and I left, glad it was over, and now I was trying to put the whole experience behind me. Although there were no great conclusions, I did feel that there was closure finally in that area of my life, and it was good to know that most people were no longer angry with me, but wanted to try and make things work.

God was working on my heart and letting me know that forgiveness was more than just letting people go. Regardless of their response he wanted me to make an effort to reconnect with the people I had been separated from because of the event.

God continued to prod me, particularly about someone (I'll call him Steve) that had been a close friend of mine, but was angry with me over leaving the church and wouldn't even acknowledge me, when I passed him one day. I knew in my heart God wanted me to give him a call, but I

didn't want to. What if he said something to hurt me? What if I didn't know what to say to him? He clearly didn't seem to want to talk to me, how would he respond?

In spite of all these fears, which really turned out to be excuses, I picked up the phone and made the call. I still remember the exact spot I was sitting in when I did.

"Hello" came from the other end of the line.

"Hello, Steve, this is Dave Dowling" there was a long pause of silence.

"Yeah" came the reply

"I just wanted you to know that we shouldn't let anything that happened at the church in the past destroy our friendship, and that we should try and forget about everything that happened before and move on from here" I told him.

The conversation didn't last too much longer after that, but at least we were talking again and we hung up the phone in a cordial manner.

Now I know you are probably thinking those two meetings didn't really seem to go all that well. What was the point in even having them anyway? Well there were a couple of reasons for them. First of all God was calling me to reconcile with the people that hurt me and the people that were hurt by me. That is God's way. He wants us together, to work together and to love each other, the same way He loves us. The second reason is because I probably never would have received full healing until I stitched those wounds shut so that I could heal properly.

So what was the outcome of all this? Well, for one thing although it took several years my family and I are again attending the church we left, and have become very close to the people there once more. Steve and I are now also the best of friends, hunting and fishing together as well as supporting each other in life. I really couldn't have asked for a better resolve to both of these situations.

God knew best all along, and just as God has a way for us to follow to get out of depression, He has a best way for you and your life. Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 11 says:

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.(NIV)

And again he says in Jeremiah chapter 33, verse 1 - 9:

While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time. ²“This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it - the LORD is his name: ³‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’ ⁴For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the houses in this city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword ⁵in the fight with the Babylonians: ‘They will be filled with the dead bodies of the people I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness. ⁶“‘Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it, I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. ⁷I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. ⁸I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. ⁹Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it, and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.’ (NIV)

I always told people I was ministering to that Jeremiah 33: 3 was God’s phone number and that we could call it whenever we needed His advice, and wisdom. In this passage it says that Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard. The Lord who made the heavens and the earth goes on to say that Jeremiah should call on Him to learn the unsearchable thing he doesn’t know yet. God wants to freely bestow on us His wisdom and in it His blessing. Later on within the verses he talks about the joy and prosperity He will bring to the people as He brings health and healing to them. Just like us when we finally become free from depression.

There is so much we don’t know about the future. Just like I didn’t know how the meeting with the elders would go. I could only speculate, and that was the worst thing I could have done. I was basing the outcome, all on past experience. Instead all I had to do was ask God and then trust Him. Instead I risked falling back down the canyon. Look too to this passage that although there

is devastation God will bring about restoration with peace, forgiveness and security so much so that all the nations of the earth will know all the good God does for them.

FINALLY FINAL

In my situation God was calling for me to restore the broken relationships I had, so much so he even initiated the first meeting. Although it wasn't my plan, as it turned out it was really the best plan for me and the others. When you really look at it our natural desires are contrary to God. God wants us to forgive and we want to take revenge. For someone made in God's image we really do lack a lot of who He is, especially without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

So does that mean that once you come to a point of forgiveness of others in your life that God wants you to reconcile yourself with them? The short answer is I think He does. So does that mean I have reconciled with every person that has ever hurt me? To be honest no, but it is something I am working on as God brings those people to mind. I believe again that it is a process that we need to work towards as God lays it on our heart through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Remember God has ordained each one of our days, and has orchestrated history as to the people we would meet when and where. So I feel that reconciliation through forgiveness is for everyone who we have ever had a falling out with. I think and feel that we should reach out to each one in God's timing, not putting it off, but working within God's plan to accomplish it.

To be honest there are people I have forgiven that I haven't remembered about until I started writing this book. Although forgiven they remained dormant in my life and I never made the attempt to contact them, but as God calls them to mind and to heart I need to. This is why I recently contacted the pastor serving at the time I left the church. Below is some of his reply to me:

Hi Dave,

Thanks for reaching out to me. I knew we had a strained relationship, and I always felt it was because I didn't know how to relate to you. The harder I tried to connect, the more I felt I was adding to the strain. This was not your fault. I never interpreted anything you ever did to me as intentional hurt. What I presumed was your frustration had to do with my inability to relate to

where you were. Thanks for forgiving me. I so appreciate when fellow brothers (or sisters) listen to God's voice to try and aright things. I apologize for the hurt I caused you (and Gail too). Please know that I have prayed for your health throughout your trial. When I see mutual friends, I ask how you are doing. I haven't heard anything for the past few months. I trust you are doing spiritually well through it all....My best to your whole family. Again, I so appreciate you reaching out to me.

Grace and Peace

I've noticed the more I reach out to people of my past the easier it has become. No matter how people respond (I have never had anyone respond negatively that I can remember) to me, I know I've done what God has asked me to do, and the blessing of freedom from it is just too hard to describe. The pastor's response to me above was another positive experience in my healing process, and I was glad I did it. It is a great feeling whenever you make things right with someone.

Now I know I'm talking about some tough stuff here, very uncomfortable stuff especially if you have never done anything like this before. But never the less this is stuff that God calls us to do. Checkout what God says in Romans chapter 12, verses 17 - 18:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (NIV)

According to verse 18 God is placing the responsibility on us to reconcile if possible. "As far as it depends on you" (NIV) it says. This means that God is expecting us to put in the effort to live at peace with everyone. I also don't think he is calling us to ignore people in order to do it, but rather to reach out to them. There may be exceptions to this, like people who have passed on, or people you can no longer locate (even though you have tried) because they have moved away or changed their name. But for all others and even for those listed above we need to try our best to contact them to make amends as God leads us to.

MAKING CONTACT

There are several things we can do make this happen. One is to contact the person by phone and talk to them in person. Leaving a message probably isn't the best way to make things right, but talking to them in person works well. Sometimes you can just share over the phone and that will be enough as in my case. Remember you are not trying to change the person or point fingers you only want to resolve the matter between you.

Another way is to write them a letter although not as effective as a phone call it will show them your heart. An example might read something like this:

Dear _____

God has put it on my heart lately to write this letter to you. I know that you and I had some differences awhile back that didn't result in the best circumstances. I've been thinking about that lately and saw the need to contact you, and let you know that although there was hurt between us that I forgive you and wanted you to know that. I also hope that if there was anything I did to cause you hurt I would ask your forgiveness for that as well. I hope you don't take this letter in any other way than what I intended it to be, which is only for good. If you would like to contact me in the future my return address is on the envelope.

Blessings to you and your family!

You could either send this letter on paper or by email if you know their email address, or by locating this person on Facebook or another social media site and messaging them. But I think paper is better, especially if it is handwritten as I recommend. A letter works extremely well for someone you haven't seen in a long time or someone you feel might still have bad feelings towards you and might not listen to you. Even if they are mad at you they will in all probability read the letter in its entirety and that is really your intention, which is to offer out your hand of forgiveness. What they do with it is totally up to them and God.

The other way is to meet with them face to face. This can work well especially with someone you see a lot, like someone at work or church. Just pulling them to the side for a minute and expressing your feeling can be a wonderful sense of release for both of you. I remember doing

this with someone at church, only I was the one that needed to ask them for their forgiveness for judging them. They forgave me and everything was again right with the world.

In fact no matter what experience I've had in either forgiving or asking for forgiveness at any point can I ever remembering it being bad. Every situation where I followed Gods direction turned out the best for both of us.

Finalizing your forgiveness cements your commitment to forgive. You have heard the old adage "I'll forgive, but I won't forget." Well God not only calls us to forgive, but also to forget. That is what letting go is all about. God wants us to forgive others the same as he forgives us. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 32 says:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)

This is the way God wants us to be following His example and living in His likeness. God forgives us of our sin and remembers it no more. Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 34 states:

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (NIV)

You may not be thinking this is possible, but I know that when true healing through forgiveness takes place it can become permanent and you truly can follow God's design to not only forgive, but forget as well. How do I know?

A few years back I remember having a conversation with my wife Gail about the issues that took place that helped lead me into my depression, but for the life of me could not remember the name of the pastor (the one I recently contacted) that was at big contributor of the problem. As hard as I thought I just couldn't remember. Astonished, my wife said to me "I can't believe you can't remember his name!" I knew then and there that I had experienced complete healing and was totally rid of my struggle with depression. I had not only forgiven, I had done what I thought was impossible and forgotten as well.

