

KEVIN J. MCCARTHY, PH.D

The background of the entire cover is a photograph showing a person's hands and head from behind, pressed against the vertical metal bars of a prison cell. The lighting is dramatic, with the hands and head highlighted against a dark background.

SURVIVING THE JUSTICE EXPERIENCE

AN ESSENTIAL
CHRISTIAN RESOURCE
FOR FAMILIES OF
OFFENDERS



SURVIVING THE JUSTICE EXPERIENCE

By

Kevin J. McCarthy Ph.D.



LONE VOICE
PUBLISHING

LONE VOICE PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 1484 Slidell, Louisiana 70459

985-789-0742

www.lonevoicepublishing.com

SURVIVING THE JUSTICE EXPERIENCE

© 2014 by Kevin J. McCarthy, Ph.D.

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

eISBN: 978-0-9906451-0-8

Scripture quotations are from **The New International Version (NIV) Copyright, 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.**

Author Photo : Jerry Situmorang
Cover Design : Sihol Gianito Situmorang
Editor : Carol Henson
Page Layout : Sihol Gianito Situmorang

Lone Voice Publishing

P.O. Box 1484 Slidell, Louisiana 70459

DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, *whose enduring love and grace encouraged and guided the writing of this book for those who still suffer;*

To my children, Susan, Jennifer, and Kevin, *who suffered through a long nightmare of failures and selfishness on my part before the light came on;*

To my grandchildren, Brooke, Blaire, Riley, Rowan, and Magnus, *who represent the very best that life has to offer and a bright hope for the future;*

To my siblings, *who lived with the experiences that I wrought on family members but continued to love me and encourage me in the darkest days;*

To my father and mother, *who did their very best and withstood each new disaster with hope and love. It now appears that you were right; all of these missteps were setbacks, nothing more. Thank you for the loving support and encouragement.*

To my best friend, confidant, and wife, Quinta, *who encourages and supports my efforts with love, prayer, and a playful heart;*

To all who took the time to educate me, *igniting a love of learning that sustained me through the bleakest nights.*



Dismas Project is a Christian not-for-profit
Louisiana based Corporation.
985-789-0742

www.dismasproject.com
dismasproject@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/DismasProject
twitter.com/Knowetics

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	08
INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL STORY	17
PART ONE	38
CHAPTER 2: More Victims of Crime	39
CHAPTER 3: Betrayal	41
CHAPTER 4: The Reality of Evil	54
CHAPTER 5: Justice Orphans	61
CHAPTER 6: Spouses without Portfolio	71
CHAPTER 7: Families: What Will We Tell the Neighbors?	83
PART TWO: NAVIGATING EVERYDAY LIFE: HOW LITTLE THINGS CHANGE	92
CHAPTER 8: Life Apart – Love Apart	93
CHAPTER 9: Anger	105
CHAPTER 10: Regret	120
CHAPTER 11: Pain	130
CHAPTER 12: Sex Without Contact	141

PART THREE: PRISON LIFE	151
CHAPTER 13: Prison Living: A Complicated Arrangement	152
CHAPTER 14: Maintaining a Family throughout Incarceration	166
CHAPTER 15: Understanding the Pain on Both Sides of the Wall	177
CHAPTER 16: Planning for the Future	189
CHAPTER 17: The Role of Spirituality in Holding the Family Together	200
 PART FOUR: SPIRITUAL LIFELINES	 212
CHAPTER 18: Mercy	214
CHAPTER 19: Grace	222
CHAPTER 20: Forgiveness	232
CHAPTER 21: Faith	245
CHAPTER 22: Hope	256
 PART FIVE: PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND APPLIED SPIRITUALITY	 264
CHAPTER 23: Perimeter Psychology	265
CHAPTER 24: Reclaiming the Past	298
CHAPTER 25: Healing the Wounds	306
CHAPTER 26: Transitioning to Community	314
CHAPTER 27: Life The Family on Parole	322

PART SIX: POST-PRISON DECOMPRESSION	331
CHAPTER 28: Post-Incarceration Transformation	333
CHAPTER 29: Recovery	341
CHAPTER 30: Service: Helping Hands	351
CHAPTER 31: Gratitude	359
 ADDITIONAL NOTES	369
CHAPTER 32: Theoretical Underpinnings A Theory of Victimization	370
CHAPTER 33: Reflections: A Killing and Three Deaths	379
 CONCLUSION	392
 APPENDIX	395
 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	399

The Bible. New International Version, Zondervan, 1984.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was shaped and formed by the suggestions of many people. While I would like to name them all, my memory fails me at this moment, and I fear that I would miss more than I named. So please accept a gentle nod of gratitude to those who invested themselves in an unpopular effort. You have all shown personal courage and compassion in the face of a wave of indifference and discouragement. Blessed are the merciful!

For colleagues who explored the early ideas that are foundational to this book, I thank you for sharing your experiences and wisdom. I would particularly like to thank Hollie McCollister, counselor extraordinaire, who invested numerous hours exploring the concepts of knowetics and Severcide with me. To those on the fringes of these events who contributed out of their own personal pain and suffering, I hope this effort will honor your trust.

To my editor, Carol Henson (whom I have never personally met), and the many others who have contributed to this effort, I would like to thank each of you individually for your enthusiasm and support. Somehow, you were able to see the importance of this book before it had a consistent direction. Some of those who have put their creativity to work are Jason Huff, David Whipple, Kevin McCarthy II, Pastor Rod Pasch, Brennen Hodge, Randi Pena, Father Lomax and Father Rareshire, Sandra Grabow and many others.

This is our journey together.

What makes this the most difficult book to write is the requirement to look honestly at the issue of parental betrayal based upon an offender's behaviors and the effect that it has on the children as well as all family members.

It requires an examination of the breakdown of intimacy between family members and evaluation of how this trauma subsequently forms emotional scar tissue that often precludes any further attempts at trust building.

Those left behind when hope's door slams shut are the bereaved and wounded. They may never be able to place their confidence in an emotional connection. They move from friendship to friendship, never finding a place to light. Always on emotional alert status, they carry their wounds openly, almost defiantly. Their mental health suffers, and they continue on in life, needing a healing touch but never trusting anyone to move that close to them.

When the courtroom door closes and the defendant is led away to serve a prison sentence, what really happens?

Surviving the Justice Experience

When the steel door slams shut as the defendant is escorted from the courtroom, many believe that justice has been served. They dismiss the matter from their minds, assuming that the case is all over.

Having written a book for professionals who work with offenders and their families, as well as a separate volume for offenders in search of personal transformation skills, I now turn my attention to the most difficult part of the trilogy: Children, Spouses, and Families of Offenders –Surviving Incarceration and Its Aftermath.

The plight of the families, spouses, and children is most often hidden from public view by the elements of shame, embarrassment, anger, blaming, resentment, and despair. These are truly the forgotten victims of the justice system, and they have few advocates or supporters. The children can be regarded as justice orphans, while spouses and family members become insignificant or socially invisible within the community. Their cause does not stir passions for equity or even equal representation in the legal proceedings. After the verdict and sentence, these “lost ones” are relegated to serve out the terms applied to the offender. The only difference? They will live out their “terms of incarceration” in public, under the scrutiny of most and the private judgments of many. It is a privilege to tell their stories and to provide an understanding of the ways that the theories of victimization affect many unrecognized victims of crime. The framework for continuing victimization will be more fully explored in the latter part of this book, along with strategies for dealing with the forces of social isolation.

Kevin J. McCarthy, Ph.D.



INTRODUCTION

This book has been thirty-five years in the writing. I have experienced the criminal justice system firsthand. I have also observed my own family suffering the aftereffects of my behavior. Having completed a doctorate in clinical psychology after release from prison, I observed the plight of family members and spouses left in a state of anticipation with little support or direction, but mostly I remember the children. I do not have to go far into my memory to see the tough little faces that eventually crumbled into tears as they tried to put together the facts about things that they were never told directly.

I believe that future researchers will document these searing experiences as causative of institutionally based post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is my personal opinion that the widespread legal “remedies” and efforts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were insidious, naïve, and highly destructive to families that were torn apart in the process of restorative justice. The veterans who have returned

from the many wars over the last fifty years were exposed to events that produced lifelong psychological changes. Our country has created a population of citizens who suffer from the continuing effects of PTSD.

Those who have survived the justice wars, whether as displaced spouses, children with parents who have no rights, or family members, continue to struggle with secret shame and embarrassment over events that occurred decades ago. The government, in the person of the Department of Justice, assures us that this is a therapeutic process. But it's not their spouses, children, or family members suffering through the aftermath of restorative justice. The history of government intervention includes many dishonorable and now discredited activities such as the forced sterilizations that occurred in this country during the twentieth century or the turmoil that was brought into our communities by the application of "No-Knock" warrants or three strike laws. Apparently, little thought had been given to the social consequences that would flow from these ill-conceived policies. The shame for our current national incarceration crisis is shared with the government that fostered policies that have often produced more problems than solutions.

Because I have been dealing with my own shame, humiliation, embarrassment, anger, rage, and confusion, it has taken me thirty-five years to write. My goal is to let future spouses, children, and family members know that they need not quietly endure soul-rape while the authorities—police, judges, social workers, psychologists, and others—quietly assure them that they are only there to help.

What the heck is law and order, anyway? For those of us with a hand on the pulse of humanity, it means control. It is the perfect application

of the Golden Rule: He with the most gold rules! I cannot change the damage that has already happened in your life. But with your help, we can expose the consequences of these actions to public view and start a dialogue about change.

Recently, I had the opportunity to listen to an attorney talk about the shame of having two million citizens locked up at anytime in the USA (home of the free?), and he also cited the statistic of seven million plus who are under the control of various justice authorities like probation and parole. *These figures do not include any estimate of the number of individuals who have completed their sentences for felony convictions!* Does anybody know how many of us there are in the United States in 2013? It's like some kind of state secret.

If anybody knows, get in touch with me. This book is about the pain of being traumatized during your exposure to the justice system. It's about harm reduction and a call to accountability at the national level. When I was a child, I heard stories about how communist countries locked up millions of people. Now those stories have become hauntingly true of my own country, and few seem to care as the juggernaut continues to consume huge sections of our fellow citizens, binding them in legal mazes designed to implement de facto social and legal discrimination with no right of redress or recovery.

The United States helped Germany and Japan to rebuild after World War II because we learned from the consequences of World War I. If we had refused to give them a hand, they would have eventually become a force majeure. Today, some states have passed legislation requiring merchants to collect a deposit on bottles or cans that they sell. The practical goal of

this law is to promote recycling efforts. Most of the 10 million citizens currently caught up in the legal system will eventually return to the community. They will generally return angry, without hope, skills, or opportunities. They will be required to observe all laws, though in many states their right to vote has been terminated. They will be expected to pay child support for children with whom they are denied an ongoing parent-child relationship.

Depending upon where they live, they will receive anywhere from ten dollars up to two hundred dollars to help them transition back into the community after spending years in prison. If they do not succeed, chances are good they will end up back in prison! I have a Ph.D., but if you were to give me 200 dollars and place me in a strange city without any other tangible resources, I would have a difficult time surviving until I got my first paycheck. But we expect those with the least skills and abilities to do what we could not do ourselves.

This book is about returnable bottles and throwaway people, but mostly it is about the people who really love and care for the throwaways. This is written for those who still suffer. It is written on behalf of the spouses, children, and family members of offenders.

ESSENTIAL TERMS

Language molds thought;¹ therefore, the key to meaningful communication lies in developing a semantic understanding specific to the situations I describe. Given the uniqueness of these circumstances, it has been necessary to reach beyond common vernacular for new words

¹Malachi Martin, *Windswept House: A Vatican Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) p.380.

that convey explicit meanings. To help build bridges of understanding, I have coined two terms.

KNOWETICS: a spiritual way to describe the life experiences of people whose actions have violated the accepted standards of community life. It will take a new and meaningful life form of its own as you read the following pages. It is a construct that will help you to recognize your personal pathway from unconditional love to the dark realms of conditional love or, worse yet, symbolic expulsion from society. It offers a light to your future pathway by examining the labels you have acquired in your life journey. Knowetics expresses the individual's redemptive potential and offers an opportunity to reengage with a sure knowledge of God's unconditional love. This is the spiritual process that I have called knowetics—a personal encounter with the truth that all worth and dignity flows directly from God's love for us. We are all His precious children.

SEVERCIDE: This term has been created to identify the practical effects of labeling and exclusion. It describes these labeling encounters at the individual, group, community, and societal levels of life. Each of these encounters has essentially shaped our personal awareness and served to construct an inner world of belief about ourselves. The actual name of the label matters little, since high value labels provide contrast, a scheme of comparison. "Have you met my son the athlete or my daughter the lawyer?" These obvious acknowledgements of worth (assigned at the family, community, and societal levels of life) make clear distinctions between individuals by assigning worth on a value scale that then serves as an access guide to limited resources. Each of these desired labels can

quickly morph into new realities of diminished worth (and subsequent exclusion), bringing us to a wide spectrum of negative labels (drunk, divorced, jobless, felon, homosexual, homeless, unreliable, undesirable, unwanted, unknowable, and unlovable.) *Severcide* is my personal attempt to create a domain of thought, embracing a personal journey that ultimately affects the quality of our lives. We are not His pernicious children!

These constructs are used to inform this journey of hope, my journey of hope, in bringing to life these previously unacknowledged actions in the context of historical, political, scientific, and religious thought. Current events are likely to take on a new significance as you discover the unspoken realities that sculpt our lives.



CHAPTER 1

PERSONAL STORY

There are few things more intimidating or challenging than writing the truth about one's own nature. Most of us make assumptions about the character of people we know based on how we see them behave and how they interact while in our company. Our preconceptions are often shattered when we receive a behavioral report that does not match our own observations.

Herein lies the problem with trying to understand human nature. We often harbor conflicting feelings that are driven by our memories, thoughts, and the subconscious, which pushes through our psyche toward the daylight of behavioral expression. In such moments, it is rather easy to talk around the subject of one's intentions. It is a much more difficult process to look inside and recognize the swamp that sucks our defeats, failures, sins, guilt, and crimes under the surface of

the water. But we are always aware that the surface tension of the water is easily stirred.

I couldn't write a book about the pain and suffering found in the families of offenders, or suggest helpful and creative ways to deal with it, without first meeting a precondition that is not yours, but mine alone. I must offer you the truth about life as an offender. Then I may use my redemption experience to offer a new understanding of faith and hope for all who suffer through this insidious, intergenerational cycle of hopelessness and destruction.

Even now, thirty-five years after the change process started, I find my deeds difficult to think about and much harder to acknowledge in writing. But such is the stuff of meaningful change. One must be willing to document the entire process in order to reach out to others. I will not glamorize my sins or crimes; they need no illumination to those who know me well. Nor would it serve any useful purpose to inscribe the list in this book. Those who don't know me have no need to be burdened by my actions. I have attempted to focus on the aberrations of character that I displayed during this period of my life, not the events or people who unwittingly provided me an opportunity to vent my rebelliousness and anger. Therefore, I have restricted this statement to major turning points, rather than focusing upon a life littered with the debris of my sinful choices.

What I hope to offer you is a shared journey about the way it felt to be me through all those years. Only then will you be able to develop insight into the processes that mark an offender's life and all who come into contact with him (or her). My writings are being guided by a close family

member who has assured me that this is an essential part of my story. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will help me remember the essential recollections that will make this effort useful to others.

I came on the first wave of post-World War II babies (1945) and arrived in a strict Irish-Catholic home. My arrival, though not unexpected, added another dimension to the shape of the family. While my birth was greeted with anticipation and pleasure, I am sure that my later life choices left bitter regrets with those who loved me. As a young child, there were times of great joy and great fear. Family members seemed to embrace a sense of kinship and caring, but at times there were gaps in my understanding. That is when fear crept into my life—a great fear that things would spin out of control. I was overwhelmed as I tried to meet these surges with an understanding beyond my years.

Family members brought joy and pain, a very conflicting predicament for a young child. One seemed distant and unpredictable, using alcohol on a binge basis, quite possibly to cope with the stresses of life and a houseful of children, each with their own special needs. It was a time when hand-me-downs were fashionable and obedience to one's parents was akin to the rule of God.

Another family member demonstrated unpredictably in terms of emotional behavior, swinging from stable to unstable and back. As years passed, these swings would become more pronounced.

Sometime beyond age six, I became aware of a growing competitiveness among the children in our family. The goal was that one would not be outdone by a sibling, though this was often used as a whipping tool. It

was difficult, upon reflection, to get a true sense of where I started and ended as a person.

Another sibling had the amazing power to manage and divert the ever-lurking tension and potential domestic violence. I remember how my feelings of fear would soar whenever this sibling left our home. Why was I left alone to cope with problems that might emerge within our family? At about this time, another child was born, a child who shook up the order of attention. This child required care, love, and attention beyond my understanding, but the worst part of the new arrival was the requirement that I share responsibility for the baby's care. It seemed an awful burden at the time, and I did not understand the nature of family love, since at times it felt like it was every man for himself; a chaotic environment is a dreadful place in which to instill a sense of responsibility.

As I mentioned earlier, I had been raised in a strict Irish-Catholic home. Church attendance was not at one's discretion. The nuns who taught at the parochial school that I attended were exceptionally focused upon teaching us the law of God, and the reality of violating it was eternal damnation. They were also adept at teaching us an excellent basic elementary education. I am more and more impressed at the value of this endeavor. It became a foundation for subsequent educational endeavors after hitting several road bumps.

With the full fury of God hanging over my head (conscience), it became difficult to contain my resentment about being shoved into an emotional corner (or so it seemed at the time). As my "rebellion" started to emerge in behavioral terms (lying, stealing, being sulky and generally unhelpful), I became the target of criticism on the part of friends of the

family. I deeply resented my lack of privacy, nor were my activities kept from others. At a deeper level, I responded to these perceived attacks by shielding myself through distancing myself from others.

My bicycle became a tool of exploration and an expression of freedom. I wonder now if I did not use it to “run away from home” with each new adventure. Ultimately, I had to return to the reality of living at home. On one such trip, I went further from home than ever before and had a collision with a bus, which put me in the hospital for perhaps three months. The outcome was surgery for a depressed fractured skull and an extended period of recovery. I apparently scared my family out of their wits (I was expected to die) with this antic, and I subsequently lost a full semester of school, which meant that I would not be promoted to the next grade.

It seemed that I was not only lonely, distant, and rebellious, but now I had evidence that I was stupid. It appeared that my situation was getting worse, not better. And the worst part was that no one could “fix” me, no matter how many people were encouraged to “talk to me.” Attempts were made to invoke God’s wrath by telling me that perhaps the angels would come and take away someone I loved and feared while I was at school. Now I know that those “warnings” made the task of learning an impossible experience. My mind was consumed with real fears that held me captive. Confusion swept over me like a hurricane. I could not pay attention to what I was being taught. Rather, I became the class clown and suffered for my actions by becoming the target of extraordinary efforts to discipline me into a state of compliance. That strategy backfired, and I became angry and sullen in most environments, except when I was

outside of the house and free to roam.

That period also introduced the coming of professionals into the picture. Perhaps my behavior was due to residual aftereffects from my accident and subsequent surgery. The struggles intensified until I felt that I was living under a microscope. The only escape was when I was outside of the house roaming. Of course, if you roam long enough, you are going to be exposed to some unsavory characters. But at the time, I did not think it could get worse; in fact, I wondered if I wasn't just an evil child. No matter what my intention, each new encounter brought more pain and shame to my family members. I seemed helpless to overcome my knack for getting into trouble. I do not know of anyone that I could really talk with at that time, or if I was even aware of what was going on inside of me so that I could talk about it. The pain of being completely out of relationship with God added to my burden, and for the life of me, though I had intentions to the contrary, I always seemed to make the wrong choices. In adolescence, I was introduced to sexuality by a neighbor child who assured me that it was quite okay to indulge ourselves and one another in such pleasurable activities. Earlier, in elementary school, I had engaged in a "you show me yours and I will show you mine" adventure with another child in the next grade below me. Obviously we had been observed, because the matter was quickly reported to the school principal, who determined that I was the primary culprit. Actually, I had only joined in at the urging of my younger friend. But I was to bear the added shame through the label of being damaged.

There was no inherent pleasure in that moment of curiosity. But there was a lot of consequential pain afterwards. I quickly figured out that

something was wrong with that type of curiosity. Thus, a lifetime of struggle was born in the aftermath of that event. I still lacked any knowledge of sexuality and was rather innocent at that time, in spite of my anger and rebelliousness.

Later, I saw no reason to resist pleasure when it was available at a moment's notice. Besides, inside I felt helpless in the spiritual battle that was raging. I started to give up hope of moving past that focus and instead engaged in a number of exploratory activities that added to my carnal knowledge and increased the potential for frequent random encounters. From my initial introduction until manhood, I would become involved in an ever-deepening struggle that was rooted around sexual behavior. Later, the focus would include extensive use of pornography. All of it convinced me that I was a lost cause.

At the same time that I was surrendering my soul to this course of action, I also became quite pleased with my sexual proficiency that drew others into an ever-widening network of partnerships. Oddly, it seemed common and something good. It was as if when our clothes came off, so did all the pretenses. My partners were just like me. Onwards I traveled, encountering few barriers. On one such occasion, a priest told me in confession that he would not continue to give me absolution if I did not intend to change my behavior. But I was already lost, wasn't I?

Hopelessly lost in the dark reality of selfishness and comfortable with demanding sexual activity as the price of a relationship, I soon reckoned that if one would not sleep with me, then there was no use wasting my time with that one. This became predominate in my thinking. People were there to be used and likewise, they could use me for their own

pleasure. I came to believe that I was doing an affectionate service for all of my partners. That's love, isn't it?

There had been many uncomfortable touch-and-go moments but by this time, I was an active alcoholic entering the world of drug exploration. Those seemingly harmless, mind-altering chemicals would soon begin to inhibit any conscious self-restraint, and if I encountered a partner who seemed reluctant to engage in sexual activity, I would use verbal skills or even physical pressure to help them to relax and enjoy the gift I was giving them. Many did relax and participate, but others did not. Given this slide into the depths of depravity, I can now see that all personal boundaries ceased to exist when I wanted sexual activity.

Marriage and the birth of three children (two by my first marriage, one from an extended encounter while I was in the U.S. Army) did nothing to deter my activities, either sexual or my ever-increasing passion for chemical relief. Clearly, I can see now that as my choices continued to degrade into perversion, I had to use a variety of chemicals in order to live with myself. I was medicating the reality of my choices away so that the pain would barely be noticeable to me; others, though, had the insight to see into my hidden agenda.

Many tried to warn me, and my response was to escalate my behavior to the point where I finally prevailed upon my partner to engage in swinging activities. That decision soon brought increasing tension into an already fragile relationship. Those feelings of tension later morphed into pronounced feelings of hatred toward each other (for the pain that was felt by both partners). Those desires for sensuality eventually reemerged as revulsion for acts of promiscuity and infidelity, sanctioned

or unsanctioned. But this did not occur before the final step in the process.

The handwriting was on the wall; it was only a matter of time until the marriage self-destructed from either sexual activity without boundary or my full-blown chemical addiction. But you see, I had a solution for that problem. I taught my partner the value of drugs, particularly marijuana and pills (uppers). We engaged in therapy as a last-ditch effort to avert the obvious, but I think now that it only hastened the downward slide into oblivion.

Once it became apparent that the end was near, I saw everything sliding away. I gave away our children's dog without telling the children of my actions and fled from California to Alabama, where I stayed with swinger friends. Later, I went to stay with family in New York City, but I could not stand knowing that I was back where I started—as an object failure. I bought bus tickets for myself and the children, and we wandered for some time, eventually returning to California.

After staying in an empty church bus, I finally conned a church member into taking us into her home along with her three children. She was a resentful individual, so we were well paired. I could never muster the desire to engage in sexual activity with her, but I readily exploited her credit cards and financial standing. There was no thought at that time of the subsequent affect these actions would have on her own children or mine. I was completely oblivious to the needs of others and still in hot pursuit of booze, drugs, and sex.

Eventually, I managed to get an apartment for myself and the two children

from the marriage. But I continued to hide from my former partner until I was stopped for a traffic infraction and jailed for failure to follow court orders. In my absence, my partner had gotten a custody order, and it had been escalated to the attention of law enforcement, given my quirky behavior during that time.

Later, I succeeded at regaining formal custody, largely due to my ex-partner's living arrangements. By this time, I had the children in Catholic school and seeing a Newport Beach therapist weekly for family therapy. Shortly after I prevailed in court, I was feeling on top of the world. It appeared that I had been vindicated and affirmed in the same process. One would think that this would have been a major turning point in my life. In fact, it was—I became worse than before! I was taking risks with others that could have landed me in jail. Eventually it did, when I came home and proceeded to have a sexual relationship with my babysitter while her cousin slept in the children's bedroom. It was a new low in the dimension of perversity. But curiously, I was not sorry for the behavior, only for being caught.

I was arrested later that day and subsequently charged with nine felonies, which were later reduced to four felony charges. My children were placed in state care. I remained in jail for a month or so. Then, my bail was arranged and an attorney was retained on my behalf by the individual whom I had used previously; she used the equity in her home to help me. I had a great sense of relief to emerge from jail but quickly had an experience that literally was the beginning of change in my life.

I had lost everything through my own choices. It had nothing to do with others. It was all my own doing. Through the grace of God, I experienced

a spiritual awakening when I visited my attorney's office to review the police reports and witness statements. He was not there. He and his family were away in Europe, so I sat in his chair reading all about my behavior, searching in vain for a way to explain it all away. Worse, when I got to the back of the file, there was a copy of my FBI "rap" sheet that summarized all my prior encounters with police in various jurisdictions.

While the children were still under the custody of the state, they would soon be returned to me pending the outcome of my trial. I was tempted to blow it all off and go get loaded to celebrate being out of jail, but this felt different. I knew I was in deep trouble. Given the charges and the shameful behaviors I had displayed, I had no one within my family to share my troubles with. Boy, I suddenly realized that I needed a drink to soothe my pain and fear.