Remember the contact and the dialogue of forgiveness to the other person is not just for them, but mostly for you. No matter the outcome, no matter the result. Releasing others and reconciling with them is the way God designed His plan for each and every one of us. It doesn't matter if the other person isn't ready to forgive or even forget. That is their problem, to be worked out with God and you don't have to make it yours again.

Ask God to show you anyone that you need to contact today to finalize your forgiveness. Work at God's pace with the names He gives you and the people He brings to mind. Pray for His help, as it can be tough and something we have a tendency to put off. So ask God to bless you in your obedience to serve Him and give you the desire to honor Him through this task, and he will.

Follow God's prompting in whatever he is leading you to do. If you need to forgive someone who has passed on, maybe a parent or a friend. Go to their grave, if you can find it, and tell them there that you forgive them and release them. The act of taking this extra step will never be wasted. Maybe it is a letter, email or phone call to someone. Whatever God is leading you to do, do it. You will feel so much more at peace both with God and the other person and you will never regret doing it.

Finalizing your forgiveness will help you establish your health and wellbeing and allow God the opportunity to work in the lives of those people you contact as well. I know this area can be scary, but you have to remember that people's opinion of you is secondary to God's love for you. He only wants the best for you, and to love you completely and unconditionally. So when we remember that we have His love, we can move forward and do what we thought was impossible. God is standing before you ready to take your hand. Just follow His direction, and trust Him for the outcome. He has never failed me and I know He will never fail you as well.

CHAPTER 9

CELEBRATING YOUR RECOVERY

Congratulations, by now if you have followed the steps to recovery you probably have successfully placed many miles between you and your depression. If that isn't the case you need to go back and spend some time covering each step over again. Remember although some steps are more difficult than others, they all hold a valuable part in your healing process. I can truly say that everyone I worked with through their depression that followed the steps we have talked about in this book have found their life again. If they failed to follow a step like refusing to forgive like Carol did then they came up short of a first down and the opportunity to start over again.

Like I've said earlier in this book I am not a professional counselor, I'm only a minister of God's word that has experienced the ins and outs of depression firsthand. I am sharing with you what has worked for me and for so many others as well. But although I have seen many different situations involving depression, I haven't seen them all. Everyone is different in where they are spiritually, in their brokenness, their motivation, and in their circumstances, and it maybe that help is needed beyond the scope of this book.

Based on what I have found true through experience, I've concluded that the power of God's Word coupled with a willing heart, brings about transformation. Yours may or may not be almost instant once the last brick has been put into place. For whatever reason if after following the steps laid out previously there has not been significant change in your emotions or attitude then maybe you should look to a professional Christian counselor for help, and if at all possible one that has experienced depression personally themselves. Recovery is hard work, but more than rewarding which is why once you arrive there your next step is to celebrate it.

Why take the time to celebrate? For several reasons, the first being that it is an opportunity to reprogram your mind. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 - 2 states:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

For so long your depression has corrupted your way of thinking. It is almost been like driving a car down a county road at night in the fog. Because your vision is clouded, your mind has to work that much harder in order to react to changes in the road. Renewing your mind in context with this verse means to replace your worldly views with the way God views things. Then you will be able to have clearer vision, and a greater sense of what God wants you to do, as you will become more sensitive to His leading.

Another reason is that it helps define your success. We celebrate many things in life, birthdays, holidays, graduations from high school and college, new jobs, anniversaries, weddings, and the list goes on. They are milestones, markers in our life that define a time in history. For graduates we call it commencement, the ending of one thing and the start of another. The ending of their required learning and the start of its application to life, in most cases a job or business. Recovery from depression is another milestone (a major one) that needs to be celebrated as well.

TROPHIES

If you would go through my dresser drawer somewhere in there you will probably find my high school varsity football letter. You know the one you sew on your varsity jacket, for playing a sport. This is representative of a trophy. For my children as well, I believe most of them have trophies for playing soccer. Each of us have trophies in our life, they mark our life with successes.

Things haven't changed since the times of the Old Testament, they are still just as important today. In the book of 1 Samuel chapter 7, the story goes on to describe how the Israelites (God's people) were attacked by the Philistines. They asked Samuel to cry out to the Lord for help and God heard him.

As they battled the Philistines God acted on their behalf and thundered a loud thunder, it was so great that it threw the Philistines into such a panic that they were forced to retreat in disorder before the Israelites. The men of Israel then pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a place below Beth Kar.

1 Samuel chapter 7, verse 12 goes on to say:

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." (NIV)

Samuel in essence set up a trophy as a remembrance to the success God granted His people. In fact he called it Ebenezer meaning *"Thus far the LORD has helped us."* (NIV) It was a reminder to the people that God had delivered them from Egypt, through the Red Sea, from Pharaoh's army, from famine and thirst for years in the desert, and now He had delivered them again.

When I was working at Youth for Christ one of the things I used to do with kids was plan a two or sometimes three day bicycle ride from the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania where I lived, to the either Ocean City or Wildwood, New Jersey. The trip totaled just over either 150 or 200 miles depending on which site we were biking to. The trip itself took a lot of training and planning in order to get ready, and regardless of the destination sought we would travel over 100 miles the first day. 100 mile ride in cycling is known as a century and is a feat to celebrate, because you feel that old once you're done doing it.

With cycle computers on our bikes we could track every mile we pedaled throughout the day, and when we reached 100 miles I would stop the entire team and gather them together. I would ask each of them to go find a rock of some sort and gather back at this spot again. After a few minutes of searching the team reassembled and I asked each of them to pile their rocks there on the shoulder of the road. Then I would read the story above and ask them to remember all the ways in which God had helped them that day to get here where they were now. It was our Ebenezer, our trophy declaring *"Thus far the LORD has helped us."* (NIV) It was a time of celebration and made the 16 or so miles left to finish that day that much easier.

In your celebration and renewed thinking you need to reactivate your recall of all the times God has helped you to get where you are today. The love He has shown you through people and His Word, the situations he has protected you from, the gifts and abilities He has granted you, and even the circumstances that lead you in and out of depression. You heard me right. To have experienced depression and survived this is a gift from God. Because it will not only strengthen your life and walk with God, but equip you to help others find their way out of the maze as well.

So now you have this huge trophy on the shelf of your heart, right next to all the others God has created for you. Trophies representative of all the other rescues God has performed in your life, whether they were financially, physically, emotionally or spiritually, they were trophies just the same, and you need to celebrate all of them.

So now that you know why, you need to know how as well. Unlike big events like birthdays and weddings your celebration needs to be different. After all having a bunch of people over your place for a barbeque to celebrate your freedom from depression probably wouldn't go over too well as people just wouldn't understand your blessing as they haven't been through it themselves. Before I faced depression I could never understand why people in a funk just didn't shake it off and move on. After my recovery though it was a different story, I could not only feel the pain people felt I could relate to them.

PARTY TIME

So what should your celebration look like then? It should be private, personal and rewarding. I don't mean taking a cruise by yourself or going away on vacation alone. I'm talking about learning to love and enjoy yourself again through intimate personal parties by celebrating a fact that has always been true, but may be new to you for the first time again. One of the things I noticed again once out of my depression was how blue the sky was. It didn't change color or depth of contrast it was always the same, I just didn't notice it as it was one of the farthest things from my mind. I could also hear the birds singing again, and so I celebrated that fact. I could experience the love of my family again and the joy of relating to others, and I celebrated that. There were many new discoveries each and every day the further I distanced myself from depression. It may sound weird, but I was learning to live life again.

Lingering in the moment was part of the joy I was feeling again. Like a good cup of coffee or tea is better enjoyed over a quiet drawn out moment, rather than a rush down the highway on the way to work. That is what I was experiencing. Freezing frames of time to enjoy them. Looking at people differently, listening more and speaking less. Feeling the elation that one might experience when beating a terminal illness, I was embracing the power of God in my life. The Word of God was becoming new to me again, I was no longer reading it like a homework assignment. Instead I was finding myself in it, relating to the people between its pages and I was celebrating that.

Anything and everything you are going through right now that makes you feel like a kid again is part of your celebration from depression. It is like first and goal in a football game with the ball starting on the one yard line. Your accomplishments and successes no longer have to be yards long, only inches. Like someone a million dollars in debt, they feel the only way out is to cancel all spending and work three separate jobs. But even with that it isn't enough. You feel like you'll never climb out from under the burden. But now picture you no longer owe anything, your debt has been canceled, paid in full by God. How much do you now need to put yourself in the black, it would take mere pennies.

That is what life should be like for you now. You have been granted the desires of your heart in being healed from your brokenness. Everything is new, all your energy no long needs to go into paying the debt, instead it can go into your savings for future events in your life.

Slow down some now, you are no longer in a rush to get nowhere. Linger in the moment. Enjoy life! God calls us to an abundant life and that life starts now. Remember John chapter 10, verse 10:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)

Jesus came not only to save us from our sin, but also save us from ourselves. If left to our selfish way of thinking, and our own wisdom, the life we would live would be shallow and empty at best. But with the understanding that we are dependent on God for everything in our life, even the air we take into our lungs, then we view life differently. My children have never concerned

themselves with the finances of running our home. That job always fell to my wife and me with the help of God to provide the money we needed to live on. There was always food on the table, heat in the house, shelter from the storms, and they never worried one minute it would be different or ever end. To be a kid again! No worries, no problems. But we can be, and we still are in fact a child of the King, a child of God.