Finally, after years of people talking to me, understanding dawned. As I reviewed the rap sheet, I became aware of the unwritten facts clustered among the accounts of my criminal activities. The divorce, the bankruptcy, the loss of family and friends, the incredible number of jobs from which I had been dismissed. The only ones who were dependent upon me were my children, who I later understood loved and feared me, much the same as it had been in my childhood home. They were in a desperate situation with nowhere to hide.

At that moment, I felt physically ill as I saw my life laid out in the attorney's paperwork. I did not just need a drink at that point. I wanted several drinks to ease my pain and feelings of shame. In a moment of clarity and spiritual urgency, I reached for the phone and called Alcoholics Anonymous. They directed me to a local Alano Club in Garden Grove,

California. Even after making the phone call, I still played a little game with myself as I left the building. If I turned right, I would go have those drinks I desired. If I turned left, I would drive to the Alano Club and turn myself in.

I turned left, later reflecting with extraordinary thankfulness (probably with the help of Jesus Christ and my guardian angel) that the battle was about to end. While I stopped using alcohol fairly soon after my initial encounter with AA, I continued to smoke marijuana for another month, quitting all chemical addictions on September 20, 1977. The healing had finally begun.

The arrest had happened on July 9, 1977. I fought the criminal charges, using three separate lawyers during the course of prosecution. In May 1979, I lost my father and returned home for the funeral. During that time, I shared the details of my arrest and the pending charges to a family member.

As was common in my childhood, my shame was revealed to other family members, without my permission, with the excuse that the burden was too heavy to bear alone. I returned to California and shortly thereafter went on trial in May/June 1979. My attempts to defend my actions failed, and I was found guilty on all charges. I was subsequently sentenced to six years and four months in state prison.

Later, while being transported to the prison, I remember thinking, “I don’t belong here!” But the reality was that I did in fact belong among those other prisoners because of my sinful actions against others. There was no way to escape from that reality. I was completely stunned that it

had ended this way. For several months, I was horribly confused by that sad turn of events. It was not until my appeal had been turned down that I became aware that I had also been convicted of touching the other girl inappropriately. It was a detail I did not remember until well after I was in prison. What followed was a definite period of disillusionment with God. I had gotten sober and clean, but He did not reward those efforts in what I deemed should have been part of the bargain. I turned my attention to things I could accomplish in a powerless environment. That course lasted through the next four years and one day. God did not let me walk out of that prison until I paid my debt to society in full. But he opened the door for therapy and education, and He continued my spiritual awakening in the prison setting. I have written elsewhere about the nature of living with evil over that period of four years, but God always protected me and even sent a Christian guard to witness to me personally and with a variety of spiritual reading materials.

During my four years in custody, I managed to write down an amends list that I later initiated as a free man. The first item on the list was to find my daughter, born of the military relationship, and to make amends to her directly, owning the responsibility for my actions. After our initial contact, it took ten years to cement a friendship, a remarkable blessing. I also left prison with an associate of science degree from Cuesta College and a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Antioch University. God had used my four years in prison as a time of healing and restoration. My mind, emotions, and intellect were nurtured in the heart of a prison. I was also released with six years of sobriety from all chemical addictions. It was a period of constant and intensive healing, a true turning point in my life. The gains were consolidated after my release, as I was able to

find housing, employment, and social support from various individuals. I applied for admission to Pepperdine University and completed the requirements for a master of arts degree in 1986. That degree was in the field of counseling psychology.

I was mystified by my slide into degradation and confused that I had consciously pursued that pathway. I am sure that part of my educational choices was an attempt to put the pieces together of my life and perhaps understand the lives of others who were in prison with me.

I worked for a period of 18-24 months and was disappointed to realize that my graduate education did not put sufficient teeth into my intellectual skills. While I maintained an ongoing, albeit confusing, connection with Christianity, I was more of a marginal believer, putting great stock in applying for admission to a doctoral program. God was very patient with me. At that point, I was re-introduced to a relationship with my two children from my failed marriage. I also was successful at starting a small business to help sustain all my other efforts financially.

I was finally accepted into the general psychology program and later transferred to the clinical psychology program at United States International University. Thanks to the grace of God, I graduated in 1996 with a doctorate in clinical psychology. During the course of my education (master's and doctoral levels), I had the opportunity to travel extensively, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, my education encompassed a cultural awareness of many of the world's geopolitical entities and a growing realization of my responsibility to reach out to others who lived lives of pain and shame.

Applying for a Marriage, Family, and Child Internship credential, I checked the back of the application in the box that asked if I had been convicted of a crime. Several years later, someone reviewed the application when I filed a request to sit for the licensing exam. That triggered a response from the attorney general of the state of California, in which my licensure application was denied by the MFCC Board. I appealed their decision and, after an extended hearing, the administrative law judge recommended that I be allowed to move forward toward licensure. The MFCC Board overruled his recommendation and issued a final denial. At about the same time, I was permitted to argue aspects of my original appeal before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal. While they acknowledged the legal issue that I raised on appeal, they found that the case was then moot since I had already been released from incarceration and had completed the parole requirements. It was a time of incredible highs and devastating lows.

The pathway from postdoctoral positions eventually led to an invitation to complete my internship requirements at a University Medical Center within the Department of Psychiatry. It was a year of passionate learning, one of the most intense learning experiences of my life. But having been through the experience with the MFCC Board in California, I was highly resistant to full disclosure on applications or licensing statements. I did make a full disclosure to one of my internship supervisors, who courageously urged me onward. That supervisor became a mentor, helping to smooth the rough patches that I seemed to encounter.

My progress was not always easy. The next few years offered the opportunity to applying my knowledge, skills and training. It also

provided the chance to understand the limitations inherent in all professional approaches to the stated and unstated needs of individuals and families. I eventually applied for licensure in Mississippi for many personal reasons. I did not acknowledge my unlawful behaviors out of fear and past experience. I took the national board exam, completed my oral boards, and was issued a license as a clinical psychologist on September 19, 1997. It was twenty years to the day that I had my last chemical adventure. Coincidence? I think not! From this point, the learning curve steepened as I realized the enormous effort that would be required to competently apply the theory and skills I had been taught.

Later, I found myself looking deeply into literature, researching gaps that I had discovered in science. Little did I realize, but God was leading me back to my Christian roots and revealing truths that seemed to conflict with my educational values. I spent years in practice, often resistant to the barest suggestion that there was an alternate way to evaluate patients. Later, I did start reading a number of spiritual books that also challenged many of my preconceptions.

In 2008, I retired from government service and accepted a position working for the U.S. Navy as a civilian contractor. This time, I made a full disclosure to the agency recruiter and completed the National Security Agency background questionnaire truthfully. I put myself into God's care and hoped for the best. Afterwards, I was interviewed by a special security agent about my responses on this disclosure form. I gave complete and truthful responses to all questions.

During the three years of my employment as a Navy psychologist, I was exposed to clinical presentations that re-ignited my interest in the

connections between psychology, psychopathology, and theology. This served to trigger an intensive period of introspection where I took a critical look at my own character formation and took note of the life discrepancies that had marked my life's journey. This period was filled with endless personal questions and formulations about the basis for deviant responses and where they all started in terms of development.

Later, I was able to draft an inquiry template that I started to use with both genders, as well as supportive reading materials that were distributed at no cost to the client or the Navy. These questions are listed below for your own instruction. They are listed in a specific order that is intended to help the patients start the process of stripping away the masks (pretenses) that they hide behind. The questions are:

- 1) Can you remember a time when you told a lie and got away with it? Afterwards, you might have felt bad about telling a lie, but you never attempted to come clean with anyone, probably out of fear of potential censure and discipline.
- 2) Can you remember a time when you stole something that did not belong to you? This was one of those "must-have-it" objects. After you got home, you felt ashamed of your behavior but did not make any attempt to return it since you had already committed an act of theft. You may even have thrown it away or put it into a junk box from which it never again saw the light of day.
- 3) Can you remember a time when you cheated on an exam, a financial agreement, or even a relationship? Can you remember the awkwardness that you felt in response to your actions? Did you ever discuss this matter

with anyone of significance in your life? Did you just push the conflict away and avoid further internal confrontation?

4) Can you remember a time when you were engaged in a sexual activity with another person? As the act continued, you became aware that you no longer wanted to finish this activity, but you lacked the inner courage to tell your partner. You allowed yourself to engage in this act, and even if you experienced pleasure, you later beat yourself up for not having the fortitude to speak up.

The questions are focused upon revealing a pattern of behaviors that, if allowed to continue, may be the start of the soul-killing process. In each question, the theme of regret and denial are critical to that process of learning to live at peace with one's self. These are not trick questions; in fact, they have often been impasse breakers. Hopefully, in the short number of sessions that we had together, these questions would encourage the process of self-examination. In my opinion, any intervention that assists the patient to look within him or herself is a useful intervention and a potential turning point.

I started to use these questions routinely whenever sessions lagged or started to become stagnant. From January through mid-March 2011, I was referred a number of patients suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder. As was my professional practice, each was given a series of personality and functioning assessments. If I encountered substantive resistance, they were offered a referral to the other psychologist or our visiting psychiatrists.

My enthusiasm for trying to identify a starting point in their personality

disorders resulted in lowering my guard and ignoring caution flags as I engaged individuals in questions designed to help me understand the nature of their individual psychologies. The list was similar to the questions listed above but also contained questions about their current activities and was aimed at revealing those behaviors that brought them feelings of discomfort.

My efforts yielded several complaints and triggered a background investigation as the matter was referred to Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) for further investigation. The lead investigator pursued a background check, which revealed the previously disclosed information. I was summarily removed from my position and arrested on three criminal charges in three separate jurisdictions.

Those charges (two misdemeanors and a felony count) were either dismissed in court by the reviewing judge or, in the case of the felony, never filed for prosecution by the district attorney. Each location had relevance, in that one location was in the jurisdiction of the naval base, another was within the jurisdiction of my practice, and the last was within the jurisdiction of my home. These actions were accompanied by an NCIS disclosure to the Psychology Board, State of Mississippi, which led to the revocation of my professional license based upon the non-disclosure of my prior criminal history, even though it had ended thirty-four years before the facts were revealed.

Overall, it was a devastating experience—professionally, financially, socially, personally, and physically. But like the prison experience, God had a plan. Over the twelve months that followed, I was led to write three books, of which this is the first to be published, and to abandon

all efforts at protecting “my image.” The result has been the birthing of a ministry for offenders and their families. While the project started with writing a handbook for mental health professionals, it has quickly grown in scope and extent. The Navy affair was only a setback, as my mother would say.

My intention in revealing the current events in some detail is not a vindication of my decisions, nor is it a vindictive indictment of others involved in the administrative processes of government. I have tried to walk a thin line, erring on the side of ownership rather than casting a long view on these events. No matter what the individual intentions of those involved in the process, I find that we were all serving the purposes of God. Therefore, I have no regrets, nor do I harbor ill feelings toward those who acted upon their legitimate concerns. I have read and do believe that God uses all our intentions and actions to bring about the fulfillment of His will.

I am sure now that evil actually exists. I had my own dealings with this dimension of life. I recognize its presence in society and perhaps embarrassingly in the actions of others, even those who masquerade under the pretense of caring for others. It is pervasive in our culture, and this book is a partial endeavor to document my journey back from the edge of perdition. I offer this life summary to provide insight into the emotional journey that has been my lot (all my own choices). Nothing in this book should be construed as blaming others. My journey is the result of my choices.

God always has a plan for our lives. He alone knows the highest good that can be revealed in a surrendered spirit. Later in this book, we will

tackle the issues of living through a prison experience. But for now, arm yourself with the knowledge that you are not alone.

The final chapter in this book will focus upon the solution to all of our failures—a sure solution. If I can offer help or encouragement, contact me directly. I will do my best to provide you with assistance in finding your footing and moving on toward living the life God has given to you.

VISUAL DATA SUMMARY

Ages: 7-8 to 31	A Path of Personal Degradation
	Fear and Confusion
32 to 65	A Path of Personal Recovery
	Faith and Hope
65 and up	A Path of Personal Ministry
	Service to Others

Kevin J. McCarthy
Post Office Box 1484
Slidell, Louisiana 70459

May 13, 2012



PART ONE



CHAPTER TWO

MORE VICTIMS OF CRIME

Suffering, violence, and injury are felt by all people, not just a few. Shaming, humiliation, and exclusion violate basic individual human rights equally. No one group can claim exclusive access to the domain of victimhood. It takes wisdom and courage to see the problem in its entirety. It will take even greater wisdom, courage, and responsiveness to make the necessary changes that will initiate true community healing. If one is to acknowledge the importance of the role of “community” in raising a child, or of repairing a broken window to halt the process of neighborhood deterioration, how much more important is it to address the festering wounds of those who dwell in society?

There is a limited amount of space, air, and water that defines the concept that we call Earth. The planet currently accommodates over 7 billion individuals, most of whom have had to define some concept of worth or

individual dignity. That process can be advanced considerably through empathic understanding and outreach. This is not a call to be “soft on crime,” as one district attorney posited. It is a call to design solutions that work for the true administration of justice, for the healing of all victims of crime, for the repair of the torn social fabric, and for the possibility of restoring all those whose actions have brought about an exclusionary social response.

In this context of paradigm change, the nature of victimization and victimhood become viable elements of the social contract. That contract can then take on the form of a “living document” that can be applied to every individual alive on the planet. This is the essence of why we no longer execute animals that have killed their masters accidentally. Nor do we usually prosecute children or execute those with severely limited intellectual or cognitive abilities. The social contract of which I speak has been largely dashed under foot in the post-9/11 American world.

It’s time to rescue that contract and see what parts of it are still useful in this tenuous framework we call society before it is torn apart in dissension and endless social conflict. In order to accomplish that, we must establish an appreciation of human worth.



CHAPTER THREE

BETRAYAL

Betrayal is a very strong word. But I cannot think of any way that I can tamp it down to a less offensive term. It is what it is.

As I have gotten older, I've seen that betrayal seems to be a way of life. It is accepted as a necessary consequence of "doing business" with other human beings. It matters little that it can apply to a marriage I am conspiring to abandon or to a criminal matter in which I place my family's future in jeopardy.

So, at the risk of offending those who draw comfort from their imaginary conclusions of the facts, I must return to my original theme that the "truth will set us free." If I cannot allow myself to examine the truth within the quiet of my own mind, how will I ever accomplish my goal of restoring human relationships with those my actions have offended?

How can I invite others to engage with me in a healing process if I fail to understand that my actions have caused grievous wounds (intended or unintended)? Betrayal is an excellent starting point for exploring the pain that spouses, children, and family members experience when a parent is sent to prison. In my own case, I was charged with the crimes of a sexual nature. While I was in the county jail, my children were placed in foster care. After my release on bail, they were returned to my care under the supervision of the court. My case took almost two years to work its way through the system before I lost a jury trial and subsequent pleadings.

At that point, I realized that I would most certainly be sentenced to a prison term, though I had no idea what that entailed. Attempts to place the children with my family members were unsuccessful, most likely because of my own attitudes and actions. Finally, I was able to locate others who had children attending the same school as my own children who indicated their willingness to care for my children during my incarceration. After being sentenced to a 76-month sentence and shipped off to the state penitentiary, I was informed that the children needed to be placed somewhere else after that first year. I was fortunate in that the then-current social worker was attempting to place them together in a family.

That happened, and my children were kept in the same geographical area with a new foster family. Having “heard” of my crime, that family quickly set about to convince me that I should assure the children of my guilt so that each of them (particularly my son) could close that door and move on emotionally. To that end, they brought my children

to visit me and again stressed the importance of assuring my children of my guilt. Not wanting to contribute to my children's pain and sense of emotional abandonment, I did as I was asked. My children left the prison, and I would not see them again until after my release. By then, it was too late to undo the harm that was done to them. Both children were exceptionally angry with me.

There were some attempts at emotional reconnection, but they were woefully inadequate and misinformed. The relationship with my son seems to have survived the anger and rage that accompanied being a foster child. I had no clue what each of my children went through because of my own actions.

My relationship with my youngest daughter has resisted all attempts at resolution and reconnections. I eventually gave up on overt attempts to bridge the horrible gap between us. The events that initiated this soul-disconnection between parent and child happened in 1977. It was not until 2011, in a conversation with my son, that I learned that both of my children had been abused while in foster care. I was stunned. That bit of information explained so many things that I had pondered for years, things that I felt powerless to change. Not only did my children pay a price as "social orphans," but they were also subjected to a variety of acts that served to label both of them as deviant because of my actions. My son later noted that when he was interviewed for a security clearance while in the military, the investigator brought up my arrest and incarceration. My son was a child of seven to nine when those earlier events transpired. What account could he give of his father's alleged crimes?

Now I fully understand that both of these children survived their own

traumatic experiences with neither parent around to protect them. That is the definition of betrayal! Both of these children have grown up with a reluctance to closely engage other people. The ways that each manifests this distinction differs, but they both have a tendency to let few close.

Betrayal is such an intimate behavior between parent and child that it is often glossed over, or excuses are made for the actions of the offending parent. Usually, both parents are involved at some level in making the acts of betrayal possible. While one parent may be guilty of the actual events, it is not uncommon for the other parent to be aware of what is happening; their usual response is to remain quiet.

At this point in my life, I do not believe that it is possible for betrayal to exist within a family without the knowledge and tacit approval of the other adult family members. The saying that “time heals all things” is not necessarily true. I may just have grown very cautious about publicly identifying behaviors that I associate with a potential for harm or serious consequences.

It may be that my sensitivity to these conditions has reached an exquisite level of personal discernment. I can sense something deep inside of me that triggers my alarm. But I am unable to put my fears and anxiety into words. In this situation, I am left carrying this burden with no visible hope of ever having others really understand my concerns. I live alone with my struggles, knowing that it is not really possible to trust others, given my most profound issues of personal pain and shame.

It is one thing to be betrayed by the justice authorities or school officials, but it is entirely another matter to live with betrayal within a family. Out

of such a structure, I soon discover that I have no one to turn to with my questions or mood shifts. The silent message I receive at every turn in the road is to “suck it up.” It is not very comforting or reassuring to blindly march down the road by myself, but the most devastating part of this encounter is the void of aloneness that is created deep within my psyche. That wound tends to linger over the course of a lifetime and shape future relationships and opportunities. As individuals, we seek to fix these problems from within, since there does not appear to be an external solution that we can trust.

Betrayal is the product of the infliction of harm. No parent or spouse wants to believe that they have intentionally inflicted harm on their loved ones. But the truth is that we often make decisions that reflect self-interest, not the interests of those we call family or friends. This will be a difficult concept for many, but the ability to wrench ourselves out of wretched relationships and to restore loving relationships is contingent upon our ability to recognize our wrongs. To demonstrate this point, let’s look at potential areas of harm that affect loved ones.

Physical harm is not just restricted to beatings, abuse, or physical actions that hurt others. We can physically deny attention or affection—elements of nurturing. This concept of nurturance is essential in all relationships, but particularly when involving our children and spouses. Instead of being there for those who are dependent upon us, we may have made choices that make our behaviors an affliction to others.

Do your spouse and children exhibit signs of stress when you walk into

the room? Does a surge of fear sweep into their lives because of your presence? These are the subtle indications of physical abuse; others carry around the stress of their fears and concerns in their bodies. Eventually, this takes on a life of its own, and their lives are changed forever. Joy and pleasure slip away, and tension becomes a way of life. Some of the things that trigger this reaction may be alcohol or drug abuse, mean temperedness, or an unwillingness to engage others in your care. That's right, I said "in your care." When we invite relationship or produce children, we incur responsibilities. When I have made decisions that mean I must be away from those I love, my absence may trigger painful responses in their lives. One small thing that I can do to correct the pains of the past is to make an unspoken commitment to share one meal a day with those I love without anger, wrath, aloofness, or criticism. My focus will be upon those who need my physical presence and the comfort it gives them. If I am not skillful at comforting others, I will resolve to address this character deficit by reaching out with attention and affection at every possible opportunity.

Mental harm is the act of undermining the confidence or self-esteem of those in my care. I can do this by constant nagging or belittling them. Am I skillful at reminding others of their flaws or character defects? Or do I regularly make an effort to build up others? When life is over and you are gone, what will your loved ones have left in terms of memories? It doesn't matter what bad decisions you have made in the past; you can step up to the plate and hit a home run by turning these painful practices into potentials of pleasure for those who share your life. You may not be able to erase the pain you have caused in their lives, but you can release those broken encounters into God's care with the assurance that He will

mend all of those severed relationships in His own way.

Mental harm is not just restricted to life inside the home. The pain we inflict on those we love is carried out of the home and into their daily lives. Consider the child who is told that he is stupid or clumsy; do you understand how those words affect children in their daily activities? The child will get a poor grade, which then reinforces the idea that he is stupid. You need not say another word; he will carry those doubts with him throughout his life. Treat your spouse that way, and he or she will eventually give up and discontinue any efforts to address your caustic comments. Quietly, your relationship starts to die a little at a time. But you do not notice until you are served with the divorce papers or are on the receiving end of their distance from you. “Why would I turn to you when you never offer anything to build me up? Your focus is on tearing me down.”

I saw a story on the Internet about a father whose autistic child seem to have recurrent problems in school. He frequently received notices from the teachers about his son’s behavior. The boy’s relationship with his mother (divorced from the father) and his father was affected by the emergence of growing insecurities and fears. The father was a wise man who knew his child and knew something was wrong. He “wired” his child and then listened to the classroom encounters. For the boy, every day at school became a punishment. Instead of enjoying the learning process, it was more like serving a day in prison. The information revealed on the recorder eventually led to the termination of the offending staff. More importantly, it opened another connection between the father and his son, as the recordings invoked a surge of compassion and

understanding.

Emotional harm is different from mental harm in that I may meet my spouse and children's basic physical and mental needs yet be oblivious to the need for tenderness. More pain is inflicted each day with words than with all the weapons in the world. Careless though well-intended comments can cut deeper than any knife, producing wounds that may never heal.

When my divorce became a certainty, I gave our family dog away. Continuing to care for the animal would have been a burden. I never thought about the needs of my children. There was no conversation about my decision. I had made an executive decision, and there was no appeal process. In writing this book, I have given sections of my early writings to my son for his insight and feedback. As a result of that process, I discovered his woundedness when, at forty-one years of age, he finally got up the courage to ask, "What happened to Misse?" For all those years, he had carried that wound in his heart. I thank God that I have been able to hear the painful cry of a six-year-old child.

Another close family member refuses any contact with me. That is her way of addressing the pain of my failures. I believe that the unwillingness to engage in a relationship provides her with a sense of comfort and security. It is rather child-like (not childish), to avoid painful memories by avoiding relationship. While painful to me, I believe that she has arrived at a place where she feels some level of peace. My desire for interaction is guided by her need for peace more than a need for relationship. In 2011, I was informed by my son that both of my children had suffered forms of abuse while in foster care. My incarceration went from 1979

until 1983. Twenty-eight years after the results of my harmful behavior, I am just beginning to understand the harm that was done by my not being available to my children.

That trauma has colored their whole lives and every relationship in which they have been involved. That painful revelation also helped me to understand many of their life choices. I am grateful to have that opportunity. My daughter grew from age seven to eleven and my son from age six to ten while I was away in prison.

Silence is an appropriate way to make amends. We never stop growing or learning, and the time of incarceration can become the foundation upon which you build all relationships. Use the time apart to come together in small but meaningful ways. Those small initial efforts will have a tremendous impact on the lives of everyone with whom we interact. Even if those interactions are silent.

Sexual harm is likely to invoke conflict and confrontation in the hearts of many who read this book. It is personal and sensitive subject. Such a painful violation of personhood and individual boundaries is it that we seek to bury those encounters from any possible public view. So the response set becomes denial, masked anger, promiscuity, multiple divorces, distrust, addictions, destructive decisions, and eventual emotional isolation. While I have broken down the elements of harm for purposes of illustration, they overlap and feed each other in a synergistic fashion. The wounding never stops until we seek healing. Forgiveness is the essential key to bring about true healing, both emotionally and spiritually.

Many of those who have been abused, and even those who are abusers, have come to think that their deep wounds will never be healed. It is inconceivable to them that healing is linked to forgiveness. This triggers questions about spiritual beliefs. “Where were you, God, when all of this was happening?”

The most shameful part of this process is the secret inner knowledge of the times we engaged in activities that added to our woundedness and shame. One of the hardest tasks we will ever face is to start by forgiving ourselves. That becomes the key to forgiving others. The other choice is to stay locked in a behavioral cycle that contributes to future self-destructive choices. It is a never-ending cycle until we muster the courage to confront the monster within. It may seem like an extraordinary useless hope to believe that true peace can be achieved. But it is achievable, and many arrive there every day. Choosing to engage in the healing process is very private and personal. It is true for those abused and for the abusers.

The harm we have encountered emerges as searing pain in our lives. Most of us seek to flee the experience of intense pain. Like any other kind of harm, the key to restoration lies in healing. Even the most wretched encounters can become essential to that process. But it can never happen until one is willing to expose the wound to the light of day. When that wound is caused by someone we love, it becomes particularly difficult to confront. The anger and sorrow we carry will only start to heal when we take the first steps forward: Use the time of separation to reflect, respond, and restore that which has been lost.

Spiritual harm is the most destructive type, wounding our very spirits.

We become transformed from loving and trusting children into individuals who are unable to appreciate the goodness of God. If I cannot trust those around me, most certainly I am not able to trust the One who created me. I am alone, unsure, and eventually unwilling to engage in those spiritual fairy tales. Now I am truly alone and cut off from everyone else—with the exception of transitory and impermanent relationships that can never meet my needs.

Spiritual harm reduces God's Word to empty promises. It goes to the root of our connectedness. Planting seeds of doubt in our lives is a principal weapon of the evil one. Do you remember his words to Eve that "you too can be like God if you eat the fruit"? In other words, "God is holding back something good from you. He is depriving you of your pleasures." Suddenly, I am rebelling against my Creator. This becomes intensified when I start to experience a range of forbidden pleasures. I like that feeling, and I want to experience it again ... regularly.