NOT TO WORRY

Even in going through my struggle with cancer over the last few years, and not being able to work, God has provided for our family in miraculous ways, some almost unbelievable. For me even though I could no longer work God was blessing me and my family in spite of my inability to be able to work. I never had to worry (although I did at times) because that is not God's plan for any of us. Listen to the words of Matthew chapter 6, verses 25 – 34:

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?’ ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NIV)

You have the opportunity to celebrate today your new life, without worries and without problems. Don't get me wrong I still face obstacles some of them pretty big as well. But they are no longer problems, they are opportunities for me to experience the power of God in my life. How He will act next and where He will show up, whether by people in my life or through

finances or encouragement as I read His Word. I've needed to change my thinking and still am. I am trying to celebrate every moment of my life. Although I can't physically do things I once could, I some days get to sit on my porch and look at the field and trees and cherish the moment. Replacing any discouragement with the blessing I do have. I'm a child of God, loved by Him, cherished by Him and yes even disciplined by Him. But as long as I remain in Him I can have life and have it abundantly, not because of who I am, but because of whose I am.

Make sure you celebrate the moments of life, but make sure you never fail to include God in your celebrations. After all He is the one who makes it all possible. Without Him none of us would exist in the first place. We owe everything to Him including our freedom from depression. So linger in the moment and act like a kid again, it's OK. It's time to celebrate!

CHAPTER 10

ESTABLISHING YOUR BEACHHEAD

June 6, 1944 is a day remembered by many people that were not even born during that time period. It is popularly known as D DAY. It signified the invasion of France by the Allies and although it was done at great risk, it successfully became one of the most important turning points in the war, ultimately leading to victory.

On that day an assemblage of about 5,000 ships spanned across France's bordering waters for as far as the eye could see. With its cargo of around 150,000 allied soldiers and over 30,000 vehicles they steamed ever closer to the shoreline. Besides the frontal attack from the water, over 13,000 paratroopers were dropped in behind enemy lines, and hundreds more planes dropped over 13,000 bombs on the beaches strongholds to weaken the enemy forces. Although about 9,000 Allied troops were either wounded or died on France's shore that day, the vast majority of troops went on to secure a beachhead in advance of those that followed, and thereby creating a foothold that would later lead to the German army's defeat. (Factual numbers of D Day sourced from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dday/sfeature/sf_info.html).

Great effort, planning and secrecy went into the D DAY invasion. Our lives are no different in the regard of us establishing our own beachhead in order to safeguard our heart in order to get and stay healthy.

So what is a beachhead? The dictionary defines it this way: "A position on an enemy shoreline captured by troops in advance of an invading force." In essence it is a form of first achievement to open up our progress for the future. It's our starting point, but it is also a foothold and threshold, that we commit to ourselves to no longer cross in retreat, only moving forward from that point on. It is digging ourselves in, in a sense and saying I will never be driven back into the water again. I will hold this position in my life and the only movements I will make will be

forward and if I should fall back, this foothold will be my anchor, allowing me to regroup my thoughts and then move forward once again.

It is important that each of us has and maintains a beachhead in our life. It is both our offense to living and our defense for failure. It is a safe place to wake us up to action and say, “Hey, think about what you are doing here.” It is like a road sign along the way we are traveling that says, “Do not pass.”

It becomes a place within our minds and our hearts that we must guard for all of us to truly be successful in life. What I mean by that is that if we are to experience life fully and experience success as God defines success then we need to guard ourselves.

GOD'S SUCCESS

So what does God's success for us look like? Although God may bless you financially God's success for us has nothing to do with measuring our success by what we possess. I would define someone experiencing God's success for their life as someone who has a striving committed personal relationship with Jesus Christ and who is at peace because of it. Having this type of relationship affords us many things: peace of mind, salvation from our sins, the ability to boldly approach God's throne, the opportunity to talk to God, to be joined to God's family of believers, to experience God's leading, and the list goes on. That to me is true success! People all around you are seeking what God can freely offer, only they don't find it because they choose to look in the wrong place. If you know Christ, then you know the peace God offers, although this peace can easily elude us if we don't spend time protecting it.

Here is what God's Word says in Proverbs chapter 4, verses 20 - 23:

²⁰My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. ²¹Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; ²²for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)

Your heart is the center of your being, it encompasses all of who you are. If your heart is wicked you will be wicked, if your heart is kind you will be kind. It's important we protect our heart

from things that are evil and massage it with the things of God in order to allow God to purify it. The greatest tool you and I have to do this is God's Holy Word.

So how do we let God's Word guard our heart and change it at the same time? First off the only way God's word will affect your life is if you know it and understand it. It is a benchmark, or a standard that we can judge everything else by. The passage referred to above tells us, speaking about God's Word, that we should not let it out of our sight, but keep it in our hearts, because it is life to those who find it and health to the whole body.

Knowing the right path to take can mean all the difference between joy and heartache. For instance God tells us in His Word to avoid certain things for our benefit and for the betterment of our relationship with Him. The list contains big ticket items like:

Sexual immorality - (1 Corinthians 6: 18)

Drunkenness - (Luke 21: 34)

Lying - (Revelation 21: 8)

Stealing - (Ephesians 4: 28)

Unforgiveness - (2 Timothy 3: 1 - 5)

Murder - (1 John 3: 15)

Jealousy - (Galatians 5: 19 - 21)

and even goes on to include whether or not we should be in a love or even business relationship with someone who is not a Christian (2 Corinthians 6 14 - 18). This list in no way takes into account all the things in scripture we need to avoid, and there are many do's as well as don't we need to follow as well.

But in order for us to take advantage of the use of God's Word as a ruler to discern our hearts and the hearts of people around us we need to know it. This is why it is so important to spend time studying God's Word, and yes I did say study. When I see passages about the importance of God's Word in the Bible I always remember the action of learning it, coupled with such things as "Meditate on it" - (Psalms 1: 1 -2), or "Bind it" (Deuteronomy 11:18). These take things a step

farther than just reading it in hopes of remembering it, it is a commitment to stockpile as much of God's Word into our heart in order that when we respond to the things of life we do so in a positive Godly manner, as much as we are capable of anyway.

One of the things God tells us in Philippians chapter 2, verses 3 - 4 is to not think of ourselves better than someone else:

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. (NIV)

Using this verse as an example let me explain how it, and verses like it can safeguard your heart from falling back into depression, by becoming a filter through which we see life.

I remember it was only a short time after my recovery from depression and I was enjoying life. I was taking in the world around me anew again, and I hadn't felt this free in a long time. I was driving along a road leading north from my town and came to a traffic light. The road was fairly busy and therefore the intersection I had stopped at was often busy as well. Across from me in the oncoming lane was a man on a motorcycle with his directional on, indicating he wanted to turn left in front of me. I was feeling pretty good at the time and wanted to extend some grace to this guy, so I decided to wait to pull out in order to allow him plenty of time get where he wanted to go. The light had only been green for a second when he let the clutch slip from his hands, he revved his motor and quickly sped across in front of me all the time gesturing an obscenity to me with his hand as he whizzed by.

I far as I knew I wasn't guilty of anything deserving such a response. But I knew that in order for me to stay healthy emotionally and spiritually I needed to begin my reentry in life by sorting it through a filter so I wouldn't be pushed back into the water again. Instinctively it would have been easy for me to become angry at this guy, after all who was he to treat me like that? But instead I looked at him through a filter like the one showed me by the counselor at Summer Institute, but this time the filter I used was not based on just my opinion but God's as well. Instead of becoming angry I began to look at this guy the way I believe God did, and started to pray for him and for God to bless him instead.

I pulled through that intersection that day different, I had rejected the evil thoughts I could have had, and instead successfully safeguarded my heart, moving one step farther up from my established beachhead.

THE BOARDWALK DOLLAR

For just about every year for the last 20 plus years, I had been going to the New Jersey shore, at the beginning of each summer to a Youth for Christ conference. This event brings together hundreds of teens from all over the northeast region and it challenges the kids to evaluate their relationship with God and if they never have before, to receive Christ as their Savior.

My main focus in going on a trip like this is to hang out with the kids. By spending time together and getting to know each other, so I can better share Jesus with them on a one on one basis. Besides all the structured activities there is also plenty of free time for kids to just be themselves and have fun. It was while hanging out with the guys that I discovered just how imaginative these kids could be. The amount of people who walk the boardwalk in a day's time must be staggering, thousands upon thousands, and the kids I were with, wanted to put these people to the test. So here is what they did!

While the boys and I stood against the boardwalk railing, one teen would go under the boardwalk, and taking a dollar bill from his pocket, would stick it up through the crack between the floor boards so that only half of the dollar was exposed, while the other half he held tightly between his fingers.