Soon, I am physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually disconnected. I pursue a spectrum of behaviors to reassure myself that I am on the right road—at least, that is what makes me feel better ... or so I tell myself.

The experiences we have with those in authority in our lives will mold and shape our awareness. The key to restoring harmony stems from a serious examination of the harmful actions of others that eventually manifested in a sense of betrayal. The action plan is not a carefree or painless process. But if you have the courage to look at your life without flinching, then you have already begun a journey on the road to healing. You will meet many others as you move forward. You will recognize

them by their refusal to be a partial person. They are being made whole with every step they take. Do you remember Christ's question, "Will you be made whole?"

My readers may note that I did not identify the focus of my assertions regarding infliction of harm or betrayal. That decision was not an error or omission. When one is subjected to these types of painful afflictions, they often go on to become abusers and betrayers themselves. They learn all too well what they have lived. So the focus was deliberately left undefined since it is likely that, at some time in their lives, offenders were exposed to similar encounters with those in some position of authority.

The horror that emerges is found not only in the behavior of the offenders but also in the behavior of their family members, who may behave in the same way and may also engage in relationships that recreate the dysfunction and abuse they previously experienced. Once these harmful behaviors have twisted the lives of loved ones, they all suffer from the possibility of being damaged from the actions of those they love. That is the essence of betrayal.

The effect of betrayal can be measured by many standards, but some of the most devastating results happen after the defendant is escorted away. I cannot write a non-clinical book about the plight of family members left behind when a loved one is sent to prison, nor can I successfully identify the broad nature of victimization, without addressing my own harmful actions and the pain of betrayal that I imposed upon all those who loved me.

That theme permeates all that I do, personally and professionally. I have been encouraged to explore the focus and scrutiny that all family members come under when a loved one goes to prison. That process incurs burdens that have not been adequately explored or acknowledged. If the price of revealing the harm and betrayal that happens in these situations is the sacrifice of my pride, image, or appearances, then so be it. It is time to initiate healing at the most basic level. It begins by acknowledging ownership of the hurtful outcomes and by accepting responsibility to use the (our) remaining time and resources to create a healing experience for those who have suffered.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE REALITY OF EVIL

From betrayal we move to unmasking evil, whether the human variety or the spiritual reality of possession. A brief review of the news over a period of thirty days will reveal a broad spectrum of man's brutal actions toward man. That period of assessment will also be useful in helping you to formulate appropriate questions about the basic concept of good versus bad.

No one wants to think that someone they love is capable of personal atrocities against their loved ones. No one wants to believe that a loved one regards others as little more than objects to be used to accomplish his or her own purposes. Only by grasping the essential truth about the battle between good and evil will we develop a frame of reference in which we can build an effective response for our loved ones and ourselves. I am sure that those who are perfectly possessed (Appendix

D) have few qualms about their actions, living as though whatever they choose is okay for everyone else also. I am not sure of their ability to recover since they have given themselves over to behavior that routinely offends and degrades others. I think the key to recovery for those who are possessed is some small fragment, some tiny conscious desire to be rid of the influence of evil in their lives. That is their primary lifeline for help. No desire, no recovery.

The imperfectly possessed (Appendix D) are aware of their burden and, while displaying a variety of behaviors that we would clearly identify as harmful to others as well as themselves, they still seem to have a conscious reality of their interior struggle. At some point, they have surrendered their will to the evil one who manifests his activities through their often-unexplainable behavior. These individuals are more likely to dispossess the evil in their lives since they have an intimate awareness of its presence in their lives.

Not all evil choices are manifested under the direct influence of the evil one. Sometimes, those choices develop from our own internal desires that become coupled with the “suggestions” that pop up in our thoughts as random ideas. These “suggestions” represent a different level of struggle since they seem to represent our own internal mental processes. At this level of conflict, the suggestions come to us to act upon ideas as we choose. They do not seem to have the imperatives visited upon individuals who are truly possessed. That’s why it’s called human evil (Appendix D). We can opt out before engaging in the activities. The possessed are likely to manifest a decidedly distinct and compulsive mechanism of action governing their activities. On a lesser

level, we are often confronted by the reality of strongholds in our lives (Appendix D). These seem to be set points that we continue to hover about, endlessly returning to behaviors that burden our lives and the lives of others. They can include alcohol, drugs, gambling, sexual issues, or pornography as well as core issues of lying, stealing, and cheating—to label a few behaviors—though they are not exclusively restricted to these dimensions.

Strongholds evidence themselves in the repetitive nature of the choices we continue to make, choices that produce long-term scarring in our own lives and the lives of others. We play with these strongholds, falsely believing that we are in control and can stop anytime we choose. Since these actions affect others as well as ourselves, they manifest on an internal and external basis.

On the most basic level are the vast majority of people who routinely suffer from the oppression of evil (Appendix D). They live with the awareness of internalized conflict. Most of this struggle is played out on a deeply intimate basis as each individual sorts out the nature of their own battle (Appendix B). At this level, we are singled out and attacked on a very personal level (Appendix C). The barbs of the evil one are tailored for our own unique personalities. Given the issue of personal shame engendered by these very private accusations, we are likely to suffer in silence rather than discuss these encounters with those who can offer help and support. Thus, the evil one draws us out of the sheepfold and proceeds to destroy us while the other sheep watch. Stay within the sheepfold and take courage; the battle has already been won!

Over the years, I have developed an awareness of the nature of evil at the

personal and corporate levels. Once encountered, the first response may be to give up and walk away. That is the little voice speaking fear into your life; don't buy it (Appendix C)! Our responses to these encounters begin at the level of our emotional responses, so if you find yourself experiencing fear, confusion, distraction, anxiety, rebellion, and anger, you have just received an important spiritual message delivered via your own personal emotions (Appendix C). I think that these are all appropriate responses to being exposed to the presence of evil, but in that first moment of engagement with the enemy, don't let his stealth or appearance disarm you; use your sword of the Spirit and rely on prayer as your ever-present help.

While it has been necessary to define the essence of evil, we should not become lost in the vastness of the problem. We are fighting this battle as highly-trained soldiers. Stay focused and trust the process. God is in control. Always has been and always will be! I agree it is painful and devastating to see the influence of evil in the lives of those we love and to recognize its influence in those who live as our neighbors, co-workers, and possibility even fellow worshipers (Appendix B). We are personally responsible to God for our actions or our inactivity as we go through each day. Quitting the battle and surrendering to the other side is not an option. Nor is it an option to abandon those around us simply because they appear to be so hardened and uncaring that they will never change. The battle has already been won for us, so it becomes our responsibility to claim the victory and live it on a daily basis. I am not going to give up on my family and friends, or even poor sinners, just because I have not seen a break in the battle lines that offers a clear sign of victory. I trust in God, and I believe His Word.

My desire to highlight the reality of evil, even in those we love, is not an invitation to despair or give in to feelings of futility. Satan is very much alive and seeking the ruin of souls. Satanism is the worship of Lucifer and all that he embraces. It is very much present in our world, though scarcely commented upon in news reports or religious communications (Appendix A). I suspect that Satanism plays a significant role in the occurrence of crime and the distortion of human personality. Behaviors that shock our consciences and trigger an outcry may often be associated with demonic or satanic activities, but given the current abyss between science and spirituality, they often go unrecognized in their manifestations or origins. It is my personal belief that no one is beyond the reach of God; therefore, His is the power we must evoke if we are to reclaim our loved ones.

This is a battle cry to rally for others as others have rallied for us. Let's not leave anyone behind. Let's use our talents and resources, especially spiritual ones, to intervene in the lives of others. Lift them up in prayer and manifest a spirit of service in His name. Everything that we do is meaningful; few things in life truly happen on a random basis. That means that what we do each day and throughout the day counts toward the victory we are seeking. Nothing is ever lost in God's economy. His is the perfect balance sheet.

An awareness of betraying acts may be the first solid indication of the presence of underlying evil influences. The hardest part of confronting this reality is accepting that our family member or friend is not the person that they represent themselves to be. They come with unwanted baggage, but that is not a reason to reject them and run away. In learning

to accept others, we must recognize our own evil propensities. We need to remove the beam from our own eyes before turning to the speck in our neighbor's eye. Forgiveness and mercy are the principal spiritual tools that have been given to us to accomplish this purpose.

Before you can expect to encounter the evil in your life directly, you are likely to experience the challenge of pretense. This is a satanic device that seeks to shield the activities of the evil one behind a mask of reasons. Some can be quite rational, but when you are dealing with the evil one, know that you will always be confronting lies, deceptions, and half-truths. This is his nature, and it does not yield readily to being exposed.

We have evidence in God's Word that Satan must yield his place to the light of the Word. This is your sole authority; use it wisely. Before tackling the problem of evil in the life of another, make sure that you have cleaned your own house and that you have things in order with God. If you ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and truth, it will be given to you freely. Do not attempt to confront the evil one alone; these encounters must be engaged with a team of spiritually-conscious individuals in order to prevail. If you are sober and committed about your purpose, you will eventually prevail. Remember that He that is in you is stronger than he that is in the world.

Do not yield your loved ones to Satan in this battle. As a child of God, you have the authority to spiritually fight on their behalf, and in fact, you have an obligation to pray for them according to the Word. Satan does not like to lose, but he must yield to the Light of God's Word. Darkness will always flee before the Light.

In the next section of this book, we will address practical realities of living through incarceration in the community. These elements are included to address issues that many couples have no time to discuss before they are faced with separation by incarceration. Life does not stop when a loved one goes to prison. This section is designed to help you overcome the hurdles that you may encounter as a prisoner's child, spouse, or family member living in the community.

Later in this book, we will discuss the solutions that are offered to us in dealing with evil. We are well equipped, but given a limited awareness of our resources, we may be tempted to flee at the first recognized appearance of the enemy. This is the time to remember whose child you are. Fight for others as though you were trying to save a loved one from a fierce saltwater crocodile. Do not give up, because in a moment, the whole tenor of the battle will change and you may be able to snatch the unwitting victim from the jaws of death.

It takes courage ... but then again, it takes great courage to love fiercely. A knowledge of the realities of good and evil are necessary to survive the trauma of incarceration at the family level and to continue to successfully function within the community. Throughout the encounter ahead, you will face multiple trials and temptations; now is the time to draw up your battle plans and review the choices that lie ahead.



CHAPTER FIVE

JUSTICE ORPHANS

The most precious resource in our world is the children since they represent hope for the future. There is no gem or state of being or mineral or resource that has a greater value than a single human life. Without the gift of life, all other circumstances are without meaning. Our value is derived from the simple fact that we are all God's children. Children have a special place in that eternal scale of valuation. I believe that this is so because of their innocence and willingness to trust others. Therein lies the crux of the issue. Children usually believe what we tell them. They hope that we will treat them lovingly and with kindness. They see the wickedness in the world about them, but they believe that we are super-parents who will protect them and meet their needs at all costs. The reality is that we often fail them in what they most need from us: reassurance and compassion.

Given the complexities of modern day life, we are likely to miss critical clues in our children that would highlight their fears, concerns, and unspoken needs. For a family going through the process of disintegration, parents are much more likely to be consumed with their own survival needs and miss the fact that their children have continued on the path of growth and development without parental guidance. This section deals with those needs as defined by Eric Erickson, a developmental psychologist. He constructed a series of eight developmental stages of man. Within each of these transitional states, we are faced with the task of resolving a “crisis.” As we master these crises, we move onto the next level of growth (broadly defined). If the crisis is not resolved, we stay stuck at that point and only partially master the tasks needed for mature growth.

There are multiple theories of development, including those of Freud and Piaget, that can be used to enhance our knowledge of our children, but I find that for purposes of developing an understanding of emotional competence, Erickson’s work is the most pertinent resource.

Even in a perfect home, there are processes and developmental challenges of which most parents are unaware. This may lie in the fact that the child has no ability to identify and speak about these developmental crises. The best they can do is to act upon their fears and discomforts in a manner that eventually gets the attention of adults. If they knew what to ask for, they would do so.

Being a parent means that we take responsibility for having empathy regarding the needs of children. They are children, not little adults. Therefore, they process what they see or hear about from others in a

completely different manner from adults. In infancy, a baby has no initial ability to maintain a mental image of its caregiver. You pop your head over the side of the crib, and perhaps the baby smiles. You walk away, and the baby wonders what happened to you (inability to sustain object permanence). It may even become upset and start to cry out of a basic fear of being abandoned. It has no capacity to articulate these fears to you other than the basic behaviors that babies use to communicate comfort or discomfort (ages birth to eighteen months). You know you are coming back, but the baby has no such internal reference point. Over the first eighteen months of life, a baby either learns to develop trust that you will appear when needed, or conversely, the baby will enter life with a limited ability to trust in others. A moment's reflection on this crisis will yield clues revealing why some adults may behave as they do. Before acquiring language abilities, the baby is likely to store memories as a series of impressions. This limitation is evidenced in later life when we observe the behaviors of others who are without explanation for their actions. The pre-literacy impressions do not exist in a context that is readily changed through adult logic. Developmentally, the infant requires affection, love, and attention to its needs in order to overcome the crisis of trust versus distrust. Successful resolution allows the infant to acquire a basic sense of drive and hope. The infant can then go on to believe that the world is a trustworthy place in which to enjoy a meaningful life.

The next stage of development builds upon the skills already mastered in infancy. This period encompasses the period from eighteen to thirty-six months old. The next crisis centers on resolving the struggle over shame versus autonomy, as the child faces the task of toilet training and the appearance of frequent "no's." These "no's" become an almost universal

response. Eventually, with patient loving care and endless supportive direction, the child masters these tasks and, as a result, a new sense of personal autonomy emerges. With this result comes the development of self-control, courage, and will.

A child who manifests urinary or fecal incontinence during a period of significant stress within the home is likely to be struggling at an earlier developmental level. I do not believe that this choice is made at a conscious level; rather, the child is demonstrating that the current level of emotional needs are not being met. Again, if the child could express this in words, it would all click together in the consciousness of the parents or guardians. Each behavior is an indication of the child's developmental progress and can be an essential guide to understanding the current level of maturity or emotional needs.

Building upon the successful resolution of the need for personal autonomy, the child then passes into another stage of development that spans the years from ages three to five years old. At this level of growth, the child is faced with mastering the crisis of initiative versus guilt. The child has been watchful of the adults within the environment and playfully creates similar situations during creative play.

It is also likely the period of time during which the child questions things routinely. Most likely this curious nature will manifest in "why" questions. Why did Grandma die, or why did Daddy have to go to prison? These may be questions that you have not been able to answer for yourself, much less for the four- or five-year-old child trying to make sense out of life.

Helping your child cope with the importance of these events while you also respond will help your child develop a sense of purpose and extend an emerging sense of meaningfulness regarding life itself. At this point, the family relationships are the most important element for growth and emotional maturity. This is also the period in which children may develop strong attachments for the parent of the opposite sex. Given the absence of a parent, the child will need support in resolving this developmental crisis.

The next stage of development ranges from ages six to twelve and centers upon resolving the crisis of industry versus inferiority. Within the emerging individual, what has happened to me becomes less important than what I start to make happen within my own life. At this stage of development, the child who has successfully resolved the crisis will start to display competence and method. Social functioning takes on a new importance, and self-esteem issues become obvious. Resolution allows the child to develop an inner sense of competence.

Best friends, favorite teams, and choices become important indicators of enhanced individuality. A child of this age with a parent in prison is likely to manifest a tense inner conflict that may go on to denial of parental responsibility. The child may also question himself about what he did or failed to do that caused this tragedy to happen. This child needs loving support to sort through intense familial feelings balanced with a reasonable understanding of the underlying facts. Kindness, reassurance, and truth will help the child to emerge from this conflict, functioning at a higher level of maturity. At the age of thirteen through eighteen, a child is faced with the crisis of identity versus role confusion. Successful

resolution of this crisis will allow the child to develop an internal awareness of loyalty and devotion in relationship with others. This is an age at which parental influences tend to fade into the background as issues such as peer relations and social competence assert themselves.

During this stage of development, teens are likely to wrestle with questions about their identity and are likely to internalize an individual viewpoint as they confront moral conflicts. Failure to resolve this crisis will likely develop into feelings of inadequacy. Parental influence may create a loving impression of worth and potential to which the teen may return after experiencing the seemingly devastating struggles of adolescent life.

A parent may consider the job done when a teenager graduates from high school and goes off to college, secures a job, or enlists in the military. Actually, our development continues onward. While the outward appearance of parental approval seems to be of significantly less importance, the next stage generally encompasses the ages from eighteen through thirty-five. The crisis revolves around how we manage the issues of intimacy and solidarity versus isolation.

The successful resolution of this crisis will result in the emergence of love and affiliation with others. The key to resolving this challenge lies in the young adult's ability to experience meaningful intimacy. Yes, even as adults, our children have clear but unstated needs. The ability to experience intimacy builds upon the successful resolution of the other tasks previously mentioned. Tolerance, love, and understanding are the keys to providing effective and lasting support for a child of this age level.

One might think that this concludes our developmental journey, but there are two stages through which we may pass (God willing) that will help us understand the emergence of true maturity as individuals. The next stage spans the ages from thirty-five through sixty-five. The crisis that must be confronted and resolved at this stage of development centers upon generativity (the impulse to be productive) or self-absorption and eventual stagnation.

Looking back upon the nature of our lives, we are likely to search for meaning in our productivity, our ability to further our cultural values through the children we have raised, and our appreciation for developing our own capacity for creativity and meaningful work. This period may be marked with struggles to find meaning in our lives. We may have arrived at the point where we have finally emerged as being in control of various life domains, our focus based upon what we have accomplished for the betterment of society. Reassurance and love are the keys to supportiveness and individual encouragement.

Last of all, we move onto the final stage of life, which generally spans the period from age sixty-five until our deaths. This stage is set with the ultimate crisis of our lives and centers upon resolving the issue of integrity versus despair. Can we reflect upon the meaningfulness of our lives and appreciate the acquisition of wisdom that we have shared with others? Have we made the task of living a little less challenging for those who have filled our lives with their needs, concerns, problems, joys, hopes, and endless potential? If so, we can accept the completeness of our lives balanced with graciousness as we approach our pending deaths.

This is the stuff of life. Others will rarely tell us of these great unspoken

personal needs, but we all have them in common. Consider the frightening experience of a child whose parent has been sent to prison as they try to quell the surging fear of possible abandonment. There is no facility to reason out that their needs will be met if you do not address that need in a compassionate, caring, and affirmative way.

That is exactly what I mean by the term justice orphans. These are the life-shaping realities that compress a child into a world of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, and fears, all unspoken. Each new encounter or unmet need becomes a painful question of self-worth or personal failure. These are the needs that often require adults to perceive a child's essential sense of panic, mostly through observing behaviors and lovingly supportive care.

This is the only way I know to reach a suffering child who is serving a sentence of aloneness, uncertainty, and pain. The most difficult part of this reality is that the spouse and family members are challenged to respond to the silence of their own child's needs when they are in the pit of suffering from the trauma of incarceration themselves.

Children are just children; they are not little adults. Out of a sense of loving affection and concern, they may not make themselves visible as suffering persons, but they do suffer. They are likely to go about their activities, trying to sort out the pieces to a puzzle that is beyond their ability to comprehend. Often, they will just settle for examining the pieces they had direct influence upon, such as "if I had just done my homework or had been a better kid, this would not have happened to my family. It's my fault these things happened."

Certainly, if I cannot adequately verbalize my feelings, fears, or concerns, I have little hope of having a preoccupied adult understand my pain and feeling of disconnection. I see what is happening, but I have no clue why it is happening. It is like watching the approach of a tornado headed directly for your home. In the face of impending disaster, I can do little more than hunker down, make myself as small as possible, and whimper in my fear.

As my life progresses, I'll know that there is something wrong with me since this does not happen to the other families around me. I have done some terribly wrong, or I am just wrong myself to have brought about these events (without knowing exactly how I did so). That is an example of magical thinking, a child's ultimate retreat from the pain of a reality beyond their ability to comprehend.

Children need adults to offer them consolation and comfort. Most of all, children need to be told the truth (age-appropriate explanations) so they can begin to sort out their questions and confront their fears in a loving context. In telling a child the truth, the adult can shape a structure of hope for the future and assurance that the present disaster can be overcome with love, attention, and affection. Building upon that foundation, an adult may then guide the child into the role of fellow problem solver. With the emergence of this new reality, the child is afforded an opportunity to become part of the solution to the problem. Not the problem itself!

The purpose of this section has been to shine a light on the unintended consequences associated with the luck of the draw that dictates which families shall be destroyed under the judicial juggernaut and which will

emerge from this experience redefined, strengthened, and whole. May God be merciful to those plodding this dark pathway. Only the future will reveal the broad social, family, and individual consequences of these decisions.



CHAPTER SIX

SPOUSES WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Relationship is a word that we use to describe a bond between people, forged upon a mutual understanding that includes trust, honesty, reciprocal support, and joint respect. It is the essence of what we hope and dream about as we ponder the nature of our interactions with others. When that constellation of aspirations seems to emerge from the shadows of life, marriage is the direction we pursue to cement our dreams. Whether by marriage or informal relationship, we seek union and become willing to join together with another to pursue the joys of living and to share the responsibilities that emerge upon the pathways of life. We become committed to relying on our partner to help us navigate our way along the new frontiers that challenge our expectations and prospects of a good life together.

Few individuals start this process aware that the marital inertia may

become spent under the severe strain of a criminal conviction and subsequent period of incarceration. We readily say words of commitment to each other under the glow of the ceremonial moment, often without any forethought of what those words actually mean. If I declare that I am willing to love, honor, and obey my spouse in conditions of sickness, poverty, or worse, and I pledge to cherish my partner through all future circumstances, how does this pledge play out when my partner has been removed from the home due to illegal activities? It is a fair question and one that frequently eludes a meaningful answer.

Sometime after my divorce, I was given a copy of the book *Love Life* (for every married couple), written by Ed Wheat, M.D. I was in the midst of another relationship, which I was trying to justify to God. The book spoke to my heart in its simplicity. I could sense that the controversy about honoring marriage vows seemed to center upon possible exclusions to the rule. They did not focus on the marriage commitment itself. How often I have cried out to God to help me in some horrible situation created of my own making. These cries have been gasped after my actions, rarely before I have made the fateful choices. One of the many tools that Satan uses in our lives is the old smoke and mirror trick. He uses circumstances to deflect any attempt to examine the facts of our commitment. Surely God would not want me to stay in a loveless marriage with an offender serving a life sentence. So, we listen to the whisper of Satan and the shouts of our family members and friends.

Wow, exactly what does God require of me in such a hopeless situation? Yet, who could have been more hopeless than Jesus Christ nailed to a cross? Nailed to that cross for crimes he never committed—for other

people's crimes. He went to His death, a felon's death, based upon His commitment to His Father.

"Oh," you say, "but that is completely different. He is God. I am a human being shaking with emotional fury at the prospect of spending a lifetime on my own. This is not fair; I have needs too."

God does not turn His back upon those who suffer within the cities and towns of our country. He is well aware of the tragic aftermath of all criminal activities and their subsequent judicial consequences. He is intimately aware of your grief, suffering, and shame and wants to console you, comfort you, and guide you in fulfilling His will for your life. You are right! On your own, you cannot do this. But with God, nothing is impossible. Even the best of marriages require constant support and mutual working together.

"How will this ever be possible with my spouse in a prison hundreds of miles from me and our children?"

Your loneliness and fears can become your essential connection to God. He will supply your every need. If He made you, who would know better than He what it is that you require in life to sustain you? Perhaps your spirit is sagging so low at this point that you say, "I do not want to even think about it." Or your mind and body tell you that you would be better off finding someone else and starting over again. Perhaps your hope has been shattered beyond repair. Your emotions are raw and on fire, and there is no one to share this with since everyone wants to offer you advice on how to live your life. There is One who will listen to anything you have to say. That is God, who is still in the business of redeeming

broken lives.

While I can describe His power to heal brokenness by describing people whom I have encountered over the course of my life, none of these illustrations will have the impact of saying one quiet “help me” to God directly. When we come to Him like a small child in need of assistance, His heart is moved with compassion and mercy. He will put the pieces into place and begin a new work in our lives that will surpass any dream or expectation that we have previously held.

If you are at the bottom of your capabilities, you have the greatest need to call upon Him for help. He is a protector of widows and orphans; surely He knows that you and your children are in the midst of a devastating struggle. He knows that your very lives are at His mercy and grace. He knows that you have strong thoughts and feelings about your circumstances. He is aware of the deepness of your sorrow and sadness. His promise is that He will never leave us alone.

For some who read my words, their nature will rebel in fury at what I have proposed. Others would tell me that they couldn’t go one more day experiencing the spirit of exclusion from their neighbors or the taunts of those who are not willing to grant them privacy and peace. Some individuals and groups seem to thrive upon making others miserable. But make no mistake; God is watching all things, and He will sustain you in this trial.

Still others draw comfort from their spirituality but experience a withering challenge to their trust in God’s provision for their lives and the lives of their children. Here is the bottom line: Either everything

written in His Word is true, or it is all fiction. Either you are in charge, or God is in charge: If His Word is true (and I believe it is with all my heart), then this is the time to dig deeply into your foremost relationship for support, love, courage, and patience. That primary relationship is between Creator and creature. The most essential concept that I can convey is the knowledge that you are not alone.

There will be people who enter your life with concerns for your welfare and that of the children. They may attempt to insinuate themselves into your lives under the appearance of friendship or church membership. Unfortunately, there are people who would use your suffering and uncertainty to drive a wedge into your vulnerable psyche. The rush of concern may hide ruthlessness as these individuals use their closeness to you and your children to serve their own purposes. Be on your guard; those individuals seek only further destruction by using your vulnerable state to their own ends.

Another invitation to possible ruin may lie in the nature of romantic relationships, which can blossom out of the intensity of the moment. Certainly, this is a time when you feel defenseless and susceptible and in need of loving care and support. When someone appears out of the mist and offers to carry you away from your world of grief and shame, how will you respond? It is imperative that you consider your options now, in light of your marital commitments. Once someone has emotionally swept you off your feet, you will be unable to reflect meaningfully upon the dangers.

Another invitation is the desolation that lies in the deeds of bitterness that an encounter with evil will produce. At this point in our discussion,

it is not important to identify the nature of that experience with evil. This topic will be covered in greater depth in the chapter called Perimeter Psychology. For now, it is essential to recognize that the swampland of bitterness is a place of death. It represents the death of all that you find joyful and meaningful in your life. This infection will spill over into the lives of your children and family members if not controlled from the very beginning.

These things are realities that you will encounter on your journey: the shame of being in the supermarket when others stare, and your child's report of being heartbroken by the taunts of other children regarding the publicized events affecting your family members. The ultimate embarrassment is being unable to defend one's name in a hostile environment. Those moments will try you in the most intimate recesses of your heart. There is no one to share this strange legacy with, nor are you likely to master the words to convey the intensity of your experience. It's as if you find yourself adrift on an ocean of indifference and/or outright hostility. You have acquired the name, "the inmate's wife, the murderer's son, the prostitute's daughter, or the rapist's parents." Before you can put an oar into the water, you are gripped in currents of hatred and judgment. You swirl endlessly, trying to get your bearings when there are no stars to help you determine your position.

In spite of your confusion and despair at this moment, I want you to stop and consider your situation. There is One who has a dynamic GPS bearing upon all lives. Not a point on a map, but an intimate knowledge of all of the dimensions of our lives. He awaits our cry for help before imposing His plan for sorting out the elements of disaster that we are

navigating through at this time.

Your pride may offer several intellectual and scientific reasons why you should discard this proposal for a rational alternative. Perhaps your arrogance exceeds your desire for help or you have come to believe that after everything you have done in your life, God would never forgive or accept you. “I am too far gone, beyond any hope of redemption.” From the experience of my life and thousands of others, I can tell you faithfully that this is the moment God has been waiting for. All that is required of you is the faintest indication that you need His help. He is delighted with your heartfelt cry and responds like the loving Father that He is. He will not withhold any resource to help you and your family in your need. That is the simple truth.

I would imagine that at this point in your reading, you have experienced a feeling of great brokenness, a feeling of dejection and despair, a terrible aloneness that you never imagined would sweep into your life and transform your hopes and dreams into ashes and tears. When we are at our weakest point, God is sovereign in our lives. As you would comfort the pains of your child, God seeks not only to comfort us but also to give us a new life. He will sustain us through that life when each of us is willing to be His child.

If you bristle at the thought of surrendering your life to God, be assured that He is not a dictator. If you wish to shoulder your burden alone and according to your personal plan, He will allow you to do so. It gives Him pain to watch you withdraw from His loving embrace, as it pains you when your child is unwilling to release his or her burdens to your loving care. A wise parent knows that sometimes you have to allow the child to

work out his or her own plans before becoming willing to seek your care. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? Jesus told the story to the crowds. His words comfort me even today.

To be a spouse without a portfolio is like being a diplomat without any formal mission or purpose. You may experience a sense of unease as you mingle with other families at various events. You may feel like an oar out of water or an unfilled pool. Taking the small sure steps that God has given to you may exert more strength than you feel you have. It may also feel like you are going nowhere in a hurry. While serving my term of incarceration, I frequently pleaded with God to free me from any further burden. My physical freedom was not His primary concern at that time. He sought to free me from the burden of self, which was done slowly, one day at a time. It was a process of blossoming, and He was the Divine Gardener.

I would have been satisfied with my “freedom,” but God had a much bigger plan for my future. Had I been given my heart’s desire (freedom), it soon would have been squandered like the prodigal son’s inheritance. Instead, He has graciously given me the opportunity to share this journey of hope with you. He has never betrayed my confidence.

Recently, the U.S. prison population has exceeded two million individuals. There is no end in sight to the destruction that is inherent in the wake of the practical applications of Severcide-Industrial Complex. Earlier in the book, I briefly introduced the concept of severcide, which is a system of exclusionary practices applied against those who have violated broad aspects of the law, cultural awareness, and community standards through a variety of behaviors or breeches of common decency. Not all who

commit such offenses are subjected to its capricious demands, but those who acquire the dreadful stigma of exclusion incur another dilemma on behalf of family members and friends. In continuing to support familial bonds, family members and friends of offenders risk sharing the burdens of stigma and censure that have become institutionalized by laws, policies, practices, and the limited allocation of resources. The only way to avoid the practical applications of severcidal practices is to renounce the offending individual and to join in distancing oneself from association with offenders. Thus, once an offender, always an offender.

Family members may have empathy for the dispossessed of society but do not voice it loudly or show it in any appreciable public manner. Otherwise, they will draw scrutiny and possible censure upon themselves. This intricate network of haphazard governance has emerged in the United States to affect the lives of 120 to 150 million individuals. It continues to expand with the systematic criminalization of vast portions of our society and has overflowed its original levies to affect groups branded by limitations, ethnicity, religion, and a variety of other social branding mechanisms. It feeds off the outgrowth of the Terrorist-Industrial Complex, which fully emerged following the 9/11 tragedy. In plain-speak, if you are not a friend, then you must be the enemy.

Now it is time to consider your situation carefully and realistically. It is time to put aside pride, arrogance, despair, and devastation and to seek your rightful place. You are not alone in your suffering or shame. The God of the Old Testament did not abandon His people. He gave them freedom from their oppressors. Today's bondage is best represented by

the denial of human equality, laws that seek to classify every potential wrongdoing as a crime, and the death of forgiveness and mercy within our society. God demonstrated His mercy by leading His people out of captivity. He is still God today and is completely willing to lead us out of a lifetime of captivity if we are willing to accept His help. The same story and its many facets are repeated over and over again in His Word. The message has never changed. God is constant. He never varies in His love for us. If we are willing to surrender our burdens into His care, He will create a new life and a new purpose for each of us. There are no exceptions to this rule of love. Don't you remember that one of His final acts was a gift of love, mercy, and forgiveness to the thief who was dying on another cross next to His own? "Master, remember me when you come into your kingdom" were the words of the dying prisoner. Jesus answered him directly with an individual acknowledgement of his worth, telling him, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). That was a personal promise to a felon. It is a profound hope for all who have violated the law of the land and the law of God.

He who died on Calvary is the same God of the Hebrews. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He does not change. The Bible is filled with passages about His love for His lost sheep. If you are a lost sheep, you do not need to tumble off the mountain alone and frightened. If you have always been a sheep of His pasture but now are reeling under the blows of a loved one's criminal conviction and sentence of imprisonment, He has never left your side. He will reach out to you at a mere glance for His mercy.

Humility seems to me to be that point when all my personal goals and

ambitions are crushed and all I have left is the taste of ashes and tears of regret. Do not forget that even in His revulsion at sin, God was willing to spare Ahab when he became contrite and willing to repent. He heard the cry of the Shunammite woman for herself and her child. God listened with great compassion to the cries of King Hezekiah, who was on his deathbed, and restored his life. Do you harbor the fear that God will be indifferent to your needs as you go through this traumatic experience? This is the very substance of faith, having tried everything without success and with no possibility of help coming on the horizon. Will you cast your cares on the One who cares for you? He did not make you to abandon you in the hour of your greatest need.

Do you remember the Bible account of Gideon with 200 men against 100,000 of His enemies? Or do you remember what seemed like the craziest battle plan in history, when God directed those at the Battle of Jericho to march around the city for seven days and then blow their horns and watch for the victory? He is the same God today as He was then. And He works through people. People like you and I. Surely, if you trust in His goodness and mercy, you will meet others just like yourself and begin to hear the modern day stories of His continued love for us all.

It is established that you have been immersed in an overwhelming tragedy through circumstances beyond your control. Even with the added burden of bearing the stigma of social insignificance or community invisibility, you have become the linchpin that will hold together your fractured family bond. Perhaps you were born for such a time as this! Is it a struggle? Does it tax every fiber of your being? The answer is yes. But

you are not carrying this burden alone.

You have been credentialed for your mission by God Himself. He will present you with a suitable portfolio to accomplish your purpose. You are His precious child. Trust in Him.



CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILIES: WHAT WILL WE TELL THE NEIGHBORS?

All around us, families are busily engaged in the business of living. They all seem productive, happy, and sure of themselves. I had the privilege of being taught by Dr. Lorraine Howard of Cal Poly State University, who impressed upon me the importance of evaluating myself, not against others, but against my own personal past. She noted that it is the only valid comparison upon which we can make an accurate judgment. Her wit and strong intellect helped to spur me onward in the midst of the storm. When we live within communities, there is always a temptation to feel that we are obligated to explain the actions of those closest to us—to offer some rationalization or apology as a peace token to heavy-frowned listeners. This is a trap we step into because of our constant sense of shame and grief: Trying to make sense of a situation that defies

logic is an unnecessary burden to assume for yourself or family members. I don't suggest that you live without being a member of the community, but I want you to know that those individuals who are motivated by good will and a true desire to ease your pain will already understand the impossibility of explanation. They require no words and come to support and love you, knowing that such a disaster could strike their own families. These are the few who will truly come and "sit shiva" (a Jewish mourning ritual) with you throughout your ordeal.

Sitting shiva doesn't mean that one's friends will appear with half-understood explanations that they extend as bereavement offerings. True friends know that some things are incomprehensible to us mortal humans. They are aware of their own spirituality and can therefore respect your inner privacy. They come in friendship to console you in the midst of inconsolable grief and pain.

Nor does sitting shiva mean that they use their presence as a pretext to probe your personal weaknesses and limitations, like the "friends" in the Book of Job who came to console but ultimately wound up making unfounded accusations against him. Few people are aware of the power to comfort and console others that presence alone possesses. To share someone's agony is a gift and privilege, since your presence alone fills that person with life-sustaining strength. This is what God in His mercy does for each of us. It is that quiet infilling of grace that enables us to bear our burden through the next day.

Some families will be given to factions and division in the aftermath of a "justice" encounter. It becomes a time when the most wicked and horrible words can flow from the lips of those who claim to love us. It

extends its invitation to abandon oneself to absolute wretchedness. In the swirling cloud of accusations that follow, we may lose our bearings and react by shutting the door, spiritually and emotionally isolating ourselves from further pain.

Though justified by the intense emotions of family members, such isolative behaviors only reap further pain and suffering as one stands proudly apart from all who have given meaning to their lives. Saying that I am not one of you does not make it so; it only echoes in the hollow recesses of our broken hearts. It's like a child who continues to remind himself that he is not scared of the bogeyman. I have had the experience that this encounter ultimately manifests.

The cruel sword of community judgment is wielded capriciously and without deference to any, no matter how young or aged. There is no attempt to spare the feelings of the wounded or to comfort them while binding up their wounds. At a time when some need consolation and comfort, they receive a stone instead of bread—a snake instead of a fish. In such a context, what conceivable explanation could we offer to those who jeer at us? For those who love us, no explanation is necessary.

In other writings, I have referenced the plight of the Klebold and Harris families following the Columbine Massacre. Consider the community response in the wake of the McDonald's Massacre in San Ysidro, California. The community herded the children and spouse of the slaying suspect away from their home in the midst of the aftermath, as if they personally bore the sin and guilt of the shooter. In the time immediately following any tragedy, there is little empathy or mercy for those who are innocent, even if connected only by family ties. When our senses are

taxed to their maximum capabilities and we are emotionally numbed to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, no other human being can truly connect with our needs unless they themselves have personally experienced the mercy of God. In that quiet kindling point deep within their being, they know what it is like to be comforted and consoled. So some might say, does this mean that we are to be stalwart beacons in the midst of bewildering circumstances? Are we to deny our pain and suffering? Not at all; the pain is real, and the grief can be crippling. But in the midst of a wave of evil, our most precious resource is the grace of God. I cannot control the events or circumstances that will influence my life through the actions of others. But I can rely on the faith that has been given to me, to guide me through the darkness. It is natural to seek human company in the valley of shame, but it is important to remember that those with whom we share the world are mortals struggling with the same realities.

The direction you pursue will have a direct impact upon the integrity of the family following the period of incarceration. I am particularly struck at this time by the actions of the brother of the prodigal son. His spirit was wounded, and as a result of this wound, his heart was hardened toward his brother and father. I experienced a similar situation when I had completed my term of incarceration. One who was close to me by birth spurned my attempts to reestablish cordial relations. It was clear to me that this individual had suffered shame and loss of face in front of others because of my actions. Given the loss of any meaningful opportunity to bind up these wounds, my family member was unable to celebrate that I had gone through a fire of cleansing and returned home alive rather than lost to the world. My presence offered no comfort or

joy; for this individual, it was just a reminder of things better forgotten. My salvation was found in the fact that our Father had welcomed me with delight, a new sureness of purpose. So it was that at the time of my mother's funeral, there was no comfort from the connection afforded us as siblings, just a strange brooding and censure.

Through the grace of God, I was able to connect, emotionally, mentally, socially and—most important of all—spiritually with another sibling who later died of cancer. The time preceding his death gave rise to the happiest and most joyful reunion. Sorrows and recrimination gave way to a new and more complete understanding of our early childhood together. What emerged was a renewal of friendship and personal acceptance.

That spirit flowed over into relationships with other siblings. We took the time together to mourn our brother, but what distinguished this time was the joy of a meaningful reunion with the sole purpose of honoring the one who had passed from our midst. What was a period of sadness was turned into joy as we celebrated the opportunities that still lay ahead for the rest of us. My brother would have been pleased with the celebration of life held in his honor.

Later, I would come to reflect upon this event and to draw wisdom from the circumstances. It was in the context of this new awareness that the foundations of this book were laid. Humbly surrendered, there is no problem beyond solving when placed in the care of God. Privately, I had begged God to take my life, not my brother's. I had offered to be an organ donor if there were a surgical remedy to his condition. I saw no purpose in my life at that time, just a series of mishaps and mismanaged

opportunities. *Surely, God, you see that my purpose in life could best be used to give life to another in danger of dying.*

That was not His plan. While it seemed like a remarkably simple way to further His ends, it was not what He required of me. At that point, still living under a cloud of grief and shame, it appeared to me as an honorable way to terminate future behavior that might engender pain and suffering for others. It would also extend the life of someone more talented, skilled, and creative than I could ever hope to be. It was not the first time that I had this discussion with God. Once, in a vacant church in Scottsdale, Arizona, during a conference on sobriety, I had begged God to take my life before I might harm others again through my actions.

These are private encounters that I have not previously shared publicly. They are tender moments when my spirit cried out to God to end the transgressions that occurred in and around my life. It was my attempt to yield my life back to my Creator. “Take my life, Lord. I give it back to you. I seem to bring only sadness and suffering to those with whom I live.” This was my solution, but it was not God’s solution. If He had granted my request, this book would not be in your hands.

I’ve taken the time to share these private moments so that you will start to entertain an awareness of God’s ability to touch lives and use circumstances that seem senseless in order to bring us into a new relationship with Him. In every aspect of my life, God has been present, using the reckless choices I have made as He guided me through the journey of relationship with Him. That journey, and the awakening of spirit, is the substance of my writings. If the God of heaven and earth can reach me through my sins and crimes, what can He do for you and

your loved ones?

Now with a renewed spirit, I see clearly that no life is wasted. There is no one created outside the purposes of God. No matter how lost, no matter how bitter, no matter how sinful or degenerate that individual has become, no one is beyond the reach of God. The challenge as a family member of the incarcerated one is to own the truth of this reality. You were born or married into a family by God's grace. Now you have both purpose and a reason to commit yourself to saving the lost sheep of your people. If you will not call out and ask for the mercy of God to be made visible in the land of the lost, who will pursue the lost sheep?

It does not require endless days of petitioning God or offering a variety of sacrifices. Perhaps it is found by suspending judgment and hostility and offering a simple heartfelt prayer on behalf of the offender. Maybe this can become the fulfillment of "visiting those in prison." Your sincere prayer will reverberate in that one's life and will return to you in the form of blessings that you could not anticipate. This is a work of mercy. While we as individuals have no right to God's mercy, neither does the offending individual have a right to our mercy, but acting with faith in the character of God, we seek His mercy on the offender's behalf. What you have done in secret, others will not see. This is strictly between you and God. But it is promised that He will openly bless you.

Over the years, I have had many faithful souls pray for my welfare and salvation. The number exceeds my capacity to grasp. Many prayed relentlessly for years without any evidence that I had benefitted from their efforts. But they trusted in God's Word and in His mercy. This is something that you can do on behalf of the lost sheep in your family,

incarcerated or not. It will bear fruit in time.

We look at events through the lens of immediacy. Often, if we are not impressed by what is unfolding before our eyes, we quickly lose interest and decide that it is not working. Please stop for a minute and reflect upon Jesus' view from the cross. As He looked into the future centuries and recognized our acts of indifference and ingratitude toward His gift, He did not turn away and cry out to His father, *All is lost!* Instead, He held His gaze until He recognized that moment of softening in your heart and mine. He held His place on the cross so that the small germ of our love would grow in the fertile field of His love for us.

Can we do any less for those who shame us and grieve us?

Isn't that the true measure of love, when it is given freely without caring that it may be spurned and rejected? It is not the spirit of how it is received that governs our actions and spiritual responsibilities; it is the joy with which we offer these prayers to our Creator. Who has prayed for you in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary? Will you pray for just one other person's soul? Will you champion their cause when all others have dismissed them from care and concerns? Is there anyone beyond God's ability to touch in a meaningful way?

These are our matters of concerns, not a concern about what the neighbors will think. When you stand before the Throne of Judgment, what will you offer to God? Will you say, as Cain did, "Am I my brother's keeper?" as a justification for having abandoned your own? Or will you acknowledge, "I am my brother's keeper," while looking for your family members among the crowds cheering your words?

Suffering through the challenges of a judicial experience is not easy. It requires understanding, love, and courage. There is no refuge to be found in the opinions or comments of others. They are all just like we are ... *sheep*.

When you hear the sound of bleating in the background, it is time to look around for the Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He will know the way through the shadows and the valleys of life.

A final thought about those closest to us. We do not have to like them or excuse the things they do when they hurt us or others, but we must remember that we have no knowledge of their inner state or how God is moving in their lives. Even while they are cursing at others and abusing the gifts of God, He can be moving in their souls, stirring their deepest thoughts and revealing His plan of life for them. It is ultimately a battle between good and evil, and that is our primary point of connection to others. Don't give up on them. After all, God never gave up on you.

Trust Him with all your heart!

PART TWO

NAVIGATING EVERYDAY LIFE: HOW LITTLE THINGS CHANGE

Navigating everyday life and dealing with the complexity and speed with which things will change is likely to be the essence of your future. Try not to become bewildered or bitter, two emotions that are unlikely to prepare you for the ordeal ahead. What I have written below is painful, but like cold water in a pool, it is best experienced by total immersion into the new circumstances of your life.

These words will hopefully offer guidance, but the grace to direct your path comes solely from a loving God who sees all things and suffers all things with us.



CHAPTER EIGHT

LIFE APART — LOVE APART

While in prison, I saw the frequent visitors to the facility and listened as they passed by, trying to hear their comments. They observed a number of the prison's internal structures containing amenities suitable for basic living and often were pleased to note that there were trees, shrubs, and plants growing to soften the concrete and steel environment. And so they left with the pleasant notion that prison was a tolerable physical environment. With their social consciences appeased, they could return to the outside world and dismiss any prior concerns about their loved one's living conditions. It is amazing that the institution's smoke and mirror show soothes any uncomfortable idea that there might be more to prison life than they had viewed. The same experience awaits those who are newly incarcerated and their loved ones who may take time to visit and maintain a relationship with incarcerated family members. It will take many months before one really starts to understand the

contradictory mission of a penal institution. Few prisoners or their family members ever master the skills of living through this experience without acquiring significant emotional scars. This chapter outlines some of the hurdles that you are likely to encounter on this journey.

What follows is not a diatribe against the justice system; it is the only system we currently have to administer the needs of society. Rather, it is a demonstration of how the nature of life will change once a family member has been sent to prison. It is my belief that if provided with an accurate picture of those things that you may confront, you can prepare yourself for the challenges that await you. Otherwise, you are left to experience these bruising encounters on your own. In such a time and under great stress, your spirit will be buffeted if you are not prepared for these encounters. In a family environment, you have at least the appearance of one who shares the support of others. You may have lived with someone who was completely self-centered. Nevertheless, you at least had someone in your immediate environment from whom you could hope to draw some moments of joy and comfort. The presence of another can offer moments of reassurance that we are not struggling through life alone. At the moment a guilty verdict is returned against a defendant, that assurance evaporates. In the coming days and weeks, you are likely to experience a growing sense of isolation and despair for which you're not prepared. One of the first realities that may emerge is the cruelty that appears in light of a legal judgment.

Though you and your innocent children have done nothing to offend, you are disgraced by your association with a convicted felon. Since you have "chosen" to make this association by way of marriage or relationship, the

unspoken view of others is likely to be that you and your family members share similar character flaws to those revealed under the burden of a trial. Thus, it may seem that you have been ushered from a world that seemed hard but familiar into an environment that is harsh, cold, and foreign. The world suddenly intrudes upon your most private thoughts and acts. It seems there is no safe place in which you may seek momentary relief. It is an extraordinary crisis in the lives of most individuals, largely unrecognized by others.

Your silent screams for mercy and compassion may only bring forth a prideful response that you have gotten what you deserved. Few recognize that what you are experiencing is the emotional equivalent of a death. It's an overwhelming moment of aloneness and agony as you grieve the death of a dream. You stand abandoned by most, just trying to catch your breath. Thoughts flood into your consciousness, and you experience an incredible sense of nakedness and vulnerability. In that moment, the only asset that you truly possess is your ability to call out for the grace of God to strengthen you for the tasks that lie ahead.

As the defendant is escorted from the clamor of the courtroom, there will likely be no opportunity to say goodbye. With the eyes of others scrutinizing your every action, there is no emotionally safe passage for your own escape. So you stand and make your way out of the public arena and sustain yourself with the desperate hope that you will find somewhere to momentarily recover and draw your next breath. Until you have moved beyond the emotional sterility of the courtroom, you are likely to experience the outcome in a numb daze. At this time, it is essential that you find some time and space to shield yourself and family

members from the emerging spectacle. This is the moment of separation between you and your dreams.

At that moment, your mind may seek to protect itself from the horror that just unfolded. Your body moves, seemingly under its own power, while your mind reels from a flood of feelings. What you have just experienced is similar to the mental mechanism that a soldier on a battlefield may encounter. The aftermath of such engagements may be measured in the harm and turmoil inadvertently inflicted upon your life. Do not expect others to recognize the extent of your woundedness. They have little or no ability to understand or anticipate the consequences that lie ahead.

Following a battle, the soldier may experience a host of disabling aftereffects: physical, mental, emotional, and social. Society may reward his loyalty and courage by recognizing this constellation of reactions and responses with the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is a recognized pattern of discernible behaviors that can benefit from some treatment interventions. Those afflicted with this disorder often experience a great sense of relief that there is an explanation for what has been happening in their lives. They realize that they are not crazy after all.

Those who are left behind in the aftermath of an intense emotional experience (perhaps associated with the crime, arrest, trial, and conviction of a loved one) may experience similar characteristics and a quality of “unrealness,” of this can’t be happening to me. While the scope of this experience is stretched over a greater period of time than the moment of battle or the commission of crime, the responses may be quite similar. Mental health professionals would largely disagree with

the application of these standards to folks who seem unworthy by virtue of their association with an offender. Nevertheless, this is a common occurrence. Shame and fear are often present and keep those who are affected from seeking comfort. They are like a soldier on the battlefield who may have urinated on himself unconsciously or experienced an internal battle trying to control his terror. I have observed this condition in the lives of patients over my twenty-five years of practice.

Given the climate of censure, it should not be surprising that it is not socially desirable to emotionally compensate those we see as associated with the horror of crime and the infliction of pain upon others. This attitude holds true even toward the family members of an offender, who are often innocent and have no idea how the crime could have happened. But whether we are willing to accept that reality or not, it still expresses itself in the broken lives that litter our country. I once had a discussion with two psychiatrists over lunch and posed a question to them. “Do you think that an offender who has committed an egregious crime can actually suffer PTSD as the result of his own actions?”

Their shocked looks and prompt rejection of the proposed idea demonstrated their limited experience and training regarding encounters with evil. Later, I had the opportunity to present this idea to another psychiatrist. This doctor had experienced a personal encounter with her own irrationality and impulsiveness. She had walked through the fire, knew the heat of the flames, and still had the scorch marks to bear evidence. Her response to the question was an unequivocal yes. She knew with a certainty that such consequences were likely for some and inevitable for others. If we cannot agree on the observed signs and

symptoms, what hope is there for those who exist outside the spectrum of consensus? It is not likely that recognition and relief will spring from a profession entrenched in the worldly response to such incidents. These responses may seem justified by our anger and sense of moral outrage, but they preclude any hope for individual redemption in the aftermath. There is no pathway to healing, just a reckless advancement of the policies and practices of severicide. Few if any providers have demonstrated the courage or boldness to stand up and claim these outcasts and their family members as treatable. It takes remarkable individuals to stand by their convictions in light of the rejection they are sure to encounter.

What follows in this chapter is a compilation of my experiences in caring for those outside the protection of “established” standards of practice. While I no longer practice as a mental health professional, I am comforted by the budding awareness of others that the current standards are a sure pathway to perdition for our society. I make this statement based upon the surety that what is done to “the least of these” will surely be done to others in the future under the “rule of law.”

If the law requires that I throw someone who is drowning a life preserver, I can fulfill my responsibility by doing only that and ignoring the prompt to jump in and rescue the drowning victim. I can even walk calmly to a phone and call emergency staff who is generally designated to handle such situations. Then, I can walk away in good conscience and tell others I did my duty in respect to the drowning man. I may have done what was required of me, but I have also missed an opportunity to use my humanity, my weaknesses and fears, my strengths and abilities in service to others. I have merged into the safety and anonymity of the sightless

crowd and successfully resisted the cry of my spiritual nature to reach out to someone in desperate need. But, I am safe.