As people would walk by many wouldn't see the dollar, but those that did almost always stopped in their tracks and reached to pick it up, in hopes of being a dollar richer. Just as the person's hand was inches from the dollar one of the boys would stomp their foot on the boardwalk and the one holding the dollar would hear the noise and would quickly pull the dollar bill down through the crack just as the person was about to pick it up. They were completely unaware of what was happening. To most people it looked like the wind just blew it down between the crack and it was gone.

To watch the different expressions of the people was something else. Some would stomp their feet and snap their finger as if to say, "Why didn't I see that sooner," others thought, "Oh well," still others kept looking back disgusted that they couldn't have what their eyes fancied. Still there were a few, who after seeing the dollar, walked by and even though we looked natural leaning against the rail, gave us a smiling glance that as much as said "I know your tricks, and I am one person too smart to be fooled by the likes of you."

My hat goes off to those people who take the time to evaluate the situation before they plunge into it and come out looking foolish, or even worse. I have a friend of mine, who I have been told, after many years of marriage and two children is going to be leaving his wife for a secretary at work. The world might say that this is OK. But the God who designed us and knows our needs and how we work says, IT'S NOT!

I believe that there is so many times when Satan stands under the boardwalk of life and holds up through the cracks the things that our eyes fancy. And just as we reach for the next thing that we think will bring us happiness he pulls it from our fingers, and we stand there looking like fools. Remember the boxes we talked about? How Satan comes to us and says, "Here this is anger, take it you might need it later."

So then, how do you know, what is from God and what is from Satan? How do we know the difference between what just looks good and what is truly the real thing? Most everything that you and I purchase at the store comes with some kind of an instruction book. You buy a car you get a book, you buy a DVD player you get a book, you buy a stereo you get a book. When you and I were born, we came complete with a book. God had already seen to it that an instruction manual for you and I had already been provided for us, and our use, it is called His Word, the Bible.

Think about it, if each of us never took the time to read the manuals we have acquired and do what they say, most of the equipment and cars we own would be in the trash heap, and that is the reason so many people's lives are. It is not enough to own the Book, we had better learn it and apply what it says or you and I can never expect to feel or have the fullness of God in our lives.

The only way that you and I can overcome and defeat the enemy is to know him. To study him, know his thoughts, his way, and all we can about him. On the flip side we need to know who is in charge and what He would have us to do, and how to go about doing it!

God's Word allows us the ability to know both those things. Why do you think that God has described His Word as a Sword? It's because out of all the armor of God, His Sword and prayer are our only offensive weapons, and you and I had better know how to handle them and handle them well.

We need to practice carrying the sword. Holding it close to our side, and never going a day without feeling the grip of its handle, and the weight of its blade. To know its length and the feeling it gives us as we wield it against our foe, not only for our benefit but God's as well.

God has laid out principles in His Word that can give us the answers to any question that life can throw at us. But we need to know where in His Word those answers are, and that comes through spending time in it each day. I know in my life, that when I increased the length of my daily devotional time with God, my spiritual endurance increased as well. What I mean by that is that I could see my life more like God saw my live, and then I could move ahead, knowing I had the power of God's Word to guide me.

Make a commitment to God today, set up a time and place to meet with Him every day. Spend time getting to know Him in a way you never have before. Study His Word, applying its truth to your heart, and make it alive through your actions.

Then when you and I march down the boardwalk that God has laid out for us to travel on, and through the cracks of life we see Satan's dollars being pushed up from below, we can walk on by and with a smile on our face, we can send a glance his way that says, " I know who you are and I know your tricks, and I am one person to smart to be fooled by the likes of you!"

CHOOSE LIFE

Life is so about choices. Where will I live? Who will I marry? Will I marry? What do I want to be? What church should I attend? The list goes on and on.

Choices are not always easy, and sometimes the answer isn't so simple, but sometimes it is! I had one person in my office a short time ago who had wound up in an affair with a married person from the same church. Another person I was ministering to had moved in with someone and had two babies with this person and then gave one up for adoption and is struggling as a single parent now. The list of people above, like the list of questions goes on and on.

The sad fact is that these people I've just shared about are Christian people. But somewhere along the way they were fooled into believing that their quest for happiness could be found by making their own way. They knew God's Word. They knew what the right thing was to do. Only they chose to believe the fleeting for the permanent. They chose their way over God's way, and never once have I seen that way bring the depth of lasting and real joy into a person's life.

Both of these people ended up with complex, hurtful, and difficult situations to deal with or try and remedy. But both of their ending choice as well as yours and mine all will start with a single first choice. It is that first choice each of us should be focusing on today. If our first choice in every situation is the foundation for every other choice in that situation, then shouldn't we base that choice on what God knows to be best, instead of what we think to be best?

If you take the time today to begin the process of making right choices to start with you may find yourself finishing sooner and farther ahead of the pack and with a smile on your face to boot! Remember this, the biggest questions in life are not always where you will live or who you will marry, but what does God want from me, and am I willing to do it.

BUILDING A FILTER

Before we go any farther we need to be truthful with each other. I know that you are not perfect and neither am I. We are both human, and in being so are fallible. We make mistakes, so to say that you will always filter life's problems and people properly 100% of the time would be absurd. You are going to make mistakes in judging other, and thinking wrongly from time to time, but that shouldn't be an excuse keep from trying.

I'm sure you have heard the statement said, that once a person becomes an alcoholic, they can never tempt themselves with even one drink during their recovery process, or they will go back

to being an alcoholic again. I know that this philosophy does hold true for someone recovering from depression, the fact is that if that person doesn't guard their heart they can wind up at the bottom of the canyon again. The good news is that once you have recovered from depression you never have to go back, that is if you make the right choices.

The largest part of building your life filter is making sure that the Word of God is at the center of it, as we've already talked about. That you aren't basing the outcome you see through your filter just on what you believe to be true, but what God believes to be true.

Making sure you stay healthy after depression is literally a fight for your life. You remember what depression is like and what it can do. It is a cancer that destroys from the inside out and affects our health, and the all of our life.

The fight to stay depression-free doesn't have to be a difficult one, only a consistent one. Everything in life we face: people, situations, problems, circumstances, everything, needs to be funnel into and out of our filter. Everything gets filtered, which isn't a bad thing. If we filtered everything in life we would see things more clearly and spend less time sorting through things after they have already happened, things we already have taken into our live that we had no reason to take on, if we had just filtered it first. Our energy is at a premium these days, everything, and everyone cries out for it, so we don't want to waste our energy having it used up on the negative thinking caused by depression. It is time to break the cycle. Let's look at the following steps to building a usable filter.

THE CHECK LIST

The first step in building a filter is to learn to act, not react to people and problems. So what is the difference? Acting is following a thought out plan of action. Reacting is spontaneously responding to something based on how something responds to us. Acting out gives us time to think things through, weigh them against God's Word, and make a decision and move forward to fix the issue. It may take some time to come to a proper evaluation or it might happen all in a couple of seconds, like in the case of the motorcycle guy I encountered. So it is OK to learn to pause before you respond to something in your life. Whether it is a question someone asks or a situation that takes some thought.

ACT OR REACT

Reacting on the other hand usually happens instantaneously, in a split second. Someone might say something to you and you respond immediately without thinking things through. Let's say that someone were to grab you and to pull you by your arm, your reaction would be to pull back the other way. Acting, instead of reacting in the same situation would mean to stand your ground until you evaluated why they were pulling you, and then respond. If the situation were that you were standing on the edge of a cliff and the person grabbed you, to protect you, would you rather respond by acting or reacting? Acting for sure, otherwise your response might find the both of you in freefall, the outcome of which being very unpleasant.

So acting out towards people, especially in conjunction with the Word of God is a great way to tighten the mesh on your filter and prevent hurtful things from coming through. Although difficult, one of the best things we can do to evaluate a person or the problem they are causing is to look for the truth. If someone is hurting you always ask yourself WHY? Maybe they are acting the way they do because they were brought up differently than you.

One of the things that always used to bother me was when I held the door open for someone, like at the store or at a restaurant and they would walk right by me and never say, "Thank you." Oh that use to "Frost my binoculars" as my dad use to say. How could people be so rude? Well part of the factor is that I was brought up to hold the door open for people and to expect a thank you and they were not. Taking the time to evaluate the truth takes a little time which is why it is easier to just react.

I know all of us have feelings and all of us have our personal boxes whose perimeter consists of expectations. But on the same note, I should have been holding the door open for people because I wanted to be kind, not to receive praise back for my actions. In essence because I expected, I was disappointed. Now I'm not saying we shouldn't have expectations of anyone, but what I am saying is that they need to be realistic and important. Is it the end of the world that someone doesn't say "Thank you," when I hold the door open for them? Not anymore, but it used to be a big deal. I had to retrain my way of thinking to acting instead of reacting, and believe me I am still working at it.

SHRINK YOUR BOX

One of the easiest ways to protect your heart is to shrink your box. Remember the outside or size of our personal box is made up of the expectations we put on ourselves and others. So reducing the size of our box allows us more control over the things we need to sort through and the speed in which we can do it in, as well as afford us the ability to extend more grace to people in the process. In fact, ideally if you can shrink our box to a size where only you and Jesus can fit in it, you will have eliminated all yours problems. Unfortunately that is impossible, but I'm using it as an example we should all work towards.

Although we might shrink our box quite small, I am sure there is always that one person that needs to cut across the corners of it, for whatever reason. Sometimes our response needs to be nothing at all, but for those people that continue to step on your toes, they may need to be confronted, as long as it is done with love as our main motivation.

This allows both you and them to come to a compromise of sorts based on your own individual expectations. There is no need to point blame at the other person, instead it is better to address the issue from a neutral stand point by saying something like "When you said that comment the other day, I felt hurt by it." Do not say, "You were definitely wrong for saying what you did the other day." Address it from your view of it and what you felt at the time, after all your side is the only side you can see things from as you are not the other person and don't know what they are thinking.

If you can't resolve the conflict or they refuse to listen to you, follow the directives of God's Word in Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 - 18:

¹⁵"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector. (NIV)

Of course this is pertaining to two Christian believers, although the principle of the scripture is still applicable if a problem arises between a Christian and an unbeliever. You may need to confront them if the situation warrants it, but if you get nowhere, rather than accept that hurt back into your life and become angry over it, forgive them and let it go.

FORGIVE

We have talked about this extensively throughout this book and it is the primary element to becoming and remaining free from our depression, which is why it needs to be one of our first responses in building our filter.

Forgiveness comes much easier when we change the way we have been programmed to think in the past. If we train ourselves to begin to look at people by giving them the benefit of the doubt then any wrongs they throw our way can be easily squelched with forgiveness.

Remember the second box we looked at in chapter 3 called rage? Remember the story that goes with that box? How you had just bought a new car paying all cash for it and some maniac tried to pass you on the highway clearly seeing there wasn't enough room and demolished your car. Remember how you felt towards them?

Well let's change things a little, everything in the story is the same except this time you know why the person was speeding that day. He had just received a phone call from his wife. His five year old boy was sitting on his bedroom windowsill and leaned back against the screen which let loose. The boy fell two stories to the ground and lay unconscious. He was rushed to the hospital and his father was hurrying to meet them there, not knowing if his son was dead or alive when he hit your car.

Does that story help change your view of the guy that hit you? I hope so. You see if we stop to see what the reason is behind our hurt, or offer people the benefit of the doubt, we can many times find it easier to forgive and to forgive much more quickly.

Picture you are napping on a Sunday afternoon in your backyard hammock. Suddenly you wake up because you feel something crawling on you. Looking down you spy a hornet slowly walking

along your bare arm. What do you do? If you are like most people your first choice is to get rid of it. You shake it off or smack it away. Your goal is to get rid of it as soon as possible. So why wait until the least possible minute to forgive someone that has cut through your box? It doesn't make sense, when you can forgive someone immediately and move on completely avoiding the sting from the pain that unforgiveness brings. So do it sooner rather than later and move on, there are so many more good things waiting for you ahead, but there is no way to accept God's blessings with your hands full of something else.

PRAYER

Prayer is one of the few tools God provides for us to be used offensively as well as defensively. Ephesians chapter 6, verses 14 - 18 describes for us the armor of God that we are to wear as believers. Most of God's apparel here is to be worn in defense in fighting the enemy. The Word of God and prayer are what He mentions at the end of the passage and what I look at as offensive instruments:

¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (NIV)

Once you forgive someone, praying for them and for God to specifically bless them not only cements that forgiveness, but brings you into the greater plan God has for that person's life. The Bible says that prayer isn't just words or thoughts, but prayer is powerful and effective (James 5: 16) when coming from the right frame of heart. Offering up prayers to God on that person's behalf can make all the difference in that person's life, and with God's power can even change their heart.

COMMITTING

No soldier is ever sent into battle without training, and a willingness to be trained is a commitment every soldier must first make. It is surrendering your time and energy in exchange for the knowledge of how to stay alive. This training needs to be taken seriously, whether it is for facing war or depression. In the case of the latter the commitment needs to be made, not only to yourself, but to God as well. Your commitment is that of righteousness and serving, serving God by serving others.

The portion of commitment to yourself is to make sure you are prepared to face life head on. Spending time in God's Word on a regular basis and also spending time with God through prayer. We already have looked at the importance of God's Word in our life, but haven't truly addressed the importance of prayer in our walk with God.

Prayer accomplishes several things, one of which is aligning our heart with the heart of God. It causes us to come to agreement with God over issues like sin in our life, which is what we do by confessing them to the Lord. The Bible calls us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). Therefore prayer needs to be an intimate and integral part of our life in Christ. It allows us the opportunity to come boldly before the throne of God whenever we feel the need, or desire. The more we come to God in prayer the greater the opportunity for God to change our heart through it, like He did for me when he called me into ministry.

So why am I talking about our commitment to God as part of protecting ourselves from falling back into depression? Because the closer your commitment to following God the more likely you are to remain healthy in all areas of your life, as far as it is within your ability.

Let me say that following Jesus Christ and really making Him Lord of your life is simple, but it is often not very easy. As most of us grow up, we have a tendency to do things our own way, which most of the time is not God's way. That is why we wind up in most of the situations we do and why sin is so common in our lives. If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have become a new person (2 Corinthians 5: 17) and that new person (YOU) has a chance to start life fresh all over again. Just like your relationship with Christ was hopefully renewed and made stronger after your depression.

God loves you so much! For some of you that may be hard for you to understand as there may not have been much love shown to you growing up. Don't worry about that. As you grow closer in your

relationship, you will begin to see all the ways He loves you, and come to know that there is nothing you can do to stop Him from loving you! Romans chapter 8, verses 35–39 says:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)

I believe that if you truly know Christ then one of the things you seek is to experience all the fullness of God. It isn't as difficult as you might think. Ephesians chapter 3, verses 17 - 19 tells us how:

¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (NIV)

Doesn't that sound familiar in the sense that my knowledge of God's love for me, and I hope for you as well was the turning point out of depression. Here again God calls us to realize that by really understanding the depth, the height, and length of God's love we experience being filled with His fullness.

Being that God has made that strong a commitment to love us, shouldn't we at least make a commitment to stay close and unmoved from His side? It is His will for us, and the safest place any of us can find ourselves is in the center of God will for us.

He is our life breath, sure He gives us the choice to do things our own way. But look where that has gotten you in the past. Looking back on your depression you can probably see how God brought about your deliverance through a master plan that He alone laid out for you. A winding staircase He built one step at a time, all the way to the top. This is why we need to not only walk

with God, but also allow our relationship with Him to become the greatest protecting force in guarding our life and our heart.

Prayer can help you accomplish this, as prayer is a two way line of communication. You may think of prayer as us speaking to God and you would be correct, but only partially. Prayer is also learning to leave the phone off the hook as well so we can hear God's reply and direction to us. Prayer isn't just a grocery list we hand God, it is an opportunity to develop intimacy with the Almighty, allowing us to sense His presence and protection.

BEDROOM SHADOWS

I remember certain events standing out as I grew up a child, as I am sure we all do. One that I remember so vividly was my bedtime as a kid. After my mom or dad would tuck me in, strange things began to happen to my room. As darkness was exchanged for the faint glimmer of my Abraham Lincoln night-light, my room began a change, almost before my very eyes. Lying there in bed with the covers pulled up tight around my neck, things would begin to take shape. In each corner of my room, the darkness would transform itself into eight-foot high men, each wearing a black trench coat and a dark sinister looking hat. Each man stood with his head tilted down and his hat covering his eyes. They all looked like the typical gangster type of the twenties and thirties.

Although their heads were down, I knew that they could still see me, and they were only waiting for me to fall asleep, and then without warning they would get me. Each night I would lay awake gripped with fear, and fighting sleep, knowing the minute I closed my eyes that I would be rubbed out by Muggsy and Lefty!

One night my fear had grown to be so intense that I could stand it no longer. Muggsy, Lefty, and the rest of the boys stood there in their usual intimidating way, leaning against the wall in true gangster fashion. Tonight I knew for sure that the waiting game was over, tonight would be the night that they would do me in. I could tell by the way they stood there, almost glaring into my eyes. I had to make a break for it, but where? I know! The only safe place in the house was mom and dad's bed. No self-respecting gangster would dare go up against my folks, especially my dad! But the question that remained unanswered was could I make it there alive?

My only chance was to take them by surprise. In one fluid motion I threw the covers off me and leaped to my feet, my legs churning as they hit the floor. I was out the door before they had a chance to even draw their guns. Down the hall I sped. I knew that they were right behind me. I swung into my parent's room, and with one flying leap that would make any trapeze artist envious, I landed safely between my parents and now had the protection of my father.

As I worked my way under the covers and between both my parents, I could see my gangster friends beginning to take shape again on the walls of my parent's bedroom. But it didn't matter to me now, I was in the safest place I knew, next to my father and nobody could touch me there, not even Muggsy, and the boys!