Conviction and imprisonment brings with it a change of weather. It seems that the north wind of divergence starts to blow hard, and the indifferent chill of society casts a pall upon our days. Now, neighbors and strangers alike start to identify you as the inmate's wife or the child of the murderer. Some offer bleak comments with an air of pretend compassion; often, such actions merely mask morbid curiosity. You have begun your journey.

The next step is to bundle up against the stiff breezes of forgetfulness. When you shop where you have always done business, the clerk takes your check wearily and asks for your driver's license. This person grew up down the street from you and has known you all her life. She offers the rationale, "It's just company policy." Be careful; the water is about to get a lot colder as days and weeks pass by. Your doctor's secretary reminds you that payment is expected upon completion of treatment services, as if you would vanish out the door like a thief in the night. A word of concern to others brings a quick dismissal with the response that "you are just being too sensitive." Weary, you walk away and try to comfort yourself in the evidence of a significant change. There is no partner to go home to and discuss your concerns. You are alone, living out your growing fears of helplessness.

The grocery store manager looks on with impatience as he swipes your credit card with an air of irritation. It seems that the bank has declined your purchase, and you are left asking him if he will take a check. His response, "I suppose, if it's good," bathes you in shame and anger as

curious bystanders look on at your moment of shame. Even as you glance among those standing nearby, you can find no look of recognition or comfort. There is no encouragement to be found in the moment. You take your purchases and quickly scramble away from the encounter.

Your life choices begin to alter based upon a system of demands that you never anticipated. Your resources are few, and you are left with the prospect of having to sell your home and move in with your parents. The car needs to be inspected, but you do not have the money to pay for the service. You hope that the cop who has just stopped you will overlook this minor infraction, at the same time praying that he will not recognize you as the wife of the inmate. Breathlessly, the fear escalates as you await his decision. The children in the backseat of the car demand to know why the policeman has stopped you, and your sole response is the tears flowing down your face. Even in the privacy of your own home, the system pursues its agenda of stigmatization and severicide in the form of mail received from your loved one. You await a letter with excitement, only to be disquieted by the arrival of the envelope stamped in bold red letters STATE PRISON. That inscription and the inquiring look of the postman inflict a new wound on your heart and kick up the ever-present storm in your soul. There is no one with whom you can share the intensity of your aloneness.

Later, you hope against hope that your children will not be taunted at school. You have made the effort to guarantee their emotional safety by visiting the school and discussing your situation with the principal and teachers. If you are lucky, you emerge from this encounter with only superficial wounds, caused by their looks of condescension and their

unauthentic expressions of concern for you and your children. Your heart measures the moments until you can escape to the safety of your home for a moment of solitude and reflection.

The children need shoes and lunch money. You decide to do without personal items that are essential to maintaining your own quality of life. Every phone call brings with it a new demand that you accomplish some goal to ease the burden your imprisoned mate bears, and the specter of a hefty (predatory) phone bill for the privilege of hearing the voice of your loved one. No one can understand the brief moment of comfort this contact gives you, but it is all washed away as the conversation ends in a coolness of apparent dissatisfaction and insensitivity for all you have already accomplished on your own. It is never enough. Endless demands continue to be inflicted upon you.

You decide to sustain the relationship as best you can and set plans to visit the prison setting. You have set aside time and money for this purpose. A neighbor has generously offered to babysit the children in your absence. You dress with care and lovingly apply your cosmetics to comfort your mate with familiarity. If you are without transportation, you join the line of others waiting for the bus that will take you to another world. Mostly likely, the prison is located hundreds of miles from your home. Or you have the awful experience of having your partner housed in a prison located in another state. Still, you pursue the promise of a shared moment with your love.

Upon arriving at the prison, you are turned away by an indifferent guard because either today is not your visiting day, or you are wearing a denim fabric that the prison will not allow. You may be fortunate to encounter a

compassionate soul who hastily helps you redeem the short time allotted for you and your partner by providing you with an oversized dress. As you strip away your own clothing, you realize that all of your care in dressing attractively has been wiped away in the moment.

Perhaps it is not your fault or the fault of your loved one. The prison may be experiencing inmate movement due to feeding; all guards are needed to oversee the process, and visitation is put on hold until it has been completed. In the most frightening of circumstances, the visit is cancelled because the institution is on lock down. No information in and no information out is just the way it is. No attempt is made to comfort you, because you bear “the mark of Cain.” You are an inmate’s child, spouse, or family member. The inmate is dirt and, by inference, so are you.

Not all that you encounter will offer an outright rejection. Some will mask their true feelings in words of concern and caring. Guards, administrators, medical staff, and even prison psychiatric staff may subtly reassure you that they will do everything possible to help your loved one. Some may even offer these words with genuine concern, but given the prison environment and its issues of control, they are unable to offer any warmth or comfort to those housed in the facility. To do so is to expose themselves to swift censure and possible disciplinary measures for undue familiarity with inmates and their family members. So, those words of reassurance simply evaporate into the evening sky.

Of course, there are particular groups of people who look for the opportunity to exploit the vulnerabilities of others. They exist in the world, community, and even in the justice system. They may wear

badges and carry weapons, or they may be dressed as professionals of various ilks. Don't let the judicial robes or expensive suits fool you. Like a ferocious jungle animal or a great white shark, they can sense the presence of blood and approach these encounters with an eye toward profiting from the sufferings of others.

Their ventures will usually be restricted to money or sex. They will offer to do what they can for a little consideration. They are careful never to state the words "quid pro quo," but the meaning is clear. This is a perverse pathway leading to further personal degradation. Engaging in such encounters can never help your loved one and will only hasten the end of your relationship. The demands will not abate until you have been personally debased and financially scarred. Run away from these potential encounters as fast as your feet will carry you!

You will find the same element within your community. The tire salesman offers you a special deal on new tires if you are nice to him. The plumber and roofer seem openly sympathetic to your plight and then drop over after the job has been completed just to "check on you." The big-hearted neighbor wants to take you out to dinner and comfort you. The wolves in sheep's clothing wait in the shadows, hoping for an opportunity to benefit from your circumstances.

You will encounter these predators, male and female, in all settings of your life. Not everyone who extends a hand will conceal these motives, but it is best to be on your guard until you have had time to accurately determine the intentions of a "supposed" benefactor. This is a cruel but certain reality to serving your sentence in the community. Be cautious and submit your cares and concerns to the One who truly loves you and

can truly help you.

On the way home from your visit, you seek to hide your grief and despair among the rear seats of the bus, or you engage the road ahead with all the intensity you can muster. If you can just keep your concentration, you believe that you can get through the next moments. You are in a void beyond comprehension; somehow, you have lost your personhood. Nothing seems to draw forth any true feelings of mercy or compassion but brief respites afforded to you by emotional numbness or restless sleep. There is no compass to sail by or sextant to take a position on the stars. There are no stars. They have all been snuffed out.

Now comes the darkness, which descends like a skyless night. You are alone with the rawness of your emotions and helpless as an infant abandoned in the desert. Life apart and love apart are neither life, nor are they love.

You are at the most basic position regarding relationship. At this point, only your commitment to each other will sustain you for what lies ahead.



CHAPTER NINE

ANGER

When something sears your soul and the souls of your loved ones, anger is a certainty. Don't let its appearance distract, confuse, or deter your purposes. The best use for anger is to use its depleted volume as a fuel source to light the pathway ahead. That way, you provide warmth and light to everyone sharing the road with you. Spiritually, you have a right to anger. It is a reasonable and intense emotional response to dehumanizing conditions. But the Bible warns us to “not let the sun go down on your anger.”² In other words, we are challenged to extract anything meaningful from this passionate surge and to bury its corpse before the sun sets. That is quite a challenge.

Let's talk about how to recognize anger in its many forms and how to extract the promises that its fury presents. Anger in the face of emotional battering, deep soulful wounding, and the ever-present air of social

²Ephesians 4:26

indifference accompanying these actions would be justifiable. But the depth of wounding in our national psyche has exceeded our ability to come to grips with this reality. It has become commonplace rather than an aberrant incident that troubles our social conscience but is forgotten with the next day's news. These policies are now protected and legitimized by those who wield the sword of power.

As the endless freight trains rumbled through the towns and cities of Nazi Europe without alarming the populace, the train of events occurring in the United States is happening in front of us. But somehow, we have grown immune to the cries and can no longer perceive individuals and families being crushed by the justice industry and its first cousin, severicide. In short, severicide is a policy of tolerated and encouraged exclusion bent on the disfranchisement of those deemed unfit for society as well as the family members and friends associated with them.

This perversity can be engendered by a number of factors: birth, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or place of national origin. It can also be set in progress by individual actions that violate community norms or values; for example, crimes ranging from murder, rape, and robbery to situations as simple as bigamy, gun registration laws, and the odious burdens attached to post-conviction regulation concerning the "supposed" future conduct of sex offenders. Please allow me to put brakes upon this wagon train before it starts to roll downhill.

The following estimates are based upon information screened from domestic and international news sources:

- 14 million arrests per year
- 1 million felony convictions per year
- 2 million incarcerated in U.S. prisons and detention facilities
- 8 million on probation, parole, or under the justice industry's supervision
- 30 million discharged felons living in U.S. communities
- 90 million children, spouses, family members, and friends of these felons

There are currently 1,200 US correctional facilities listed in various guidebooks.

The prison-building boom has not stopped yet. The growth of a correctional industry is now a matter for economic speculation since private companies are listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Prisons are big business, make no mistake about it. It not only grinds up the lives of felons serving terms of incarceration, but their families and friends as well, all under the guise of policies and procedures supervised by the keepers themselves. The prison industry has learned a lot from the business world; they even have groups set up for the purpose of accrediting their actions, declaring what should be the norm in a culture of captivity.

How did we come to this in the land of the free and the home of the brave? No other country on earth incarcerates more of its citizens than the United States. All of this is undertaken in the name of law and order. Well, the reality is that we are now the land of the jailed and the home of the bailed. What an awesome way to tout the benefits of our democracy. Having maximized the potential to control the population at large

through fear and intimidation, our leaders have made strenuous efforts to export our new technology to countries around the world. They openly criticize leaders of other nations for human rights violations or complicity in international criminal practice, but heaven forbid they turn the mirror around and acknowledge the pain and suffering of millions of U.S. citizens.

The fantasy somehow goes on that we can continue to lock up people indefinitely and throw away the key. Perhaps the only demographic variable that our leaders cannot control is the growth of minority groups within our borders. It would appear that when this period of growth has reached critical mass, a new form of law and order will emerge in the venting of the building volcanic fury.

How could this have happened? President Eisenhower warned the American people about the malignant growth of the Military-Industrial Complex. He advocated for this unbridled power grab to be contained before it could become an unstoppable economic, political, and social force within the country.

The next incarnation started to take shape in the years following the Vietnam War and came about as an attempt to quell the lawlessness that accompanied the age of protest. Therefore, law and order was created as an acceptable structure to be offered to the American sheep still out at pasture.

President Nixon assured us that he had everything in hand. The war would not be expanded, but instead peace with honor was at hand ... or so Henry Kissinger, his secretary of state, told us. Not only was the

war in Southeast Asia expanded to Laos and Cambodia, but we had integrated the military facilities of the Philippines and Thailand in our quest for victory.

At home, the national conscience was seared by the killing of students at Kent State University at the hands of the U.S. Military. That event has yet to be addressed to the satisfaction of those who lived it, saw it happen live or on TV, or were touched by the evil that war had wrought internationally and domestically.

It was the 1970s, and the government quietly began to press the agenda of prison building across America in response to the public's demand for change. It was true that a surge of unrest, with many episodes of violence toward people and property, swept the nation. The government response was to set about using the resources that were no longer being squandered on the war on an extended prison-building campaign. Out of these roots, the Prison-Industrial Complex emerged and has blossomed into a growth industry based upon refining the science of punishing others.

President Nixon was busily engaged in his re-election campaign and did not take time to imagine where this "advance" would lead us as a nation. He was busy employing the Watergate team of presidential burglars in a variety of break-ins to the private premises of those who offered opposition to his re-election campaign. He left town in a hurry, amid cries of "I am not a crook," all very dignified and reassuring. Then came the ultimate slap on the public's cheek as his successor pardoned him in the interest of healing the nation's wounds.

By the time he arrived home, the country was trying to shake off the national nightmare, but few noticed the insidious rise in prison growth that started to dot our land. Thus, the leaders were happy to deflect concern to the Cold War and other international concerns. Those with their fingers in the cash pile were happy to assume lesser positions, while computers and prisons appeared on the national horizon. What had been a hot war in South East Asia became a domestic war with the advent of the War on Crime. As various elements emerged in the long-term plan, technologies were interfaced with the burgeoning domestic war. In the absence of a public outcry, they became the foundation for the continued emergence of public control mechanisms under the banner of “The Rule of Law.” The nation’s citizens had sought protection from criminals, and the government responded with draconian law enforcement measures. The sad part of this fact? Many of those citizens seeking protection have now experienced the sharp edge of these policies in their own families. From a prison population of approximately 300,000, incarceration rates have soared to over 2 million, and there is still no end in sight.

The troublesome rise of Islamic fundamentalism seemed initially to be restricted to Arab interests and their economic partners in Europe. The wave of bombings, maimings, and public executions gave way to a new form of terror: skyjacking. This unique way of dramatizing their concerns had the side benefit of providing millions of ransom dollars to advance their activities.

The engagement of violence spilled over into tourism, business, and travel as the European continent underwent a surge of radical crime in the name of furthering the social agenda associated with the countries

of the Middle East. It was only a matter of time until American interests became legitimate targets for the emerging terrorist groups. When this wave finally expressed itself in targets of opportunity around the world, we breathed a sigh of relief. It was all happening over there. We were protected by oceans on each side and by neighbors who shared some degree of economic interest with us. President Reagan fueled the arms race until the Soviet Union collapsed in its wake. Peace at last. Our international concerns soon became focused upon the rise of random groups of terrorists who seemed to strike at will.

The peace dividend that was realized in the end of the Cold War was used for many social gains but also supported the continued growth of correctional strategies and law enforcement interests. The justice business was doing just fine, and President Clinton decided to tie himself firmly to its coattails by attending the execution of an inmate in Arkansas prior to being elected and instituting a national plan to put 100,000 more police on the streets of our nation.

Out of this strange confluence of disorder and disaster (domestic problems and international siege) emerged the next venue of control, the Terrorist-Industrial Complex. It became fully vested with the attacks on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and the lonely killing field located in rural Pennsylvania. The country was outraged. The immediate response to these activities was to curtail civil rights. We began to hunt relentlessly for terrorists lurking in every corner. Thus, the triumph of suspicion took hold around the country while our international neighbors looked on, mostly with glances of sympathy and concern. Others reached out to provide us with elements of support, either through their intelligence

networks or out of their resources. Thus, anger as a national reality was born, and indifference to the needs of individuals and families became the currency of life throughout the towns and cities of our nation. This focus morphed into the realm of self-interest without regard for others. A national agenda was created, and again our country was at war on multiple international fronts. President Bush assured us that this measure was needed to ensure national security. It passed as a reactionary attempt to ensure that nothing again would escape notice by our intelligence services. Bin Laden had come to power, and all eyes were focused upon his long and energetic flight from the hands of American justice. In the aftermath, the lives of all American citizens were affected.

This agenda provided for a resurgent effort to address the needs of surveillance of internal domestic influences within the great lens of technology. The systems that had been assembled as part of preceding crisis management strategies were now to be trained on the American public at large. Not only were undesirables identified, harassed, and intimidated, but they also became the collective subject of those charged with administering the unpublished policies and practices of the Severcide-Industrial Complex. Names like FBI, CIA, TSA, DEA, and ICE will charge the memories of people caught up in this strange new era of suspicion. The difference at this point was that federal agencies operated on a global scale and with extrajudicial authority that was appropriated in the aftermath of 9/11.

Don't be fooled into thinking that it all started in the wake of terrorist attacks; there are multiple publications online and elsewhere that detail the existence of a multi-government entity identified as Project Echelon.

This was an early intelligence gathering and dissemination scheme that operated outside the jurisdictional laws of each member country. We would provide information that we had acquired and screened to other member nations about their individuals, places, and events that NSA computers had identified as matters of interest. In turn, they would supply us with information useful to our own domestic and foreign interests. Though the U.S. continued to deny its existence, the news broke when an Australian government agency confirmed its existence. Later, a European inquiry concerned with the possible impact upon individual rights managed to elicit an admission of this secret project. The news reports that I have assessed are online and dated in 1999, well before the 9/11 tragedy of 2001. Are you angry yet? Somehow, the squandering of millions of law enforcement dollars to dress inmates in orange or puce overalls, or the re-formation of prison work gangs across the nation, decked out in newly-purchased, striped uniforms, largely escaped the notice of all but those who have loved those prisoners, or those driving on country roads.

“But,” you say, “why should I be angry?”

The history of policing in this country has been marred by hundred or perhaps thousands of acts of brutality and indifference in the surge to combat the invisible enemy that lives among us. From the taped beating of Rodney King, to the 2011 beating death of a young psychiatric patient at the hands of Fullerton police officers, our country is reeling from the vacuum those incidents have created. If I beat someone to death, it's not likely that I would be charged with manslaughter. My charge would most likely be first degree murder. These incidents are perpetrated in the name

of society. That means you and I endorse these unconscionable actions by our silence—more specifically, the outcry that triggered other major political changes in our nation’s short history is severely lacking.

Our jails and prisons are filled beyond capacity, and the justice merchants remind us at every election that if we do not fund their interest, they will be forced to release the flood of degenerates and predators upon our society. What will happen when the beds start to be vacated by the natural process of attrition? Who will care for an aging prisoner population? More importantly, when there are no identified criminals or crooks to send into the established institutions, who will fill the demand for bodies that are needed to sustain this toppling enterprise? The answer is simple: you, your spouse, your children, your family members, and your friends are next. Do you think that’s not possible because we live in a free country?

Consider the ruthlessness of the emergent police state and the way that the perception of government has changed over the last fifty years. In California and other states, the correctional authorities have intimidated lawmakers and citizens by preying on the fears of the public. “We’ll turn ‘em loose; then you will see what happens in your communities.”

By prior Supreme Court decree, we had been freed of the obligation of furnishing identification according to the whims of police officials. That small act has been undone. Now you can go to jail if you refuse to provide valid ID upon demand. Another horrifying reality that has yet to capture the public’s attention is the presumed authority that law enforcement claims in the interest of public protection. They can demand that you comply with their “lawful order.” Otherwise, you will face immediate

arrest and prosecution. I know people personally who have suffered under these abusive situations. They have questioned circumstances, believing the law afforded them protection, and have wound up in a jail cell facing criminal charges. How could this happen in a free country?

Consider next the local district attorney whose claim to fame is to routinely overcharge defendants, thereby stacking the deck toward conviction. You are a member of the jury and are assigned to weigh the evidence. Somewhere inside your thoughts, the practical conclusion surfaces that the defendant must have done something to wind up facing multiple criminal charges. So you and your peers split the differences; he is not guilty on some counts but is guilty of something. No one knows what you did, what you thought, or what you said in the jury room. It is all up to an act of good conscience.

Last, consider the judge who likes to stir public emotions by routinely giving prisoners lengthy prison sentences to capture public attention. They grandstand and cater to the times, sometimes giving sentences beyond the state of human longevity. Who can serve a 120-year, 400-year, or 500-year prison sentence? Why would you engage in such theatrics unless it was to serve some personal interest? The prisoner expects to die in prison; why would you add to the burden with such outlandish practices? That prisoner standing in front of you is still a human being. Somewhere, he has someone who loves him or is concerned for his welfare. Can't you exhibit a little compassion for the dead prisoner standing before you? Or for the family members or friends who walk from your courtroom emotionally staggering from the blow you have made in the name of "justice"?

One of my personal favorites was the cowboy judge who eventually went on to be appointed to the federal bench in a well-populated district. He earned his battle stripes as a superior court judge. He had no tolerance for any outbursts in his courtroom and would quickly order the prisoner restrained and hushed by putting strips of duct tape across the prisoner's mouth. Trussed up like a dressed turkey, the jury would be charged to remain fair and impartial in all its deliberations. And of course, the obvious charge that the defendant was innocent until proven guilty. Genuine local courtroom drama—all administered in the name of the public (by the way, that's you and me). If my examples have not made you feel emotionally uncomfortable, perhaps this will. What will you do when it is your family member undergoing a "trial"?

If you are a family member of a convicted felon, you do not need to justify your anger. It flows from every wound administered in the pursuit of the justice experience. The reality is that this policy of exclusion will endure long after your loved one has been released. It has become part of the American way of life. It seems that little thought has been given to the reality of what we will do with a population of disenfranchised citizens and their grieving families. Can any country afford to exclude almost a third of its population from their legitimate justice interests?

I am angry too, and I hope this book will stir the national conscience to embrace the concept of redemption and restoration. We helped Germany and Japan to rebuild after the war. Isn't it time we invested in our own people? Today, Germany and Japan are our allies. Isn't there a route in this great nation to restore dignity and honor to those willing to work for it? If not, I have little hope for the union that forged this

democracy. Your challenge now is to harness your anger and create something of value in the midst of this devaluation/dehumanization process. Recreate your life and change one small thing that you can handle. Others will be better off for your efforts. Among those others, you may count your siblings, children, or the children who will inhabit the future Republic. Let's restore the experience of dignity and honor while we still can embrace the vision.

Nothing I have offered for your thoughts should be viewed as disparaging of the justice system; it is merely doing what it has been developed to do. Nor are my words a justification of the existing policies and practices that our government imposes upon the least desirable of its citizens. I am merely offering the facts as they play out in the lives of every American citizen. Those actions are exported to the rest of the world in the form of examples of the rule of law that guide our democracy.

The message of this chapter is applicable at the individual (micro) level and at the level of community and national (macro) interests. Its similarity of purpose is reflected in the juxtaposition of human interests that is held in common by all of humanity. Therefore, the twin burdens of human dignity and individual worth must be borne by all if the world is ever to solve its crushing problems. Anger stems in part from the frustrations and fears engendered by living through these challenges.

Anger is more than an emotion. It is more than a tipping point for our emotional excesses. It is a vital source of potential power. It is a nuclear fuel source that exists at the individual, family, and community levels of life. This energy source can be used to power the process of meaningful change. Properly harnessed, it can serve useful purposes for the benefit

of all. All we need to do is tap into its potential and then take the first steps to revisit the concepts of dignity and worth for all human life. Life is the promise of hope, as contrasted with the spirit of expulsion and exclusion that is inherent in death.

Let me take you back to the story of Moses found in the Old Testament. Raised in affluence and privilege, his spirit was deeply troubled by witnessing an Egyptian official beating a countryman. You see, even in the midst of troubling times, Moses never lost sight of who he was. The problem was that Moses let his anger unbalance his perspective, and in his fury, he struck down the offending official in an act of murder. This same Moses spent the next forty years in the desert under God's direction, learning how to care for sheep. It was all part of God's plan, and he even used the ill-tempered actions of a zealous believer to mold and shape his character in preparation for the journey that was yet to come. Humbly, Moses learned obedience and yielded himself to the hand of God. In due time, God lifted him up to lead his people to the Promised Land.

God did not withdraw His mercy or concern for this desperate life; instead, He used the circumstances to complete His own purposes. The moral of this story is that God is not done with any of us yet. Moses went on to lead a nation from whom the Judeo-Christian ethic has flowed. That is the very same ethic upon which our nation was founded. The experience of Moses has affected our daily lives and served as a foundation for the development of our own culture. Whether we are willing to accept that fact or not, it is truth.

Comfort yourself in this truth: in the midst of your anguish and pain,

God is working in our lives through His mercy, grace, and forgiveness. This is an invitation to use your individual anger and community outrage to crack through the upper boundaries of hopelessness, despair, and social indifference. God used the life of Moses to radically transform the lives of a nation and to shape the world that has subsequently emerged. Today, He is still looking for one man or woman who is willing to step up and be the first to seek a new pathway for all. In the midst of all your angry experiences, will you be that individual?



CHAPTER TEN

REGRET

Another equally powerful resource is the emotion of regret and the conscious influence it has in guiding our actions. I personally regret every thought, word, and deed that I undertook in pursuit of my reckless and thoughtless behavior. I committed offenses not only against my neighbors—often innocent victims—but also against the God who made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. I fully bear the burden I have acquired, and no act of compassion or empathy from others can acquit me of this responsibility. That relief flows from the mercy of Jesus Christ. It is the only place where I seek true refuge and relief in this life. It has always amazed me that my long list of regrets fade into nothingness under the touch of His love, like the early morning mist dissipates under the first touch of the rays of the sun.

Regret leads to misery and sorrow. Like anger, regret can be modified

to harness its potential. The precondition for this action is that we experience an awareness of our own fallibility and failings and emerge from this encounter with a resolve to live differently.

Some well-intentioned spouses and family members may strike up friendships with family members of other prisoners. There are times when these relationships have been used to bleed money to pay for the protection of a loved one in prison. At other times, internal and external pressure is applied to become a drug runner, bringing contraband into a secure prison environment. Once engaged in these activities, the pathway to degradation steepens and shortens notably.

Avoid the pain of regret and anger; don't get started on this pathway. Keep your goals in front of you. Talk about them often and make sure that all family members know what they are ... this is your survival plan.

Your goals and focus are your personal interests; no one will respect them or value them as you will. Don't entrust them lightly to others who may use your most intimate interactions as a stepping-stone to get them what they want. Given a culture of self-interest and national interests, it is scarcely surprising that we have melted into a frenzy of contrived needs and rights that reflect little or no understanding of the brotherhood of man. We are a society that gives sanctuary to the philosophy that life itself is a property right invested in the role of gender. Arbitrarily, we rip the innocent from their protective wombs and justify this action as a human right.

As a nation, we have grown cold and indifferent to the needs of others

because our personal wants and needs have become paramount. This has become a matter of national policy. Crime is merely an artifact of this realization. If the life of an innocent child is an inconvenience, then can the money lying in your cash register be used for my purposes under the same proposition? Why enshrine arbitrary boundaries as laws, when they undermine the most basic rights bestowed by our Creator? How can we teach respect for others when we have denied the very basis of individual respect, which is life itself?