Nobody ever said life would be easy. Even Jesus said that in this life you and I would have hardships and rough times, but remember, Jesus said "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." It's all a matter of realizing one thing, that our Father's bedroom is only down the hall!

Look at what God said about living in this life, He never meant for us to live this life under our own strength. Although many of us try to, even as Christians, who should know better. We think that we can overcome the enemy all by ourselves. And that is just what Satan wants us to believe. If you and I begin to think that way then we begin to trust in ourselves and not in our God. We begin to take our eyes off of our Savior and Lord, and put the focus on us. We become our own refuge, and in the long run find ourselves empty and a world around us that is crumbling.

Our God is a loving father that cares for you and me, more than we care for ourselves. It's next to His side and under His wing that we need to draw comfort and protection from the Leftys and Muggsys of this world. Our power lies not in ourselves but in our heavenly Father. In His wisdom, in His knowledge, in His love, and in His faithfulness to us.

The one thing that I know, that is as real to me now as it was that night so long ago, is that when the fears of who I am and where I am going and how I am going to get out of this mess I am in, no matter what it is, overcomes me, and is just too much for me to bear, the safety and securest place in the whole house, is my Father's bedroom and it's just down the hall!

Take some time today go sit in your heavenly Father's lap and feel again what it is like to be a kid with no worries. Give Him your issues, and your worries. He wants them, and even more important is He wants YOU. Rely on Him to keep you safe from depression. Trust Him at His Word even if it doesn't make sense at the time. Only He can assure you that you never have to visit the lair of depression again, but it all starts with doing things His way. Isn't it time to exchange your weakness for His strength? It can be just that easy, with a trip down the hall to your Father's bedroom!

CHAPTER 11

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

Anything we go through in life, every event, issue or problem if we survive it can not only make us stronger, it can give us the insight we need to help others. We can never be sure why God allows certain things to come into our lives, but He knows and He uses them for His master plan to mold us and shape us to look like Jesus. As long as we remember that, and know that God is ultimately in charge, our sufferings although painful are also endurable.

Our goal then should be to never waste the lessons we learn through God's direction and teaching as we face trials. Besides working patience as it says in the first chapter of the book of James, trials also give us the tools to comfort others as it tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 3 - 7:

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (NIV)

As the family of God we need to be reaching out to those around us that are hurting, especially when we have answers to their hurting questions.

Until my sickness with cancer, to say I was a big eater would have been an understatement. I loved food and I guess I got that from my mom. She loved to cook and would push all kinds of food on me, starting very young. So I guess I learned bad eating habits then, because normal size portions were never enough for me. I loved food. I loved the comfort I felt from it. When I

worked out on my own I would many times treat myself to the Chinese buffet where I could relish a nice hot sit down meal with food I really enjoyed.

I have a friend Jerry that loves food as well. In fact whenever we get to see each other, food becomes a major part of our conversation. We evaluate and share about different restaurants we have visited lately or new ones we have tried.

About an hour from me is one of my favorite restaurants that I came to find through a friend. It's nothing fancy but the food and the price are great. You can order a whole lobster, potato, and two dozen steamed clams for about \$20, you just have to buy a beverage to go with your meal. Steak, steamed clams and potato, is only around \$18. I think that is a pretty good deal, and do you know what? I tell people I know looking for a good night out about this place.

That is what reaching out to others who are hurting is like. All it is, is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Sharing the comfort with which you have been comforted with.

I COULD SEE IT

I love to raze my children and one of the things I do is quote old jokes or movie lines or even scripture to get them going. One joke, an old one liner I remember goes like this: A man walks up to a horse and says, "Why the long face?" The point of the joke is a play on words, because we all know horses have long faces, although it could have been taken as him being sad as well. In any case it is obvious that horses have long faces. Just as it is obvious that hurt reflects from people's lives if we take the time to notice it.

I was speaking to the youth at a Christian retreat one year. During one of the sessions I noticed that one of them was missing, so I went looking for them. I found them walking down a road behind the main building.

I came up behind her (I'll call her Sue) and said, "What is going on?" she gave me some sort of reply that warranted my concern. I told her that I wanted to talk with her during our free time right after lunch. She agreed.

After lunch we moved from the dining room out onto the spacious porch of the main building and each sat in a rocking chair. I could see she was struggling, and based on what I had gone through, I felt depression was at the root of it all. I turned to her and said something like this: “You probably are having a hard time eating, and sleeping and your tired all the time. The thing you think about is the thing you think about all the time and it controls you and your thoughts.”

She looked at me and said, “How do you know that?”

“Because I lived it,” I said.

The next hour plus was spent with her opening up to me about her fight on the inside. We covered some of the things you’ve read earlier in the book and by the time Sue left the porch that day things were different. But nothing would have changed in her life unless I took the time to notice she was hurting and then made it a point to do something about it.

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

Working in youth ministry for almost 30 year teaches you to keep your eyes open to what kids are going through. I always had the gift of being able to look through someone and see that they were hurting inside. Maybe it was the fact that I was trained to look for it so much, that when their guard came down I was just there to see it in them. Regardless if you want to be able to reach out to others who are hurting you have to train yourself to look for it.

Maybe you’ve read this book to glean some tips on how to help a loved one going through depression or maybe you are on the road to recovery from depression. In either instance you have a great opportunity to help those still struggling with it. Let’s take a step by step approach to being able to offer that help.

The first course of action is what we just talked about. You have to take the time to notice people who are hurting. Sometime they try to hide it like I did, and many of them are very good at it. But if you are around people long enough especially if you live with them it will come out. Although you might not understand all of it, especially if you haven’t been through depression, you will notice it and that is a start.

My friend Gary that I talked about in the beginning of this book and a dear friend used to say, “Dave was in his funk.” Although he couldn’t pinpoint my problem he knew things weren’t quite right and I wasn’t acting like I normally would. Even though I was trying my best to hide it, he still saw it, because he had something to compare it to.

When you look at people and things don’t seem quite right, weigh their present actions against how they normally are. Look for any differences in them, especially if they are prolonged and last a while. It is normal for each of us to go through a “funk” now and then that only lasts for a few days or a week. But if things continue and there is a consistency in their actions that don’t add up, it is time to either step in or get them help.

IDENTIFY WITH THEM

One of the things I have noticed about cancer patients, myself included, is that in the initial stages of treatment they really don’t want to talk about it to anyone. I was talking at church about this to my friend Fred who has faced cancer on three different occasions. His reply to me was the same, cancer patients (at least the ones we have known) just don’t want to talk about it, even to other people who have had cancer. I don’t know why this is, just that it is an observation that seems to hold true. Once those patients go through the initial shock of the situation and things seem to settle down and they begin to understand more about their disease, this is when they start to talk about it. From that point forward it is almost like they want you to understand what they are going through.

This is common in people facing depression as well. Although I have had people approach me wanting to seek help, because they knew I had gone through depression. Many people facing depression need to be sought out.

As I’ve told people at church about the writing of this book, I had one person say “That book is for me, I want to read it.” To look at this person from the outside you would think of them as someone who had it all together, but based on their response to me they are probably facing issues known only to themselves, or one or two close friends.

GONE FISHIN

If you spend any length of time with me you'll come to find out that I love to fish, especially for saltwater game fish. I've learned a lot over the years about fishing. Starting as a young boy I would spend hours down on the docks either at the lake my parents rented a cabin at or at by Aunt Millie's marina. The key to catching and not just fishing is to teach yourself to think like a fish. Really, that can mean changing baits, presentation, or location. You need to do whatever it takes to entice fish to bite.

Working with people facing depression is no different, and one of the best baits you can offer a person to open up their mouth to you is to show them compassion and show them you can identify with them. Now it may not be that you have gone through depression, but there are other hurts you have experienced in life that you can offer out to them instead. If you have faced and overcome depression then you have a natural connection already established for you.

One of the best ways to identify with someone facing depression is to show them what you see in them. Like Sue I was able to identify with her because I was able to tell her what she was feeling and what life was like for her at the moment. Below is a list of some of the things people feel while going through depression, some people may experience many of them, while others only a few, it is your job to look for the ones you think they are dealing with and present them to that person:

- They have been having trouble sleeping or sleep all the time.
- They can't eat right.
- What they think about (the event) is all they can think about.
- They are not themselves (not acting normal).
- They have a hard time focusing.
- They are always angry.
- They are physically tired.
- They are emotionally spent.
- They don't laugh anymore.
- They keep to themselves as much as they can.

Mentioning you noticed these things to them like I did with Sue and Judy (remember, the girl with the steak knife) could be all it takes for them to see that there is somebody available that understands or is at least trying to.

Once you have made a connection with that person don't forget to tell them that you love them. They need to hear and know that. Also remember to tell them that no matter what they are facing God knows about it and loves them right now as well. Don't do it in some flippant manner though like the one counselor did to me. Get close to them and really share that truth with them. They will know if you are serious or not.

LISTEN

Once you have connected with someone and it might take several times to accomplish this, let them share. You can ask questions, but make sure you take the time to listen, not formulating questions while they talk. Try and ask questions that will direct you to share in ways where you can further identify with them. Questions that verify what they are saying like, "So what you are saying is _____" or "If I'm hearing you correctly you feel the way you do because _____." This will let them know you are listening to them and let them know you care as well.

People today need to really work on their listening skills. Most of us are too busy waiting for an opening to jump into a conversation. Don't make this mistake. Listening to someone is showing them you really do love them. You are putting their need to be recognized above your own.

Once that person has opened up to you and helped you identify the root of the problem, ask them if you have permission to share something with them that might help. By now most people are more than willing to listen to you as you showed you were willing to listen to them, and besides you are offering something they might be able to use. In many cases people facing depression are seeking in a big way for something that might take away their pain, so if you are willing to share, many are willing to listen.

Once you have permission, now might be a good time to share some of the things you learned about in this book, or other tools you've learned to come through your depression. Always

remember to keep God as the center of the solution. He is our designer and knows us better than we know ourselves, something I forgot or chose to ignore during my depression. People facing depression need to be reminded of that and even if they haven't wandered from God they probably have become disconnected in the sense of knowing how to apply His Word to their life. You can use mine or other people's stories to show that God holds the answers for them and there can be success with His help.

Maybe sharing like this is difficult for you. I can understand that. Another alternative might be to give that person a copy of this book and let them walk through the steps of my deliverance. I know if I had a book like this when I was facing depression I would have read it. What I needed was a down to earth guide to show me I wasn't alone in my sickness. But I didn't know of any or anyone going through what I was facing. That is one of the main reasons I wrote this book, certainly it wasn't to make a lot of money, instead it was to help bring healing to hurting people.

DON'T LET THEM GO

The year was 1968 and the place Camp Carol South Vietnam. A friend of mine Charlie was a marine. His job was to carry supplies by truck to his company. This was one of the toughest fighting areas in Vietnam. There were many times that Charlie had squeezed past enemy soldiers undetected, in order to successfully restock the dwindling supplies of his fellow soldiers and friends.

This day seemed no different than any other. The fighting was spotty, coming and going just like the wind, unexpectedly and random. Charlie had been driving his truck down a battered dusty dirt road. Just as he was arriving at camp, the enemy mortar fire hit. Charlie's truck was hit through the hood and as the mortar exploded it drove metal and shrapnel up through the floor board of the truck and across the left side of his body. In shock Charlie opened the door of the truck and fell to the ground. The left side of his body had been torn open, from his hip to his armpit.

As Charlie tried to crawl to the nearest hole to take cover, he looked around. He could see the impact of the mortars taking a devastating toll on the people and the ground that surrounded him. As Charlie lay there bleeding in a hole two soldiers entered the scene. One grabbed Charlie's

jacket and wrapped him as tightly as he could, helping to close up the wound. Choppers began to make their appearance, coming to rescue the wounded. As one touched down, each man who had been in the hole with Charlie, grabbed his jacket. With a tightly fastened grip on each shoulder and under enemy fire, they skidded Charlie towards the chopper across the field, dragging him forward through the debris across the battlefield towards a clearing where the chopper waited.

As they arrived at the chopper, its blades spinning hurriedly, both men lunged into the helicopter, still holding onto their companion. The pilot gave power to the throttle and the Huey responded. Because of being under fire, the pilot left quickly and before Charlie could be fully lifted into the chopper. As the helicopter banked hard, each of Charlie's friends grip tightened refusing to let go. Charlie hung suspended in the open doorway, the only thing between himself and death was the grip of his friends. As the chopper finally leveled off, Charlie was pulled to safety as the men both whole and wounded headed for base. Charlie was treated for his wounds and sent home to the states.

Charlie made it home because his friends were there for him and never gave up hope that he would make it. Think about your friends and your relationship to them. Are there friends of yours that you are, and have been praying for to come to know the Lord? Are there friends of yours struggling through depression? Have there been friends that have hurt you deeply for one reason or another, that need your forgiveness and prayers?

There comes a time in most of our lives where all hope seems to fade slowly from our grasp. There are times when our prayers directed toward and for our friends seem to go unanswered. It's at these times when hope begins to fade, that we need to tighten our grip, just like Charlie's friends.

I know of a daughter that prayed earnestly for her mother to come to know Jesus as her savior. It wasn't until 35 years later that the prayer she had prayed daily for her mother was answered and her mom came to know the same kind of joy her daughter has known. 35 years is half a life time to some. I am sure that through all those years, hope may have begun to fade. But just like Charlie's friends she tightened her grip, set her faith and focus to the God who is all powerful and can do all things, and kept on keeping on.

There are many friends and family I know that don't know Jesus, and it can seem doubtful that they ever will, there are others facing depression as well, but that shouldn't stop you and me from praying for them. After all, I have seen God heal relationships, reunite people's marriages, and save one of the biggest sinners around - me!

You and I may doubt ourselves, but we should never doubt our God! Let's both, like Charlie's friends tighten our grip, set our faith and focus to the God who is all powerful and can do all things, and together keep moving to help those around us.

It is so important that people facing depression have someone close to them who is willing like Charlie's friends to partner with them. Remember Carl the speaker? I made it a point to come along side him during his time of recovery. People like him need people like you to do the same. People like Charlie, people unable to no longer do for themselves. This is why daily prayer along with constant contact is vital to people's healing. They need you!

I've recently become one of those people in need. My cancer had left me weak and unable to do things for myself. I had trouble just walking the short distance to the bathroom and making it to the toilet without passing out. One operation I had has left a gaping wound in my side that has been healing for over 6 months, but each day the wound needs to be packed and rebandaged, in order for it to heal properly. Fortunately I've had my wife and my sister-in-law to be able to perform the task. I for one just can't reach it nor do I have the strength for it. Without them I'd be totally lost!

You can be the person that is willing to tighten your grip around your friends or loved ones lives and lift them up in prayer as well as walking through their hurt and healing with them. They need you because they are emotionally spent in most cases and can no longer do it for themselves. Believe me if they could they would have long ago.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Be bold! I know that helping others can put us at great risk as well. Which many times, is why we tend to stick to minding our own business. One of my favorite movies is "A Christmas Carol," do you remember the part where Jacob Marley comes to Scrooge and meets him in his

chambers? Scrooge says to him, "You always were a good man of business," "Business" the ghost replies, "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business! "(A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens - Stave 1).

So it is with us. It is our business to help those around us that are hurting. It is our job to notice them and reach out to them, no matter how uncomfortable that may be. I know you don't have all the answers to someone facing depression, I don't either. It was my willingness to reach out to those going through what I went through that allowed me to learn more in order to help more.

Never think of yourself as unqualified or incapable in helping someone. If you can listen you can help. If you can pray you can help. Never let people go from your grip of prayer either for their salvation or their depression. No matter what they face, face it with them, and you will grow in your own way in the process.

Remember that God loves you as much as He loves them and that He wants to use you if only you are willing. My hope for you is that you might use the things you've learned through this book as well as your own experience and talent to bring great glory to God, by serving others in their suffering.

The quote below was reportedly written on one of the walls in Mother Theresa's home for children in India where she ministered. It goes on to say:

"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.” (Quote sourced from http://prayerfoundation.org/mother_teresa_do_it_anyway.htm)

Remember you are the only Jesus some people may ever see. You are God’s hands and feet, His instrument to reach out to hurting people. Follow God’s leading and the words will come as you share with people. I firmly believe that. Just be obedient. Obedience is another area where God has never let me down as well.

I remember being at a conference one time with about 1,100 teenagers and staff. I was sitting in about the middle of the auditorium listening to the speaker, when suddenly the speaker said something from the stage that was totally inappropriate. As I continued to listen I could feel God prompting me, telling me to go up to the speaker afterwards and show him his fault. God never shared this through an audible voice, but it was clear to me what He was telling me just the same. I said, “God there are 1100 people here why did you pick me?” There was no reply, but the feeling was now as strong as ever to talk to the speaker. The session finally ended and people began to make their way out the side doors. People were also walking past the speaker who was down on the bottom of the stairs by the stage. I made my way over to him and said to him, “I really appreciated what he had to say, but there was one thing I needed to talk to you about.”

Before I could tell him he blurted out what he had said, and said, “I know I never should have said that, I just got caught up in trying to connect with the crowd.” We shook hands and he thanked me for coming forward to share with him. Even if he hadn’t listened and taken offense to what I had to say it would have been between him and God, not him and me.

All this is to say that if you truly want to help others you need to sacrifice your time, energy, and grow deep in your relationship with the Lord. You need to feed yourself if you intend to feed others. Otherwise you will only be acting out on reflexes, remember. But even with all that unless you follow God by being obedient to His leading, you will have missed the opportunity to be greatly used by Him, to help change people’s lives.

May God bless you richly in your healing, or in your help for others or both. May you always remember to find your strength in the One who gave you life, both physically and spiritually.