And so I start this chapter with reflections upon individual and social regrets. They are a part of the legacy we will pass on to those who will follow us. In the context of our national sense of self, which has been expressed in our domestic and international policies and practices, it is not hard to believe that we would spend millions of dollars to create a theme park for the amusement of our children while the same kind of money funds our military's participation in wars around the world.

This has become the legacy of the American Republic. Over the last one hundred years, we have pursued war as a tool of social influence and control against international enemies and more recently as a political, economic, and cultural tool against our own citizens. To this end, Americans have lost sight of the horrors of war, and we have grown cold to the very use of the word in the context of public administration.

When the realities of rage struck at our shores, we as a people became incensed that others would seek to inflict personal pain and agony on the American public. This was true for the attack on Pearl Harbor as well as the more recent event of 9/11. If we do not learn that we cannot haphazardly export the products of war to other lands, we are doomed

to suffer another impertinent act that will outrage our sensibilities.

Consider the wars of the last century. These were the recognized wars that we boast of as missions to set others free. That list pales in comparison with the ever growing list of police actions, incursions, and “dirty” wars that we start or support as a matter of national policy in the pursuit of the goals of freedom and our conceptualization of our role in nation building.

We now can observe the impact of human rights abridgement here in our great nation itself. Freedom to assemble, to redress government policies, to communicate freely and with clear conscience with our fellows, and our most basic freedom—to worship without government restrictions—are all under siege. With drones flying over American skies and arbitrary taps (based upon issues of national security, whatever that means) on our countrymen’s phones and Internet accounts, the merge of corporate and government interests has forged a new level of bondage for the citizens of this country and, by extension, the citizens of this world.

I regret that our leaders have not taken to heart the words of Thomas Jefferson, written in the Declaration of Independence, which state that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” All men are created equal, and no matter what path we choose, we never lose our individuality or our equality.

Yet, having viewed that basic compact signed by the founders of our nation, today we face a new abridgement of these rights. The government

has chosen to impose an onerous policy of infringement on our personal conscience and corporate conscience by requiring that churches fund birth control measures under the guise of a “health care mandate.” Our government has openly risen up in a spirit of defiance to the spiritual mandates of various Christian doctrines. In good conscience, we have no choice in this matter but to obey the Word of God.

This political activity has triggered a growing realization that our national government has launched itself into the realm of spiritual opposition to the truths that we the people hold to be self-evident. It’s Fort Sumter all over again, except this time the battle is centered upon the union of believers against a confederacy of evil. There is something to be learned from reading the story of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego.³ We serve one God and Him alone.

I deeply regret that few have risen up in opposition to this intrusion into matters of personal conscience or freedom to worship according to our own beliefs. My voice is negligible and unimportant in the roar of the crowd consumed with self-interests. But I will not let the opportunity escape me to stand up as a flawed individual and make my voice heard in this matter. Too often, I have yielded to the demands of peer influence and abandoned my obligations to openly redress wrongs or change my own offensive behaviors.

Part of the role of regret is to mold us into another form and purpose that has utility and consistency with God’s plan for our lives. In that service, regret becomes a tool that motivates us and invites a new discovery of purpose and meaning. It is not an awkward or uncomfortable emotional

³Daniel chapters 1–3.

experience to flee or escape. It is a personal awareness that we all can do better. To that end, the choices that lie ahead of us become a measure of suitability to serve either God or the people who live among us, voicing their self-serving demands.

Each demand for tolerance and human rights is another step toward the vanilla world of appeasement. It looks pretty, smells nice, and even tastes good, but it is not the basis upon which we should live. Each individual is endowed with individual rights and responsibilities to be managed by their individual consciences. No prescription for the “common good” that openly opposes the Word of God will yield a harvest of peace and fulfillment.

This returns our examination of regret from a view focused upon international, national, and community settings (macro level) to the foreground of individual and family life (micro applications). The changes that are inherent with the awareness of the full impact of regrets are not likely to manifest on the macro level of life. If they are to emerge, they will do so in the off-street environments of our society.

They will pop up in the abandoned buildings and yards of our communities. They will grow up from an abandoned rock pile in our neighborhoods. They are likely to sprout and flourish in the darkness of our prisons and detention facilities. They will also blossom in the wasted lives of those we consider social outcasts. They will become the fertilizer that enriches our hopes and dreams. That is the role of regret, to fuel new growth and promise.

Acquiring this perspective requires an act of willingness to explore all

of the knowledge that these emotional encounters can provide and to test the results in the furnace of spirituality that should ultimately be our guide in all things. This practice is not a matter of mere introspection, nor does it yield its fruit as the product of endless conversations with others that produce guilt and recrimination. True regret emerges from our personal pain as a primary motivator from which we engage a new way of living. These changes are small and subtle; they do not yield themselves easily to the powers of human observation. They flow from God's goodness.

Soil enriched by anger and regret becomes the most fertile of fields. When Moses was learning to care for sheep, he was engaged in seemingly mindless tasks. Yet God was using that time and experience to mold and shape his character into a vessel that would later be useful in completing his promise to Abraham. It must have been a humbling time for one raised in the trappings of power and influence at what at that time was the greatest nation on earth—a real step down from the wealth and potential he had previously known. But even that experience proved useful in serving God's plan for His people.

Next, let's stop and consider the life of David, king of Israel. By all accounts, he was a man's man. He was touched from his humble beginnings by the hand of God. Selected over all others, he assumed the kingship as a young man. His path reflected a history of questionable choices—including the violation of Uriah's rights by sleeping with his wife and impregnating her. In the midst of realizing his great error, David compounded the problem by ordering that Uriah be placed in mortal jeopardy in a coming battle, thereby ensuring his death on the

battlefield. However, David could not hide his sin from God. God sent a prophet to confront him; David could not hide from the truth. His activities were laid bare before the view of his people and the throne of God.

Those things occurred after God had provided David with power, wealth, influence, and the favor of the governed. God knew when He selected David that he would do all of those things, and more, in opposition to His rule of law. Nevertheless, He empowered David to act on His given authority and lead the nation of Israel. If God were like us, he probably would have washed his hands of the matter and ended David with a lightning bolt delivered by an angel of righteousness.

Instead, God still had His plan. He knew all along what David would do. He let David sit with his shame and regrets and listened as David poured out his heart before Him and begged for the life of the child. God did not waver in his decision to end the life of the child born out of the illicit union. While David and Bathsheba sought a quick fix to their discomfort, God had another viewpoint. Sin brings death in its wake. The child died, and David ceased his mourning, washed his face, and returned to his responsibilities, wrestling with his regret but intimately aware of God's justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Later, he sought to build the temple to honor God but was not allowed that privilege due to his long history of violence against his enemies. God would not permit the blood on David's hands and conscience to become associated with the glory of His temple. This task was delegated to the next child of the union between David and Bathsheba, a child named Solomon.

Even in the midst of his sinfulness and rebellion, God blessed David with another son, he continued his kingship through his death, and—perhaps the most remarkable reality—from the line of David would come the King of kings, Jesus Christ. God works with all kinds of situations and regrets. He knows our humanity. He created us for His pleasure. Written in the words of Scripture is David’s epitaph ... David was a man after God’s own heart.⁴ Now, that is an incredible statement to have spoken over a fallible and often rebellious life.

God had a full agenda planned for David’s life from boyhood shepherd to death as the king of Israel. David had committed offenses that would have required the death penalty if not for the mercy of God. But David knew how to experience regret and guilt and begged the God of heaven and earth not to remove His blessing from his life. David knew how to get right with God, and though there is no indication spoken in the Bible, I suspect he also knew how to get right with his fellow citizens.

Regret is that rich ground in which we can plant our failures, our flaws, our sins, and our crimes. It is the one place where we can get real with everyone—deep inside of our hearts and on our knees before God. Can you find a place inside of your heart where you can cast all of your thwarted plans and hopes, your fears and guilt, anger and regret, and the constant feelings of failure and shame? If you can accomplish this task in the privacy of your personal temple, then you and your family can finish the race well. Outside of these emotions, God still has a plan for your life and the lives of your family members. Remember, God had already planned Solomon’s succession to the throne of Israel before David ever laid eyes on Bathsheba. Remember also in the New Testament that

⁴Acts 13:22

Paul's jailor and his whole family were saved by the grace of God. These things have been written and given to us so that we do not lose sight of the greatness of God or His rich provision in our lives.

It matters little at this point where you are living, how much money you have in your pocket, or what others say about you. Only what God thinks about you matters. He says clearly, "You are my child, and I have your name inscribed on the palm of My hand. I knew you before I knit you together in your mother's womb. I knew you by name!" Now let's add the broken branches of regret to those accumulated from the pruning of our anger, and let's build a fire for the entire world to see. That fire will start in your spirit and spread to everyone who encounters you.

Let mercy, grace, and forgiveness do its work in your life and the lives of those you love. It cannot be contained and will eventually flow over into the lives of those you encounter on your life's journey.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

PAIN

I watched my neighbor prune some low-hanging branches from the beautiful tree that provides shade to both our homes. Those branches teem with life as birds sing morning and evening for our entertainment and to acclaim God's goodness. The squirrels scamper up its trunk, caressing the rough bark with each leap toward the sky. They run along the tree's many branches like a system of pathways made for squirrels' exclusive use. At the foot of the tree are nearby bushes that are home to several geckos that come out at various times and strut on concrete pavement. Proudly, they walk several steps and then present a bright red balloon of air that is part of their chest cavity. I know neither the reason they do so nor the purpose it serves. I suspect that either it is a function of respiration or a clever way to manifest their domination over the earth. All of these lovely creatures contribute to the beauty that is free for me to enjoy when I step outside of my home.

Witnessing the actions of my neighbor, I began to wonder whether plant life feels pain during pruning. How would I know? What could I do to address their wounds or comfort their outrage at being savaged? Even though my neighbor appeared to have a plan that might guide his self-appointed task, his actions seemed arbitrary and random to my untrained eye. And thus, some of these beautiful rich branches, exuding life in the form of green leaves, soon were lying in piles under the very tree to which they had recently been attached.

I do not know enough about the science of botany or the practices of horticulture to answer my own questions. But I do know that what I witnessed was painful to watch. Even though the clippings offered no audible protest, nor did they demonstrate an animated moral objection to the severing of their limbs, it was clear that there was a process in progress before my very eyes.

The Bible tells me that God is the Master Gardener who prunes the branches of my life if I stay connected to the True Vine. Others with a more exquisite knowledge of such things have offered a broad variety of perceptions and conjectures about the problem of pain. I will let the giants of practical spirituality inform your thirst for knowledge. It is my privilege to refer you to their offerings for further consideration. One of those distinguished authors is C.S. Lewis, who authored a volume titled *The Problem of Pain*. I know that when I am in pain, I am engaged in a learning process. This may include my physical being, my mental health, my emotional needs, my social perceptions, or most importantly, my spiritual state of health.

Are you like me? I can always tell when the pain of a headache is

approaching, but I may not consciously recognize the moment of relief when the pain stops throbbing. More likely, I note its absence as an afterthought. I have also noted that when confronted with the problem of pain, the clarity of my thought processes and my ability to accurately judge the underlying causes of my pain become remarkably impaired. My body, mind, and spirit rise up in fury at this inconvenience, even when the pain is a life-sustaining alarm to get my attention.

In December 2011, I awoke in the early morning hours experiencing chest pain and internal discomfort. While the pain was not piercing, suffice it to say that I was in no shape to return to my prior state of sleep. Reluctantly, I got up and considered my options: stay home or dress and drive myself to the hospital. With the pain undiminished, I made the wise choice to drive and drive promptly. After entering the emergency room, I was immediately escorted to a room, and lavish attention was provided to me in the context of medical assessment services. Later, a kindly heart surgeon entered my room and announced that I was lucky to have followed my sense of danger, because even at that moment, lying on the gurney, I was having a heart attack. Embarrassed by my predicament and unsure how to proceed, I made a few calls to family members. My wife was the first to receive this early morning announcement. She was away at school 1,200 miles from our home in Slidell, Louisiana. That situation brought with it a new level of anxiety as I spoke with her and my sibling. Once again, I was entering lives intrusively and adding to their burdens. Even as the pains in my chest increased, I was struck by a sense of shame at having to ask for help. I should be able to manage these concerns for myself without adding burdens to others. That reasoning initially kept me from dialing the familiar numbers, but the emerging thought that

I might die without anyone knowing of my condition seemed like a betrayal of my loved ones' affections. So I dialed and dialed again out of a sense of love and loyalty.

Such wisdom had eluded me earlier in the year when I had driven myself to the hospital after suffering a stroke. By now, I guess that you perceive aspects of my personality. I have always believed that pain was a personal problem and that the best resource was to hunker down and suffer through it. I lived my early life that way and managed to serve four years of incarceration balancing my desire to further my education with my desire to become invisible in the prison environment. That was a tough balancing act, and it became the basis upon which I discovered the unique aspect of psychological functioning that I had previously acquired.

If the truth be told, the wedge driven between my need for intellectual development and my desire for invisibility resulted from my pre-prison exposure to Alcoholics Anonymous. That twelve-step approach to solving life's problems eventually became the foundation that led to my return to Christianity. This was not a direct path. First, I chose to examine the religions of the world in theory and later to explore some of their outward dimensions in a superficial survey of their inherent practices. All paths that I explored eventually convinced me that Christianity offered an understanding of spiritual truth that I could embrace as a life commitment.

That reexamination of beliefs has guided my decision-making over the ensuing years. I am not alleging that since making that choice, my decisions have always been pure or free of sin or willfulness on my part. It

has been a constant learning curve; acquiring knowledge and accepting truth have been guided by useful but painful encounters. Oh, how I hate having to learn through pain, but I do learn!

If you are like me, I am sure you can relate to that last statement. Let's start to explore the problem of pain and the promise of pain.

Pain is part of the process of living. Your pain is unique to you. It has been tailor-made for you to ensure that it will do its duty of deepening you as an individual and as a human being. In spite of the distractions that the world offers us in the form of endless choices, nothing we choose will allow us to escape its hold or cause it to relinquish its authority in our lives. Pain flows naturally from the consequences of our choices. We are born in the midst of pain, and we are likely to yield ourselves to its grasp as we die.

I have discovered that emotional pain has a devastating effect on my ability to function. Before I resolved the issues of spirituality, my life was consumed with the pain of nothingness. I am not sure that I can explain it any better than that. Wandering from distraction to distraction became a painful track upon which I furiously exercised all my choices. In spite of my best efforts, those distractions yielded little beyond a momentary pleasure that was quickly replaced by the woeful realization that, once again, I had failed to accomplish my goal to become pain free. The best I could muster was varying states of numbness.

Nothingness results from the endless pursuit of goals that have neither meaning nor purpose for our lives or the communities in which we live. The meaning of life becomes lost in our mad dash to the next distraction.

Somehow, we become lost in the activity that we have created to distract ourselves and to fool others. The problem with this life strategy is obvious: no matter where you go, there you are. As my friend Anna once pointed out, “The hardest place to be trapped is inside yourself.” A sound bit of wisdom.

Pain has another benefit; it reminds you that you are alive. Life itself is a gift that provides a reason to learn to cope with the demands that pain brings into our lives. Pain can become a cruel taskmaster if left untended. But it should never become the basis upon which we live our lives or make decisions about how we respond to circumstances beyond our control.

Sometimes the only thing that we can do is trudge onward with the hope that the pain will start to abate as we continue our journey. This may not sound very reassuring, but consider that pain has a way of sharpening all of our senses. It has the capacity to help us focus all our attention on just taking the next step successfully. Though it has been a long time, I can clearly remember my first year in prison when I was roiling with emotions and completely unhinged by my circumstances. In the center of that storm, I can remember reaching out to God to stabilize my path.

He did not rescue me from the penalty I had incurred. Instead, He guided me through every day of the storm. The reflections that flowed through my mind of the children I had left behind and the family members who must have been wrenched by the painful, far-reaching consequences of my actions were perhaps the most painful part of those days. This was not time wasted. God used that experience and the events that were to unfold in my life to create a way to approach personal failure. That legacy

became the foundation for this book.

I can claim nothing for myself but the evidence of a wasted life, but I can delight in the grace of God, who redeemed me from a corrupt life and put my feet squarely on a path that would provide illumination to others. That seems to be part of the privilege of serving Him. I may not know the substance of your sufferings at this moment, but I can testify that He will redeem the lives that seem to be wasted now and will restore meaning to all events that lie ahead. In His providence, He will restore the time that the cankerworm has eaten. You can either abandon yourself to the fury of the storm or reach out and take His hand and allow Him to guide you through it.

Dignity and worth flows from the value that God placed upon each of us individually. It does not stem from society's estimation of your significance. You have been strategically placed at the center of your personal storm. Each of our circumstances is unique, and everything you and your family experience has infinite value. Nothing is wasted or random. There is a purpose to every encounter, every rebuff, and every wound that others will inflict upon you.

Looking back with enhanced understanding, I see clearly that God has used and will continue to use all events to complete His work and to glorify Himself. I would not have consciously chosen the path that I have walked, but I would not have missed the opportunity to experience His love and mercy in my life. Out of personal tragedy, I have grown in awareness, experiencing the hand of God lifting me up each time I fell. I am not alone, and though these events may seem senseless and without purpose to some, He has arranged the sequence of events to serve His

purposes.

He will do the same for you and your family if you are willing to trust Him with your life and the lives of those you love. Pain is an opportunity to focus on our dependence upon our Lord. Trust that He will reveal His plan, commit your incarcerated loved one to His care, and draw a spiritual shield about your family members. I have often experienced painful encounters as obstacles to the process of living. For instance, my relationship with my youngest daughter has appeared to be dead and without hope of resuscitation. But I have experienced the love of God in my life to such a degree that I know that these events will ultimately serve His purposes. I am willing at this point to trust in His love with all aspects of my life.

Knowing this does not diminish the pain I experience even today, decades after we last had meaningful contact. But my strength flows from a deep inner conviction that He will fulfill His promise to make all things new. The lack of intimacy between us is a source of pain, but the realization that these personal events will glorify His purposes sustains me.

In family matters, we are used to drawing from the pool of loving concern that quenches us when we are dry. Now the pool appears to have evaporated. I mention this issue merely as a way of helping you to organize your experiences with painful encounters and to provide a light for the path that you may find yourself walking in the days ahead. I assure you that nothing you encounter along that walk is wasted or without purpose.

Some time ago, I had the privilege of visiting several countries on the

African continent. This travel experience came about through the thoughtfulness of my sister Maureen, who was providing outreach services to others. The experience turned out to be much more than an adventure. My time abroad was marked with new awareness, which led to spiritual growth.

One of the most poignant memories I have is of a young, barefoot boy about six or seven years old. He was walking down an unpaved road littered with rocks and sharp stones. Before him was a small herd of longhorn cattle, and he was busily engaged in directing them with the help of a long, thin stick. He was unaware that I was observing him as he went about fulfilling his responsibilities. You see, he had been entrusted with his family's wealth. The cattle on the road ahead were his family's treasure, and they were entrusted to the care of a mere child. He walked on, driving the cattle before him, ignoring the pain he must have felt as he walked over the rocks and stones on the pathway. He had an air of purpose in his stride. He was going to care for his family's treasure because this was his role in the family's life. He did not look around but carefully kept himself focused upon what lay before him. He was intent on his purpose and did not yield to the distraction of a visiting Westerner. Reflecting now, I imagine that he had no knowledge of events transpiring in his immediate environment. His sense of purpose was clear for all to see.

In that display of purpose, he fulfilled the family's hopes, and he touched the life of an observer. It was an exercise in simplicity. He displayed his courage and love for his family by staying watchful. He never complained about the heat of the day, the pain in his feet, or the fact that he was unable

to engage in playful childhood activities. He just steadily took each step forward with a comfortable rhythm that had evidently come from the frequent repetition of these actions in service to his family. His parents were nowhere to be seen; his actions were not guided by the presence of an adult. That is what made this scene particularly remarkable to me. But his fidelity to his assigned tasks became an example of the guidance he had received from his parents and the love and respect he held toward them.

What an incredible experience to share. Isn't that the model of fidelity that is urged upon each of us? No one will recognize your struggles with personal pain. Few will even be aware that you exist outside of their own needs. There will be no obvious reward for taking this difficult path, except the love of your family members. The one inside serving a prison sentence may never directly understand the meaning behind all your steps. But it is enough to continue on your path with a firmness of purpose. You are not alone.

Pain can become the sharp rock upon which you abandon all hope. Or it can become the touchstone of affirmation. Nothing happens by accident. Everything you encounter on this rocky path will have meaning. Are you willing to let go of the illusion of control and the internal cry for self-satisfaction?

Beyond the strange world of needs and wants, there will always be others who offer you criticism and suggestions. This is your pathway. Your Father who is in heaven has a plan. An essential part of that plan is that you get the treasure home safely. Your loved ones are your personal treasure, though they may also be the source of pain. Don't take your

eyes off them, or it will be easy to lose your sense of purpose.

It's difficult to take emotional experiences and put them into words. It involves reliving that pain. I don't offer these reflections as a bitter response to that process of learning. To do so would not offer any hope of survival but rather would provoke a response of fear for the disaster looming ahead. I have no desire to add to the burden that you are carrying at this time. I'm only motivated to shine light on your dark journey and to offer a hope of relief reflected in the knowledge that millions of others are trudging this pathway silently beside you. Let the pain of that experience inform your awareness and restore your sense of confidence that God has a plan for your life and the lives of all your family members.

I too am trudging this same pathway. I am just a little ahead of you and am seeking to make your journey a little less painful by revealing the truth about what you face. Gird up your loins, put on the spiritual weapons of warfare, and face the road ahead with the certainty that this rough road can be traversed successfully and that this journey will strengthen you for the years ahead. Your small steps, taken one at a time, will become a testimony to others in your community.

Pain joins its predecessor emotions (anger and regret) and can be added to the stockpile of fuel we have been accumulating. Its primary value is to spur you on to a state of readiness and to reassure you that you are still alive. With every painful step the young African boy took, he knew that he was drawing closer to being reunited with his family.

How pain vanishes as joy emerges.



CHAPTER TWELVE

SEX WITHOUT CONTACT

You will not find any lurid descriptions in this chapter that might feed your curiosity about this natural function. Nor are you likely to find specific responses to your unstated fears and concerns. This is where the challenges rise up to face you. This is the application point for what you have already encountered and for experiencing what lies ahead. The journey you are on will not yield the richness of intimacy that may have previously sustained your relationship.

The public nature of the justice experience offers little accommodation for needs of intimacy. At the county jail level, you will communicate by phone while looking at each other through a pane of bulletproof glass. All conversations are recorded, and any portion may rise up later like a hidden snake to strike you when you least suspect. Be wary and on your guard: there is no way to describe the feeling of intrusion that has been

thrust into your life. The normal dynamics of relationship have been suspended, and the laws of interaction have changed dramatically. No longer are you a loving couple spending time with each other. Now your every word and move will fall under the scrutiny of your loved one's keepers.

This may be the harshest aspect of incarceration that you are likely to encounter. With the verdict of guilty, you have been launched into a world where all the rules have changed. Every shared glance and every spoken word brings with it the possibility of drawing attention, unwanted attention. Stress fills your soul as you go about the task of dressing for a visit. Your desire to make yourself look pleasing for your partner may trigger an unwanted interference by inviting closer inspection or by raising the interests of a prison official. Often, your association by marriage or family connection may cause others to infer that you too are their enemy. This is a very subtle process, often unconsciously ignited in the thoughts of those who assume the task of incarcerating others.

There is no way to anticipate this situation or to prepare for its appearance. It's just another peculiar aspect of navigating the justice business. How can I convey to you the experience of having others monitor your most personal conversations, ever watchful for anything suspicious? From your first meeting at the prison, you learn that touch is frowned upon between inmates and visitors. While an initial hug or brief kiss may be exchanged at the start and the conclusion of each visit, it tends to make the ever-present observers wonder about your motives.

After the visit, your loved one will most likely be escorted to a small room and required to strip off all clothing. Once naked, a strip search

occurs. If contraband is discovered, such evidence will become the basis for further prosecution and will serve as the reason to suspend or deny any future contact visits.

You could also become the target of prosecution should contraband be found immediately following your visit. The inference is that you introduced contraband into a prison environment. Don't fall for that trap. It will place all things that you have been holding together in jeopardy. If contraband has been found on your loved one's person or among their belongings, it will also lead to the cancellation of contact visiting privileges.

Your body hungers for human contact with your loved one. But you are required to sit in a room among many others and approximate a loving relationship. A child's desire to sit on a parent's lap may bring swift censure and a warning that future breeches of policy will result in the termination of your visit. How do you explain to your child that they cannot approach the daddy or mommy who lives in prison? How do you comfort their unmet needs? Often in the reality of the visiting room, these needs are swept away in the struggle to accommodate prison mandates. Eventually, these searing experiences may lead you to the conclusion that bringing your children along is a hardship. There is no way that words can do justice to the intrusiveness of this experience or describe the pain it inflicts upon your heart. It is another of those ignominious wounds you bear in silence.

In the meantime, you pull yourself together, take charge of the situation, and desperately try to suppress your anger with the prison officials for their inflexibility and with your mate or family member for having

carelessly exposed you to such circumstances. The reality of betrayal rises in your craw, and you try to quash the gall rising in your throat. You put on a smile, reassure your loved ones and the guards that it is nothing, and carry on with visiting as if nothing had happened. How do you prepare for this moment? How will you respond to this challenge? It is extremely difficult to pretend intimacy in an environment that demands the accomplished skills and talents of an actor.

Both you and your loved one know that the stretch toward grasping a moment of intimacy is beyond reach, and you may settle for a quick moment of groping to approximate your loving feelings toward each other. Your hopes for time and space together fall victim to the institution's security needs. You whisper to yourself, "I don't know how long I can keep doing this," moving as close as the individual seats will permit. Though it all, you silently bear the burden of your partner's happiness and comfort. So, you become challenged to find small personal ways to reflect your love for each other.

One small act I discovered while in prison was the value of converting seemingly innocuous actions into meaningful gestures. I taught my children that three squeezes of the hand or three movements of my foot were the same as saying aloud, "I love you." Three of anything became the visible manifestation of all that we had held valuable as a family. It was a small accommodation to our need for the familiar embrace of love. Like all children, they caught on to the meaning that such actions brought to life and delighted in the privacy such secret communications permitted. There was never a Christmas or birthday gift that held more meaning between us. It helped keep me alive during the prison years and spurred

me to create a new experience of renewed love and recommitment to family ties after my release. Such a small, private act can be the sole source of intimate contact in a prison setting. I challenge you to find something that offers comfort and joy in the sterile environment of the prison.

Earlier in the book, I mentioned that when the defendant is escorted from view, both the prisoner and family members begin to serve out the sentence. There is no more vivid example of that than the desperation one faces alone in bed, far from any physical comfort or warming touch. The pain of these moments becomes an agonizing experience as memories flood your consciousness and the fire of needs unmet flicker through your awareness. Do not forget that sexuality is the nitroglycerin of human relations.⁵ Handle with care.

Even in the midst of contrived circumstances encountered after criminal conviction, you must find a way to communicate with your partner about this aspect of your lives. Any hope of survival for the relationship will hinge upon open, honest, and direct communications. In the presence of such openness, each partner permits the other to vocalize needs and frustrations. Together as a couple, you form an extended bond of love and use your romantic history to build a bridge of connection that transcends the immediacy of your unmet needs. In the cool backwash of reflected love, you begin to find the strength to steer through the jungle of self-love remedies or the hopelessness of marital arrangements that violate the boundaries of your marriage commitment. Pornography, subtle affairs, or reliance upon self-stimulation will not provide the safety that they seem to offer. Such activities will only serve to perpetuate the

⁵Malachi Martin, *Windswept House* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) 381

unmet fires of desire and ultimately drive you both apart. Driven by unmet need and deprivation and suffering the scorn of others, you will eventually start to dwell upon the throbbing sense of entitlement that signals the end of relationship. It is a trap. It is not possible to take fire to your chest without burning yourself.⁶ It is a lover's fantasy that we can do both and still end the journey together. This fantasy fuels the fires of desire in so many of our contemporaries whose marriages end in divorce and rejection. "I can always rationalize my needs and ignore my commitment to my marriage."

I am not a cold or insensitive individual beyond the need of sexual expressiveness. While fidelity and marital loyalty held little personal interest in my first marriage, my views have changed radically under the spiritual influence of God and my wife. I asked Him to choose a partner for me to spend the rest of my life with, and He rewarded my request with a beautiful, vibrant, professional woman who compliments every aspect of my personality. The most essential and meaningful component of this relationship is the shared spirituality that guides our daily decisions.

In order to resume her career as a dentist, Quinta had to go through a two-year training program offered through an American dental school. Her diploma from the University of Indonesia and her ten years of dental practice counted little in the eyes of those administering licensing privileges in her newly adopted country. Realizing that there was no other available route for returning to her career pathway, we submitted this matter to God in prayer. In His graciousness and provision, an opportunity opened for her to attend the University of Colorado School of Dentistry (ISP Program) in Aurora, Colorado.

⁶ Proverbs 6:27

After she completed the requirements for US citizenship, we anxiously turned our attention to questions about funding this effort and discussed at length how her enrollment in this program would affect our married life together. It was clear by the way circumstances developed that I would remain in Louisiana while she moved for two years to Colorado. This is not the solution I would have sought to solve the problem. Already in my 60s, I wished to continue to enjoy the intimacy our relationship had provided.

God had other plans, and we accepted the reality that we would have to spend time apart to make her dreams come true. Not only were we making my wife's dreams a reality, but we were also fulfilling God's plan for our lives. You may counter with an observation that we always had the possibility of spending time together since we were both free to plan and travel. In this matter, the resulting time apart became very much like living the prison experience all over again. Only this time the imposition was accepted as a demonstration of love and concern, not a consequence of my lawless actions. So even in this personal and delicate matter, God had planned to use my history of incarceration to serve His purposes.

It is as difficult now to foster a caring, intimate time together during a hurried weekend of travel as it was in that prison visiting room. God has demonstrated His sufficiency by sustaining our relationship and overcoming the urgent demands for attention and release. She came to this country as my wife with one small request. That appeal was a mustard seed that has grown in our lives and sustains life in its branches. She merely asked me to agree to pray together every morning and night and to commit our marriage to the care of God. Somehow over the last

seven years, we have sought to honor God first in our relationship. It has not always been convenient, especially when I am grouchy, irritable, and feeling sorry for myself. But once joined together, we sought His leadership for our lives together.

Consistency of practice is very important if you seek to complete the prison experience as a couple. Not every morning and every night have we been able to accomplish this task together, but on those occasions when we are connected by phone or e-mail communication, we faithfully pray for each other and our marriage. He has sustained us through incredible challenges, and the bond of intimacy continues to grow. We have discovered that we do not have to be in the same room together to fulfill this promise. Our commitment to His love supersedes all boundaries. God used my early prison experience to teach me that all things are possible with Him. Perhaps you can adapt this simple tool to the boundaries of prison life and steadfastly support each other in the presence of everything that says such love is impossible.

I believe the key to making this tool work lies in the acknowledgement of each partner to stand strong and pledge to sustain the marital relationship even in the face of hostility, indifference, and temptation. No other human knows the struggles that burden your life apart from each other. But there is One who knows everything, and He has promised to provide for every need that you experience on this journey. Don't forget that Jesus Christ was a prisoner—an innocent who had done nothing deserving of punishment.

Like Quinta and myself, you can find a way to embrace this journey, one day at a time, one small step at a time. While it may strain your sense of

credulity and challenge your grasp on reality, such help is possible. In fact, the Bible tells me that God is an ever-present help to those in need. I cannot storm the throne room of God and demand release from my marital vows, nor can I contrive my own solutions to these problems. Those strategies never work. As my friend Jarrell would say, “There is no right way to do wrong.”

Doesn’t the cry of your child or the helpless whimpers of another invoke a deep personal response in your psyche? Why would our relationship with our Father God be any different? When I come with the humility of a frustrated and overwhelmed child, He never turns me away, and I am always assured of His loving help with my problems. Arrogance and manipulation masked by my inner deceptiveness will not elicit a response from my Father. But a humble and meek spirit will engage His incomprehensible flow of mercy and grace. He is just waiting, anxiously waiting for you and me to bring Him our broken dreams. Abba is a term that is best translated as “Daddy.”

Who knows your frame and everything about you? Who breathed life into your body and marked you as His special child by giving you His spirit? Who sustains you through each day? Who publicly blessed the institution of marriage? Who told us that we are created in the image and likeness of God? Who urged His creation to go forth and be fruitful and multiply? Who witnessed the birth of His Son and offered us His very best?

If you are embarrassed about yielding your physical and emotional needs to God, then I encourage you to sit down and write Him a letter. Let all your feelings spill out on that paper. Later, you can read Him

your letter in the privacy of your prayer closet. He will not be surprised at your words. You will not make Him blush with the intensity of your needs. He will not neglect you in any aspect of your journey. In fact, He has been anticipating your problems since before the creation of the world. Remember His words, “I knew you before I created the world” (paraphrased). How could a father forget his child or a mother abandon the baby born of her womb?

Sex is a very profound responsibility given to us by God’s providence. It did not embarrass Him to make us as we are; in fact, He said, “You are wonderfully and fearfully made” (paraphrased). You do not need to solve this problem by yourself. You do not have all of the tools, but they are available through the grace of God. And let me assure you that if you submit your needs to God in private, He will openly reward you and your family members.

Given the content of this chapter, I expect that many of my readers will experience an immediate rejection of this solution as unreasonable and unrealistic. This is not my concept; it belongs to God. I have only used these strategies as they unfolded along my path. If you are caught in a situation that seems to defy resolution, please reach out and contact us. Together, we can do what I cannot do alone!

PART THREE

PRISON LIFE

If you thought that *The Twilight Zone* was just an odd TV series, or that *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was just a movie, then strap on your seatbelt, get comfortable, and get ready to experience a different way of living that co-exists within the dimensions of your former life. The reality of these encounters will surpass all your personal expectations but will have sadly little in the way of permanent redeeming value. Admittedly, the journey ahead will be challenging, and it will totally transform your way of thinking about things forever.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PRISON LIVING: A COMPLICATED ARRANGEMENT

All aspects of prison life yield to issues of security and control; these are the two great engines of institutional administration. They will never yield their place to other concerns. They come primarily from the minds of correctional personnel and their first cousins dwelling in the land of law enforcement. Those who provide the grist for the mill—lawyers, law makers, governors, pardon boards, parole boards, and even judges—may make soft, empathic noises occasionally, but they will never rise up in the face of the rendering process, which is the primary product of the justice experience. It is supposed to be painful, and those charged with the infliction of punishment curiously seem to have an inability to acknowledge the perversity of the pain they inflict.

Recently, public relations ventures masquerading as “official” accreditation organizations have sought to bolster sagging public expectations in the face of numerous incidents of brutality and even death at the hands of those charged with protecting our rights. Whether it was the guards at the infamous Pelican Bay Prison in California (crown jewel of the California Department of Corrections) or the police officers who beat a young, homeless psychiatric patient into senselessness while he cried out for his father, inflicting their vision of street justice on a hapless individual who later died as a result of their beating (Fullerton Police Department), there was no outcry from their respective accrediting agencies. These organizations function primarily to shield their membership from public criticism.

The rule is still “no quarter asked, no quarter given.” The fatal beating that was videotaped yielded diminished criminal complaints against the perpetrators of this heinous crime than would have been doled out to the average citizen engaged in similar behaviors. The district attorney would gladly draw up an indictment to charge us with first degree murder, perhaps with special circumstances that make us eligible for the death penalty. The victim’s father, a retired police officer, gazed upon the subsequent proceedings with a sense of moral outrage and probably tried unsuccessfully to make sense of the goals of a justice system that has rapidly descended into a state of incoherence and self-interest. Don’t take my word for it; read about it yourself. Or better yet, wait a day or two and see the situation repeat itself in another jurisdiction. In the past, law enforcement protagonists have at least had the decency to wait until a suspect was off the streets and safely tucked into a jail cell before they were beaten or intimidated (forgive my sarcasm).

What useful function can such examples yield? They are not perpetrated for the benefit of the offender, nor are they offered for the amusement of bystanders. They are not covered or allowed as acceptable law enforcement behaviors by those who wrote the laws (who interestingly disappear when such conduct is manifested openly). No, the only logical explanation is that these actions are meant to intimidate others from voicing their concerns and fears. Many who would never openly report events to police managers or correctional officials have employed technology to tape the perpetrators in a heightened frenzy, which suggests that these events have become ritualistic rather than exceptions to the rule. In fact, the frequency of occurrence across the national scene seems to have produced a strange desensitization toward those who are labeled by their tormentors.

Back in the 1960s, a young woman named Kitty Genovese was attacked and stabbed to death by an offender on a public street in Queens, New York. Her screams were heard by many neighbors who chose to let someone else call for help. No one wanted to get involved. It was a drawn-out crime, and the peace of the observing public was disturbed by the protracted events. Yet no scream evoked a response, and her dying cries faded away in the night. That was an offender, a sullen, ruthless individual committed to his own needs, wants, and desires.

The recent events in Pelican Bay and Fullerton are indicators that the depravity of such behaviors has made a viral leap, infecting those charged with protecting our rights and looking out for our interests. If the truth be told, I suspect that few parents today urge their children to view the police officer as a friend. Undaunted by growing distrust,

the police continue to hand out their DARE pencils and t-shirts to wary school-aged groups. These children are online and see the events for themselves; they watch in their communities as the police car slowly drives down their streets, and they enter their homes with questions related to receiving mail from their incarcerated fathers or mothers.

Somehow, a pencil or a t-shirt is just not going to do it! This generation has learned that contact with law enforcement brings painful consequences. They eventually learn at a young age that there is no safe way to interact with the justice representatives since they are wired differently. Their goal is to catch you doing something wrong and then punish you. The policeman as a friend has disappeared with the end of the Andy Griffith show.

Only the justice officials have not figured it out yet. The fabric of the country is torn, perhaps irreparably. Factors emerge from all sides with cries of self-interest and demands for rights. There is controlled chaos available for viewing online or onscreen.

When you walk into a justice experience or enter a prison facility, you have joined a thousand others who have gone through the same thing. The first question to ask yourself is, whom can I trust? The answer is singular: only yourself. You have arrived in a no-man's land where all reasonable expectations fall prey to demands for satisfaction. Expect no level of personal accommodation, and you will not come away disturbed or disappointed. The most frightening revelation comes when you discover what has become of the loved one who was escorted from the courtroom. Everything is changed by the prison experience.

Let's walk ahead, keep your shoulder to the wall, and don't look at me. One young prisoner returned from a two-day family visit. The officer supervising his strip search asked a crude question about his activities during that visit. The officer scarcely heard the soft reply; "it was a visit with my mother." The officer's attention had already shifted to scrutinizing some else's private parts. And this officer was one of the nice guys!

Another inmate I met, Zack Lilliard (more on him shortly), took the time to educate the newly arrived "fish" on what to expect and how to behave. Other than that short warning and a thick rulebook, there was no orientation for prisoners. If you violated any rule in the book, you were responsible because you had a copy of the rules. Heaven only knows what you would do if you could not read or had no glasses available with which to read the small print. And with that, the prison had fulfilled its primary responsibility to you.

You had been duly informed of your responsibilities. And the game began! You had better know the rules, since failure to comply will be punished by removal of any creature comforts you might have, and could include time in solitary confinement (today, the "hole" is called administrative segregation. I guess that is one of those benefits that came with prison accreditation).

Zack was serving a life sentence. He had been reprieved from a death sentence, which subsequently was commuted to a sentence of life imprisonment. He eventually died alone in his cell and was only noticed because the guard banging on his cell door with the keys could not get him to respond. Then it was time to get the body out and make room for another inmate.

The incredible productivity of the Prison-Industrial Complex in processing bodies and minds results directly from its accuracy at screening out any noticeable ability among potential new hires to care meaningfully for those working directly with prisoners. This is likely a correctional qualification, along with the ability to fit into a uniform and accurately shoot at a moving target. The coldness of prison life does not flow out of the walls, fences, or guard towers. It is brought in daily by those who think that they are morally aloof to the circumstances that brought you to prison.

They seem to embrace the belief that they are agents of society (wannabe cops) who are authorized, by virtue of your prison sentence, to inflict cruelty, wanton disregard for the most personal needs (urination and defecation), and whatever discomfort they can contribute to make your life hell. They are unaware that your sentence was a term of incarceration, not the physical, mental, or emotional brutality that sears the souls of most prisoners. This is the silent reality that occurs in institutions across the country. And it's all being done in the name of the people.

The concept of unity is alien to those engaged in the daily gladiator games. This country was founded upon the union of states (peoples) who agreed to be governed under the laws of the country. How do I describe this to someone who is due to be released after serving a seven-year sentence in a high-security prison? How do I encourage those individuals to embrace the prospects of freedom when they are merely swapping locations under policies and practices of severicide?

We have entered an era of technology that is capable of personal incapacitation measures (the ability to render others incapable of

effective response) on millions of its citizens and regularly uses its various phases of operation to criminalize specific segments of the national population.

“But,” you say, “we must deal with the crime problem.” Is the tail wagging the dog? One indication of goodwill missing is the lack of any organized way of integrating and restoring those who have completed their prison terms and are seeking reconciliation. Neither are there any recognized ways to help restore the families who are waiting for their loved ones.

To demonstrate how far the system is out of contact with the needs of its citizens, consider the legislation passed at the federal level to address the needs of children left behind in the growing wake of imprisonment as a social tool. The legislation provided for the termination of parental rights and the adoption of these children in the event that conditions persisted for over a year. This happened at a time when the length of all levels of incarceration had exploded upward amid the outcry of the unwitting public. Finally, the government was doing something. The feds supported this goal by providing money to states that would develop legal tools to implement these policies. What will happen to the children as they grow into adulthood and seek to understand their historical roots? This is a fair question in light of the issues raised in the earlier chapter titled “Justice Orphans.” Like the endless waves of incarceration or the economic nightmare resulting from wars and more wars, no provision was made for addressing the needs of children who were separated from those family members willing to try to meet their needs.

If you or any family member is under threat of losing your children, do not wait. Seek legal counsel. The law is ruthless and relentless in the way

it can grind up the remaining elements of family life. Even the sanctity of the home offers no meaningful sanctuary in the current climate. It is often used by self-appointed “do-gooders” who perceive your insufficiencies as potentially damaging to your children. Therefore, they act in a void of assumed self-knowledge and indifference. Perhaps such people were raised without experiencing a sufficient amount of love at the family level.

Be on your guard; you have no clue where such a referral could come from. Perhaps it’s the school or day care because the kids look dirty one day. Maybe it’s the outburst of anger from a child visiting an imprisoned parent (seems the kid has the same temper problem as the parent). It could be a result of the relentless pursuit of law enforcement based upon warrantless, intercepted private communications. Even the prospect of going on a foreign holiday is rife with danger. Transiting the national borders may become an exercise in diminishing return as you seek the comfort of a vacation or just to escape the pressures of your daily life. Be on your guard, because circumstances can change abruptly.

Surely he must be exaggerating, you think to yourself. Consider the incidents where children have been forcibly removed from their homes, which have occurred throughout the United States. Since such removals spring from a federally initiated mandate, there is little recourse available to protect yourself and loved ones. The federal courts have taken down the flags that once marked them as bastions of fairness, watchfulness, and protectors of individual rights. Your best strategy is to stay informed and beware, as well as have an action plan that is known to you and close family members. I live in an area susceptible to hurricanes; my family

members are aware of the choices I would make even in the absence of direct communication. Stay wary of family hurricanes.

If a prison lockdown occurs to prevent visitation, there will be no flow of information beyond news releases. Since there is no prisoner movement, there will be no phone calls while the situation endures. The prison's "policemen"—usually called the security squad—will be tasked with the responsibility of searching the prisoners' cells for anything that catches their eyes. During lockdown, mail takes a backseat to security and control. In other words, you will be out of touch (more than you already are). These procedures are usually implemented after a significant fight, a killing, or the discovery of weapons or drugs, as well as on a random basis to break down any strategies that inmates may use to preserve their personal space.

Your incoming mail will either be read or screened. Your spouse's or family member's mail is not only subject to reading but also to copying and possible submission to the state attorney general's office as a basis for further prosecution. While I have mentioned it before, it bears repeating: you cannot expect any privacy rights with regard to mail or telephone communications. However, there are generally two exceptions to this rule: 1) Prisoners may receive legal mail from a lawyer or court, which is opened under the personal supervision of a correctional officer. By law they cannot read its contents, but they will open the envelope, pull out its contents, and shake them to see if anything has been enclosed that might violate contraband rules.

2) Under the Seal of Confession, prisoners may talk confidentially with the prison's Catholic priest. A clerk, some well-intentioned soul, or even

a deacon is unprotected by this mandate of confidentiality. Since it is an aspect of the confessional process, it does not seem that it would also cover group interactions with a priest. Check this out for yourself.

You need to consider the important matters that may occur during a period of incarceration. In legal matters, family concerns, and business obligations, it would be wise to hire a local attorney to represent your interest in matters of transparency. The attorney can either mail it or visit the offender with documents that need signatures. These can include titles, insurance policies, wills, or checks issued to both yourself and your spouse. It applies to a wide spectrum of documentation, so it would be very useful to have legal counsel available when addressing these needs. In extreme situations, the lawyer can visit the prisoner directly and obtain execution of whatever documentation is necessary without being subject to obvious monitoring or taping measures.

Please do not make the error of believing that the prison authorities will operate on the basis of good faith regarding any extraordinary needs. Once your family member has been processed, the government has power of attorney in certain matters since the prisoner has become a state ward. I am aware of situations where an inmate has been scheduled to receive some financial benefit in the form of a check or warrant. Those funds, once signed and deposited to the prisoner's account, will be used to reimburse prison accounts for any expenditure made on the prisoner's behalf. Some jurisdictions have sought to bill the prisoner for the privilege of being in prison. I have also witnessed the recent trend of making prisoners pay for medical visits or treatment services—right down to dispensing an aspirin. Our leaders mocked the Chinese

government's practice of sending a bill for the cost of the expended bullet to the family members of executed offenders. Those criticisms ranged from unbelievable to inhumane and scattered a lot of dust in the wake that followed. I have not heard of any protest against the policy of charging indigent prisoners for basic human services provided freely in most other nations.

Add to this concern the institutional indifference that one encounters with regard to minimal standards of healthcare. It would be wise to secure a copy of all pertinent medical records pre-incarceration and a history of prescriptive care and treatment measures. Early inquiries among prison personnel should yield the name of the medical professional in charge of its clinic or hospital. You should also secure his title for inclusion on any correspondence. It may be life preserving to send those records as one unit (preferably, by registered mail, return receipt requested, marked for signature by addressee only). As part of your letter, you should clearly state your concerns, list the records you have forwarded, and provide the names and telephone numbers of all prior providers. In the event of a chronic health condition (heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetics), never settle for a verbal acknowledgement from unknown medical or nursing personnel. Only a written record of your request with notice of acceptance of delivery will suffice to provide legal enforcement, should it become necessary. Be sure to put a copy of your documentation into the mail for your attorney, along with a certificate of mailing from the post office. In the event of injury, loss, or death, you can be sure that the prison ranks will close and try to freeze you out as you request information. Your early steps at the beginning of a prison sentence demonstrate that, unlike most inmates, your loved one

has someone on the outside who will hold the delegated authorities responsible for negligence or acts of malpractice. They are also aware that, given your extraordinary efforts to ensure their compliance with minimal standards of care, their actions are under scrutiny by those beyond the walls.

I sent an annual Christmas card and letter to my friend Zack Lilliard. Several months later, I received a brief, typewritten note informing me that he had died some time ago. That was it in a few short phrases: his life story summed in the quasi-recognition of his death. I suspect it was another way of saying that the ends of justice had been served. Next case!

The challenge of drawing out these facts of prison life lies in my desire to immerse you in the total experience, but I am limited to using words. I can only offer bits of color by adding details that will touch upon your own experience on this journey. Having said that, I will add information below that you are likely to find useful in managing your prison journey.

Prisoners usually have no access to cash money. Therefore, planning for visits will require your attention to having less than ten dollars in single dollar bills and as many quarters as you can bring with you to feed the visiting room vending machines. If a prisoner is found in the possession of money within the prison, it may be considered as *prima facie* evidence of intent to escape. Out of this reasoning, the prison authorities are likely to suspend all contact visits and may refer the situation for prosecution. In many prisons, offenders are eligible to receive care packages from those outside of the prison based upon their institutional locale and

their security classification. This is a privilege that can be suspended or denied if strict conditions are not met. Your family member will be able to send you a list of approved items and the guidelines for sending them. These guidelines will inform you of the specific timing to send packages and the frequency with which you can send them.

Please be advised that the actions of a well-intentioned family member or friend in sending a gift may result in the item being refused if it does not adhere to the prison regulations. Furthermore, the authorities may count that package as the prisoner's allocated package for purposes of receiving any further packages within the prescribed time frame. Simplified, this means that the prisoner will neither receive the item or any other package that could have been received during that specific time period.

Books and magazines may be sent directly from the publisher. Prisoners can order items from available catalogues through the prison canteen if they have available funds to pay for the item as well as for an additional charge that goes to the "inmate welfare fund."

Prison gangs are a reality. Prison rape does occur by violence or coercion. These are facts of prison life. Usually, the gangs are organized along racial lines, but some prisons have multiple Hispanic gangs, and each may have a pronounced hatred for the other Hispanic gangs. Some prisoners respond to the frightening reality of incarceration by seeking recognition and gang membership as a survival strategy. As one prisoner explained to a newly arrived inmate, "Stay away from the punks, drugs, and gambling, and you will be okay. Don't borrow anything from anyone or create any obligations that will later cause others to lean on you."

Please remember that intentions have no merit in this system. The authorities and other inmates will always assume the worst about a situation. It is a place gripped by suspicion, and no good deed goes unpunished.

One of the unkindest things I must do is to destroy any fantasy you may have about mercy. This virtue does not flow through the system. It is a rarity if it exists at all. Mercy flows from one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

Louisiana has the toughest sentencing laws in the country. A sentence of life in prison means just what it says. At Angola State Penitentiary, eighty-five out of one hundred lifers will die in prison. If the family is unable or unwilling to arrange for burial, the body will be buried in the prison graveyard on institutional property. Even in death, the prisoner is not yet free. Sometimes the prisoner will seek the relief death brings; it is not an uncommon response to prison life.

Prison living is a very complicated thing. Death is often a simpler solution than staying alive. Staying observant of your loved one's demeanor and state of mind may help to preserve their will to live.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MAINTAINING A FAMILY THROUGHOUT INCARCERATION

While you are engaged in maintaining your contact with your loved one, the needs of your family continue to manifest themselves. The children grow older in the absence of a loved one, and the parents and family members eventually return to the struggles of life. As the months merge into years and the years fly by, it is almost like those living behind prison bars start to vanish from thoughts and memories. This is not because of callous indifference; rather, our brains start to numb our pain through the simple process of making us respond to the demands of daily living. Gradually, the pain fades. Sad to say, but most long-term prisoners rarely receive any mail or visitors. They learn to shut down their hopes and expectations and to engage in the various activities of prison life. Slowly, almost without notice, the bonds that tie us together start to loosen and disappear.

As a way of introducing a prisoner to confinement, some institutions use a long period of restricted activities. Then, when the prisoner is transferred to other parts of the prison where they can openly engage in a walk, a conversation, or experience the freedom to openly interact with others, they experience a profound sense of relief at just being outside of their prison cell for some time each day.