As I close the final chapter in this book I want to leave you with my favorite verse as a reminder that God always thinks about you more than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. That you might remember Him as well in all you do and remember how much you need Him:

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand, when I awake, I am still with you. (NIV)

God bless you on your journey back home and back to God. Remember He really does love you!

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OTHER WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR

“To The Brink & Back Again: A Christian’s journey with God through cancer and what it is like to come out the other side”



Book Description:

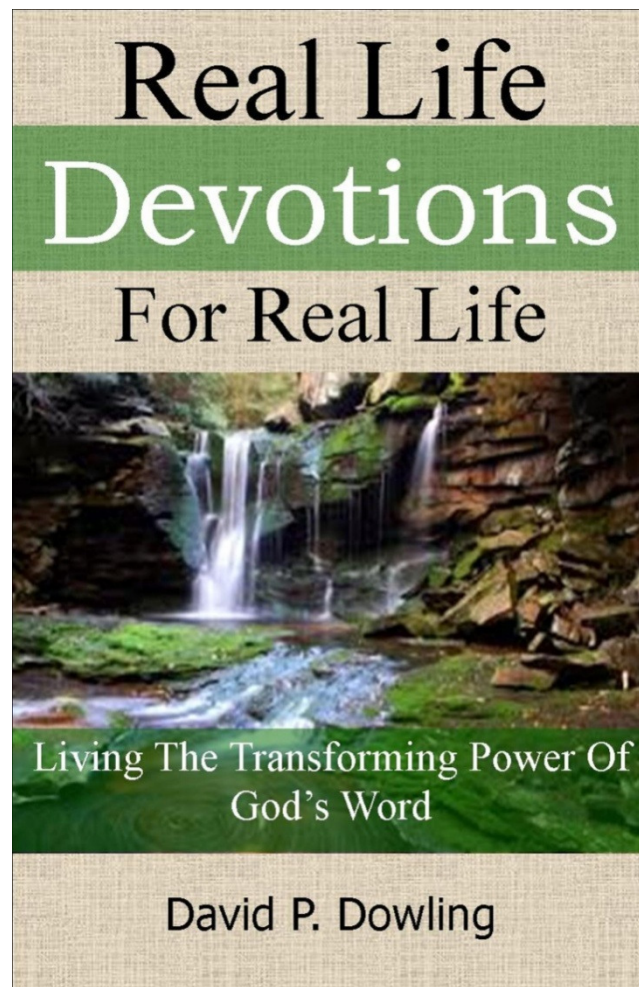
After being diagnosed with stage three esophageal cancer, this Christian author began a search for answers both spiritually and physically in order to prepare for his journey that lay ahead. Although he searched diligently he found little to satisfy his questions, which became the motivation to pen the words in this book.

Within its pages is a timeline of his adventure of how he traveled the course and faced cancer not just once but twice. Moreover this book offers its readers the answers to the questions he faced as well as what he learned about the faithfulness and sovereignty of God as it pertained to his finances, his cure, his healing and his whole life.

He openly shares about the things rarely discussed when it comes to cancer, like the emotional feelings and struggles people face as well as how his deep dependency on God made all the difference in his ability to keep going on.

Laced with scripture the author discusses in detail about what he didn't expect, what it is like to work through recovery, finding hope, dealing with survivor's syndrome, and how to walk with and come along side others facing cancer as well. It is a must read for anyone experiencing cancer personally or for a loved one looking to help someone who is.

**“Real Life Devotions For Real Life: Living the transforming power of
God's Word”**



Book Description:

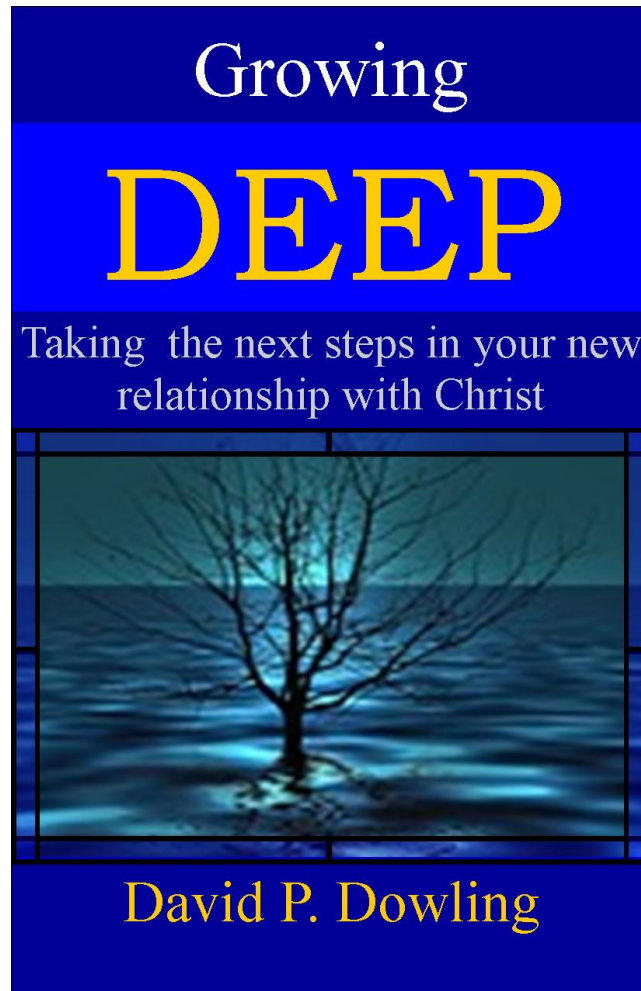
Devotionals can be a powerful tool to help deepen your walk with Christ. Uniquely designed this Christian devotional guide is far different from any other you have ever read before. “Real Life Devotions For Real Life,” is a fifty two week devotional and is compiled of real life stories from the author’s friends, family and his own personal experiences.

Each story will challenge your heart and your thinking. Some funny and some tragic, but all of them touching. Coupled with each story is a thought for the week offering an enhanced view of how to look at life, by highlighting and magnifying each narrative with a Godly perspective.

In order to engage each reader and bring them deeper into their journey with God, each devotional story concludes with a checklist challenge for the week. Each challenge is made up of seven action steps in order to saturate your heart with the scripture passage for that week helping you to not only apply it, but to make it an intricate part of your life.

Filled with scripture this book is designed in such a way to allow the Word of God to permeate into your heart and your life as you work through the stories, thoughts and checklist challenge for the week. A must read for anyone wanting to discover intimacy with Christ while trying to learn to apply scripture into their daily living for the Lord in the REAL world.

“Growing Deep: Taking your next steps in your new relationship with
Christ”



Book Description:

In our ministry over the years we have seen many people make a decision to follow Christ and we have also seen many people who have made a commitment to follow Jesus not know what to do with this new relationship.

So seeing the need, we developed this FREE book for both new believers and also for those struggling in their faith in order to help them grow closer to God as they grow in understanding what it is like to walk with God. Thus we have named it "GROWING DEEP"

Please feel free to download and print out as many copies as you need for your church youth group, church outreach, or to just give to a friend that is struggling. The only thing we ask is that

you don't distribute them for financial gain in any way! The love of God is Free and so we feel this booklet should be as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David P. Dowling has been ministering to teenagers and adults for over two decades. He served as a volunteer staff person with Youth for Christ in the Pocono/Slate Belt area of Pennsylvania starting in 1980 with Dave serving as the Executive Director from 2001 to 2008.

It was during his time at Youth for Christ that Dave had his first experience in short term missions, traveling to Jamaica to work on an addition for a school. Through that trip and others Dave gained the experience to go on to lead short term mission teams in the U.S. and to Honduras, and both Ghana and Kenya, Africa.

He is presently the Executive Director of [Inheritance World Ministries inc.](#) a ministry that trains and equips God's people to perform various types of ministry, as well as lead short term mission trips. He and his wife Gail have also come along side of [Through the Storm Ministries](#) to help in the building and support of their ministry of an orphanage in Kenya East Africa. Dave plans on continuing to lead short term mission teams there to help both physically and financially.

Dave struggled for over two years with severe depression. It was only when he hit rock bottom that he turned back to God and found the answers that led him back out of his sickness into healing. As Dave sought after God, God revealed to him not only the steps that led to his depression, but also the path that would lead him back to health in a period of just a couple of weeks. It was what he learned on that journey that he decided to place between the pages of this book in order that others might find the same freedom he now has.

Dave has the ability to make God's Word real to people, and feels right at home whether he is speaking to 20 Junior High teenagers at a winter retreat or closing with a Gospel presentation at a Michael Card concert to hundreds.

Dave is extremely professional in engaging people, both from the stage and one on one. His desire is to see people understand God's Word so they can apply it to the way they live, and live a life in a way that brings glory to God.

Dave lives with his wife Gail in the Pocono Mountains of Northeast Pennsylvania. They have one daughter Sarah, and three sons, Jeremiah, Joshua, and Caleb.

You can also connect with Dave online on [Facebook.com](#) or through [Inheritance World Ministries Inc.](#)