Many prisons will keep newly arrived prisoners locked up twenty-three out of twenty-four hours per day to break their spirit, to train them, and to condition them to prison life. How can I explain to you the effect that this has on the psyche of a person? As the loved one living life in the community, you are only likely to notice the sullenness and emotional withdrawal that stems from such an isolating experience. These words are not meant to cause you discomfort or additional pain but to suggest that you try somehow to reach across the time and space between you and your loved one and maintain a grasp upon their daily lives.

Children will continue to grow and exhibit all of the developmental needs that were explained in an earlier chapter. That is the process of life. It does not mean that they no longer love the missing family member. It is the reality of living in the aftermath of a personal disaster. We always live with the impact of disaster ingrained in our spirits. As your family's living example of truth and strength, you will unconsciously guide your children and loved ones through this period by the choices you make. If you start to bury your pain by using alcohol, drugs, or sex to numb your awareness, those looking up to you will notice and take their direction from your actions.

When you start to move on, they will likewise move on because it seems

the only logical choice. What else can we do? My loved one is gone, and the pain of maintaining contact grows with each new encounter. Eventually, any contact produces considerable pain; it is a reminder of all you have endured thus far. It becomes easier to put the issue on the back burner and slowly let life return to “normal.” The problem is that life will never return to the normal you knew before the trouble began.

As time continues its endless march and your loved one appears to have become distant and remote and your own situation within the community continues to challenge all your resources, especially your emotional stamina, it may seem easier to let the ties that bind you together slip away. If you follow this path, you will lose not only your relationship with your loved one but eventually with your children and family members. You see, they too will be reminders of all of your losses, and they will eventually fall into the same trap that has enveloped your marriage.

It takes incredible strength to make a decision to weather the journey ahead without the support of others. And no one will ever know what you are experiencing as you go through your days. You are alone, and your aloneness becomes the essence of your struggle to stay alive. As the emotions of anger, rage, and outrage wash over you, you may find yourself experiencing a certain sense of fury at your loved one and others because of the conditions thrust into your life.

This is the breaking point, a time for which no words can inform your thought processes, your rampant emotions, and your unmet needs. With a righteous vindicating spirit, you may find yourself looking for any avenue of escape. There are no temporary shelters to which you

can flee. Any choice you make at this time will produce consequences. While your imprisoned loved one is hunkering down emotionally, intent on surviving this experience, you exist in the community, bound by invisible prison bars and exposed to all the distractions the world can offer.

There is no way to put into words the anguish that this reality brings into your life. You have to accept the challenge and acknowledge your devastating situation. Seeking refuge in the available distractions is not an escape. In fact, that choice will ultimately add to your pain and the pain that your loved ones experience.

Does it make you mad? It should, for this is the plight of everyone with a family member in prison. This is the unvoiced sentence that you are serving in the community. There is no public or private recognition of your suffering or the suffering of your loved ones. This is an extension of victimization and does not carry with it any public expression of empathy or compassion.

You can survive this terrible experience and help your loved ones to survive it also (including the imprisoned family member) by using your spiritual resources to sustain and guide you. That is your one saving grace. If you grasp these resources like a life preserver thrown to one who has fallen overboard from a ship, then you will start to find a gradual easing of the pains and pressures that overwhelm you. Society offers nothing but distance and abandonment as strategies for coping with this experience. The world has nothing useful in its bag of tricks, no quick and quiet remedies. Your spiritual life offers a hope that will lift you up. Grasp the life preserver that God throws to you and let Him pull you to safety.

If you have the courage to make life-sustaining choices, then be assured that your strength and resolve will flow directly from God. Now is the time to remember that Jesus Christ was a prisoner. Who would better understand the agony of your situation? Nothing will flow out of this experience that He Himself has not already experienced. You are not alone!

One thing that may help you and your family to continue meaningful contact with an imprisoned family member is to spend fifteen minutes every week writing a letter that addresses each family member's life in some short examples. Let the children describe what information they wish to include. They may surprise you with what they remember or the things that are important to them. Don't be surprised if they write about how Susie burnt the chicken or how Jamie wet the bed. These are all family events and, if shared in love, will strength your family ties. Doing this simple activity consistently allows the one in prison to actively engage in family life through your letters. It will also encourage participation in sharing the unique aspects of his or her daily life when replying to your letters.

Significant matters or concerns should be addressed in your correspondence. Do not hold back Bobbie's failing math grade or Karen's decision to attend college out of state. By including these matters, you permit your prisoner to vicariously engage in the substance of family life. There will be an adjustment period as the one in prison experiences the reality of not having a dynamic or influential voice in these affairs, but your efforts to include them in these matters will ultimately reflect your feelings of love and concern. That becomes the bridge upon which

you continue to meet each other's needs.

Phone calls should be reserved for sharing things of immediacy and to bolster each other's reservoirs of joy and love. It is important not to become engaged in controversies that cannot be resolved in a ten-minute, monitored conversation. It is equally important to plan the end of the conversation so it always ends on a happy note. To that end, avoid assuming the role of becoming a "runner" for your imprisoned loved one. While it is important to be concerned and helpful in fulfilling the needs of your prisoner, it is essential that you balance your abilities, demands on your time, and resources to meet the needs of your family in the community. In your letters, clearly respond to their needs with a realistic offer of your abilities and willingness to accommodate their requests based upon your priorities. It will help you both to avoid antagonism and bitter exchanges later.

Always express something that brought you joy recently. Try to use your time together to strengthen each other spiritually. It will help to smooth out rough edges that will stab at your continued attempts to stay committed. Remember that this is an endurance race, not a sprint. Pace yourself so that you conserve your energy, refresh your spirit, and finish the race victoriously. Figure out what you can and cannot do and then just do your best. It will always be enough.

In June 2012, Nik Wallenda entertained the world by performing a daring feat. He walked across Niagara Falls on a tightrope, carrying a balance bar to help him complete his act successfully. He comes from a long line of performers, some of whom met tragic ends during various acts. They had been called the Flying Wallendas in recognition of their

skill and gravity-defying abilities. Over the years, many children and adults have watched, holding their breath, as the Wallendas engaged in their entertaining and courageous performances. You are doing the same thing privately and publicly. Nik Wallenda did not let the sad family history of tragedy deter his spirit or permit him to abandon his determination to complete this feat. The very fact that he completed this outstanding achievement honors his family name. It can also move those of us who live with personal challenges to stand up to fears and concerns in our own lives. The task he completed has become part of the Wallenda family legacy. It also became a vivid example of how tragedy and grief can fuel even higher goals. You are walking a tightrope of your own. Every step you take forward is a victory. Count each step as a personal and spiritual victory and give all the glory to God.

Others are watching. One thing I noticed while working for the military was the obvious fact that others are always quietly observing your actions. This is good because it gives each of us an opportunity to witness openly about the things we believe through the example of our actions. Of course, our Heavenly Father, who watches what we do in the privacy of our thoughts and the movements of our hearts, will always openly reward our faithfulness in due time. Don't grow weary on the journey. There are millions of others sharing the road with you.

Multiple attempts have been made to find out what happened to the aviator Amelia Earhart. She was a brave soul accompanied by her navigator, who attempted to circumvent the globe in her Electra aircraft in the days before the onset of World War II. She disappeared somewhere over the Pacific. While some continue to search for remains

in order to create a satisfactory resolution to the mystery surrounding her disappearance, it is of great significance to me that such efforts continue to focus upon the dead. Yet, we have millions of lost people living in our midst. It is a modern day puzzle beyond my abilities to grasp.

A movement of concerned Catholic worshippers, in addition to brothers and sisters from various other denominations, responded to the threat to religious freedom that has been imposed through imposing various “health care” regulations in opposition to matters of individual conscience. One of those who responded, Patrick Archbold (Creative Minority Report), read with interest about the hotline that was opened by the Department of Justice to allow individuals to report civil rights violations directly to the federal government for investigation.

Anyone could use the hotline or report a rights violation using online resources if they had a desire to do so. The guidelines for using this resource encouraged the public to report any incident of possible civil rights violations. The implication of such a dramatic public outreach was, of course, that the government was concerned with your ability to freely exercise the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—those rights endowed by our Creator. When Archbold called to register the trampling of his rights of conscience and freedom to worship without the imposition of government regulations, he reached a recording that said the mailbox was full!

This anomaly and apparent contradiction of purpose is the strange ritual you are likely to encounter at every interaction with the justice industry. Recently, I called a state prison in California to clarify its policies on sending prisoners manuscript documentation that was being prepared

for a companion book. I left messages asking for a return phone call but never received a reply to my inquiry. Undaunted by the circumstances, I tried to contact the headquarters of the California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections only to find myself caught in a phone tree that demanded foreknowledge of an extension number before anyone could be reached. Undeterred by this unfriendly system, I called the governor's office and explained my needs to a helpful young aide. He immediately offered to provide me with the telephone number of the institutional prisoner advocate and that individual's immediate supervisor. My subsequent calls to each of these individuals went unanswered!

That seems to be the best that the system has to offer, and it stems from the apparent disregard for the fundamental elements of dignity and worth. These rudiments do not disappear with a criminal conviction, imprisonment, or association with one who has violated some law. It appears that part of the formula for dealing with violators and their family members is to impose a wanton disregard for basic human rights.

If the federal government uses this methodology to outwardly appear as though they have concerns for our individual rights and freedoms, than it should not surprise anyone that state governments have adapted a similar system of "accommodation" to deflect any outward appearance of disinterest or active engagement in the process of destroying the spirits of its citizens incarcerated in a prison or serving their sentences as family members living in the community.

The value of describing these practices is chiefly to inform you of the hurdles you will encounter and to give voice to the emerging trends in

social indifference as a tool of government policy. Your rights and the rights of your incarcerated loved one have no merit or value in the eyes of the justice juggernaut. Those concerns are merely cannon fodder for the battles that will continue to arise from the brokenness of people. It is much easier to ascribe the problems as being of your own making than to focus upon meaningful and just solutions to basic human needs.

Our human needs do not evaporate when the steel doors slam shut. Our dignity and worth can never be diminished by man's judgment of our actions. They flow from the embrace of a loving God who has a plan and purpose for all lives.

Do not seek refuge or understanding in a society that has arrived in the twenty-first century with a depleted sense of compassion and a distorted understanding of the concept of justice. Like the infants mentioned earlier, had these uninformed citizens had any awareness of the inflexibility of their justice policies and practices, they would verbally acknowledge the truth and take immediate steps to transform the system. Like the federal and state responses discussed above, the oft touted "accommodations" you will experience are illusory and were never meant to be used as concrete aids in traversing the foreign ground of the justice industry.

The moral of this chapter is that the journey you are on with your loved one is a unique experience; you cannot expect to make this voyage without suffering personal blows and scars at the hands of those who administer our government's policies at various levels of the bureaucracy.

In no way do I intend to disparage the men and women who seek to serve our social and safety interests by engaging in careers within the

justice industry. But it is important to remember that some may have no personal awareness of your pain and suffering, while still others will not care since it is not part of the job requirements. In fact, one of the primary job requirements is the capacity to use a key correctly. Being able to turn a key in a lock will not necessarily ensure a personal awareness of tact and kindness outside of required institutional policies and regulations.

Your welfare and the welfare of your loved ones (in or out of prison) rests solely on your shoulders. It may sound cruel, but NO one will ultimately be willing to relieve you of this burden. The cruelty is not in the appearance of these realities. The cruelty primarily flows from the actions of those who use these means to ignore human need through ignorance, emotional distance, and the cloak of denial that arises from the growing gap of fear and distrust.

Your enemies are not the men and women you will encounter, but the ignorance and indifference that seem to invade every aspect of our justice system.

Rise up each morning and make sure that you are girded with the breastplate of righteousness, wearing the helmet of salvation, and having prepared your feet with the preparation of the gospel. Then and only then will you be made secure for the battle ahead. Don't forget to bring along your sword of the Spirit. It will prove useful as you encounter the fiery darts and endless schemes that the enemy will use to try to defeat you every day.⁷

Keep your eyes on Jesus and listen to the soft voice of encouragement that speaks to your spirit!

⁷Ephesians 6:13–17



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

UNDERSTANDING THE PAIN ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL

It is a new adaption of an old approach, stereophonic pain. Punish the offenders and shame the family members for having any association with them. This philosophy has been with us since the earliest times. It is not likely to abate when exposed to realistic inspection or critical review. It is the way it is ... or so some will say!

The only response has been one of diminished returns because if I denigrate your worth as an individual, I also denigrate my own worth as a human being. I cannot inflict the seeds of exclusion without reaping a harvest of despair and indifference. If our worth flows from our Creator, then all human value ultimately stems from what He has to say about us.

This is a useful juncture to introduce the concept of “knowetics.”

Up until this point, I have provided a rather vivid description of what awaits those who run afoul of the law. I have painted a rather dreary but realistic picture of life after the steel doors slam shut behind the defendant. But I have only painted one side of the picture, though I have given multiple indications that there is a way to triumph even in the midst of pain and trials. The way of redemption and reconciliation starts with having the awareness that, though you desperately need a fresh start, you have no way of going about producing the events in your life or the lives of those you love. If you recognize yourself as being at this point, it may follow that you are willing to revisit spiritual solutions.

In the early days of the Christian “church,” various people of faith observed that there seemed to be a direct relationship between sin (crimes against God) and diminished aspects of mental health. Having no intricate knowledge of human behavior or its antecedents, their natural inclination was to see the relationship in a spiritual light. This early approach to helping others took shape under the domain of thought called noetics. This philosophy holds that sin has a deleterious effect upon one’s mental health, while the promise of salvation has the opposite effect and strengthens one in the face of temptation and life’s everyday struggles.

As a Christian and a doctor of clinical psychology, I am *convinced of the underlying truth reflected in this understanding.*

The emerging problems that cast noetics into becoming a controversial subject seem to lie in the haste to create spiritual prescriptions to “cure”

the suffering individuals. While these efforts were well meaning, I believe that they failed because one human trying to restore another human's spirit to lost glory is an exercise in applying divine grace outside of the realm of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

As a licensed clinical psychologist, I often observed others suffering from a variety of burdens. But it was impossible to remove their burdens myself. I could advise them how to repack their burdens or send them for prescriptive aids to ease their pain. I could urge them to discuss their issues openly in a group therapy session. I could also give them active instruction in using the skills of cognitive behavior therapy to reframe their struggles. I could render supportive therapy endlessly and pray for them without ceasing. But I had no direct power over their most personal thoughts, fears, and humiliations, nor could I devise a meaningful strategy to change the course of their daily behavior. Ultimately, I was reduced to the role of observing pending disasters and advocating a host of mental health interventions as a remedy to their troubles. The contradiction I experienced in this setting was troubling to me. You see, I had a personal experience with redemption and reconciliation far outside the medical model's standards of care. It had worked in my life, and I had watched it work in the lives of those who surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ. You may react to this statement with sorrow, telling yourself, "I have already tried that route, and it does not work!" That is like the poor unfortunates who made repeated attempts to change themselves by using all of the available therapies and medications. *I do not suggest relying on others. Please read ahead and discover for yourself what has worked in my life and the lives of others.* I believe that healing, true healing flows directly from our own relationship with our Savior.

Not from the kindness or encouragement of others. All of us are in the same lifeboat together. It's like the blind leading the blind. I do not need the gift of spiritual vision to hear the cries of those who are overboard and in danger of drowning. Nor is it enough to settle into my seat in the boat and express gratitude that I am safe in the midst of disastrous times. Either we all have a chance at rescue, or we all have the chance of perishing before help arrives. I am my brother's keeper.

Knowetics is my personal attempt to grasp the truths that those early church fathers encountered and weave them together in such a way that they become a life line for all, no matter what their current circumstances. Knowetics as follows in section four is a concrete step-by-step plan to engage the resources of a loving God to heal all our troubles. No matter what has happened in the past, we are all His children, and like the Good Father that He is, all of us are important and precious to Him.

Knowetics is not a religion, nor will it create a crisis of conscience for those who already seek to follow Him with all of their heart, mind, and soul. There is no scriptural conflict created by suggesting that we examine His promises in a new light of understanding. To simplify this process, I have focused upon five of His attributes as the essentials in rescuing us from our troubles. This approach to living reaches right through the prison bars and will keep you and your loved ones bonded together in His love for each of us. In my own life, I have not found any circumstances that resist resolution in His time and His way. I use each of these attributes in my daily activities; they guide my steps at each moment. I am not a "holy roller" type, nor would I assail you on a public street and upbraid you for your fear, uncertainty, and suspicion. Such

responses are normal reactions to living in the world. This book has been written to give direction to those who continue to suffer without respite. The attributes are not of my making; they exist whether I am willing to use them or I refuse the comfort each offers. My prayer is that you will find them to be spiritual lifelines.

The attributes are similar to the five fingers on your hand. Those fingers allow you to grip whatever you wish and move those objects about with sureness and freedom. They are mercy, grace, forgiveness, faith, and hope. Each of these attributes is covered in more detail later. For now, it's enough to recognize that they exist. They exist as resources that you can grasp at any point in your life. Like the Father's welcome at the return of the prodigal son, our Heavenly Father is sitting on His throne, just waiting for any sign of our willingness to seek Him after we have made life a searingly painful experience.

Please remember that in the story of the prodigal son's return, his father graciously restored him to sonship. The father's joy was complete at having his son home again. Immediately, he told the servants to bring the robe and sandals, and he put his own ring on his son's finger. The ring was a symbol of sonship, family, and restoration. The prodigal's father redeemed him on the spot, and the act of reconciliation was complete. To celebrate this joyous event, the father ordered the servant to prepare the fatted calf for a feast in his son's honor. In Hosea, we have a similar picture of God's love for us as He moves Hosea to buy back his unfaithful wife at the auction block. Hosea was faithful and restored her to a place of honor within the family. That is the way that God views each of us. We are just as precious to Him, no matter where we live, whether in a prison

or in a community.

These are not words that I have created for your assurance; they are the Word of God, which has guided individuals and families throughout history. There is no sin or trespass that He will not forgive. Check it out for yourself, read the passages, and ask Him for His mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Watch what will happen to your faith and hope as He moves heaven and earth to bless you. He delights in our return. We never have to dress for the occasion or bathe our stained bodies and consciences. He is moved with the same compassion that flowed from the prodigal's father. If you show up barefoot or in prison garb, all the better: He will put the robe of righteousness around you and prepare His feast for you and your loved ones.

This is the strength that tears down the walls between us and gives glory to God. He is holy and He is just, but I believe that His prime attribute is mercy, and it gives Him joy to restore his lost sons and daughters. Early in my descent into the justice experience, I would have settled for Him rescuing me from the consequences of my actions. Had I settled for an end to my pain and shame, I would have missed so much.

God is not a great Santa Claus in the sky who dispenses favors to some and lumps of coal to others. He is a merciful Father with great love for ALL of His children. I firmly believe that God never sends anyone to hell. Hell is at the end of a path we personally choose to travel; we continue to stagger along, even as God calls out for our attention, saying, "I love you." I believe that God grieves over the loss of each soul who chooses hell and eternal separation from Him. I also believe that God and the angels rejoice at every soul who turns around and responds to the loving

pleas of the Father.

There are no rules or regulations that can deny or diminish the flow of God's love into our lives. Prison walls, physical and emotional distance, drugs, sex, hatred, anger, abandonment, none of these have the ability to restrict God's love for us. All the common horrors that visit our lives, even the great waves of death that swept through the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century, are no match for God's love. He says that He will use all things for good among those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. What an incredible promise!

I have lived long enough to see His hand purposefully guiding the events of life, using all things for His honor and glory. "No eye hath seen ... nor ear heard" the things He has in store for us.⁸ I am not writing about some fanciful or imagined loving deity. I am speaking directly from personal experience. The accumulated evidence, as it were, of things come to pass. Though my written words are likely to trigger a tsunami of protest that one guilty of such life choices would speak out, I would not have missed this opportunity to glorify my God and to touch those suffering across the country and around the world.

Now here is the question to apply to your situation. If God can reach out and touch the life of someone who had no hope for the future, and yet while still in prison started to open doors so others later would see His mercy, *what is He willing to do with your life and the lives of those you love?*

When I was actively involved in my alcoholism, I hated to drink alone. I always wanted to have others around me, though they never offered

⁸I Corinthians 2:9.

any meaningful comfort. In fact, they often added to my consternation and distress. Once free of this addiction, I soon discovered that I was never alone in my sobriety. I have always had a sense of experiencing a strong personal fellowship beyond conventional human relationships. It has been an educational and comforting process that stirs me when I am feeling low or down. It often helps me to peer beyond the masks that others wear and get a reading of their journey. Many seem to be weather-beaten and weary, though they usually say they are “fine.” It is sad to see others hugging their misery to their chests, fearful and unwilling to trust in the reality that we all share in the various dimensions of living. This goes to the core of where we live as individuals. We do not need to confront prison walls to see the distance between others and ourselves. All we need to do is stand still for a moment and touch the tension in our own lives to understand why we often flee deep personal interactions with others. The fears, suspicions, and concerns that flavor our impressions regarding the intentions of others keep us locked in a prison of spirit, each of us in our own isolated cell. We look through the barred windows and see others scurrying by, attending to their mind-numbing tasks. We may either delight in being left alone or experience a burst of anger as we realize that we have often pursued similar life strategies only to experience failure and defeat.

Knowetics is offered as a bridge to help each individual to transit the struggles and battles of life. There is no toll on this bridge; it exists for all of us to use. No special training is required, just a willingness to make each new step forward, believing in the sure provision of God. He provides out of His love for us and the pleasure it gives Him to see His children helping each other along this pathway. There are no restrictions

to using this bridge, just open your eyes and take a step forward in faith. You will meet others using this pathway to freedom.

Knowetics is a crash course on the rights and privileges of sonship. It identifies the love of the Father, the sacrifice of the Son, and the direction of the Holy Spirit guiding us through our days. It is not a replacement for worship or direct communication with the One who loves you. These words and observations are meant to be like the landing lights at a darkened airport that help the pilot to orient himself to unfamiliar terrain and ultimately to deliver the passengers safely to their destination.

I do not urge the benefits of this approach blindly. Neither do I endorse blind agreements to the suggestions of others. I would not ascribe to such influences, nor do I think you should. What I would ask of you is that you read the words that have been written and then submit the matter in prayer to the God who sustains your daily life and the lives of your family members. Then follow your conscience. I have witnessed the pain that the scourge of the justice experience has inflicted on millions of lives. I do not advocate social rebellion or blind submission in the face of the justice juggernaut plowing blindly through our country. What I do strongly advocate is a renewal of relationship with Him who is able and a return to the sheepfold of loving concern, where the Shepherd is watchful and willing to feed each of His sheep. In this context, you are sure to find guidance and sufficiency in His care. There are no prison walls high enough or bastions so strong and deeply built that the love of God will not flow over all of man's efforts to keep Him out.

He is the one Advocate who will never reject a humble heart or an anguished cry. Instead of seeing us as evil, delinquent individuals, He

sees us as His children in need of His loving help. He will never turn aside from the pain-filled cry of His child. What parent could abandon a tearful son or daughter? Like the prodigal's father, God carefully waits and watches for any indication that we are crying out to Him. Remember above all things, God has given us free will, and He will never interject Himself in our affairs without being invited. That quality is a distinct expression of His love for us. He would rather that we choose to reject Him and His goodness than force us to accept His love and provision for our lives. You may be facing the same struggle with those you love who have rejected your love and refuse to consider spiritual reconciliation as a pathway to peace. Put them in God's loving care.

Get strong about your spiritual life and stay strong as a witness to those observing your struggles. You have no idea when that quiet, sure witness will yield its harvest. Rest assured that no matter what you see right now, it will yield a rich harvest in His timing. Do not grow weary of well doing; take time to refresh yourself in His loving care. Because you are reading this book, I'm sure you are seeking help for your life and the lives of those you love. Please do not quit before the miracle happens! At my local church, there is a statue of a distraught young woman kneeling down and looking forward without seeing much. My guess is that the sculptor wanted to create the impression of someone lost in their own thoughts. The statue is mounted on a big block of granite and faces toward the parking lot in front of the chapel.

This statue has been at its current location since it was delivered to the church. Back when it was first delivered, it was placed on the grass, and it stood silently on its own. It eventually drew the attention of many of the

parishioners who were opposed to abortion on demand.

In those days, it was not an uncommon sight to see groups from all kinds of churches periodically lining the sidewalk of the major town street. They would pray, hold signs or banners, and walk quietly in protest. Usually before these events, someone within the church would take responsibility to place small white crosses on the grassy area surrounding the statue. Each cross was intended to represent a certain number of babies that had been aborted since the last public demonstration. Another aspect to having a public display was obviously to remind those passing by to pray for the mothers and their babies. Both were considered victims of abortion.

Over the years, there were fewer displays of these crosses, and the right-to-life protests morphed into an annual prayer chain that stretched along many blocks and was visible to all passing by. It looked the same, but one could tell that there was a new season; something had changed.

The gardener and helpers eventually were replaced by others who kept the appearance of order throughout the gardens. Some trees were planted, a few plants, and some rose bushes in the hope of beautifying a rather plain view of the front of the church.

With the best of intentions, someone planted a rose bush directly in front of the statue. You could still observe the statue, but the inscription of the foundation was hidden by the growth of the rose plant. As I drive into the parking lot throughout the year, the roses are in varying stages of growth or deterioration.

New children have been born and educated at our local parish school.

New families have moved into the parish, revitalizing the area after a recent natural disaster of huge proportions. There are even new clergy who serve the needs of those who worship at this church.

I still look at those rose bushes with the awareness that on the foundation is a beautiful verse from the Old Testament. That verse gives meaning to the statue, but it is hidden from view. A few of us know that it is still there, but a request to remove the rose bushes was ignored.

I guess it boils down to what one values. I like the color of the roses, but the Word of God comforts my soul. I like knowing that it is there, a silent witness to love. By understanding and accepting the pain on each side of the prison wall and urging your family members (including anyone in prison) to do the same, you have become the embodiment of love: a silent witness of love.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

I believe in the human spirit. Only the works of God supersede the power of a determined human heart. One advantage of getting older is the view that comes with advancing years. In my teens, life served no purpose other than to amuse me and keep me entertained. My twenties and some of my thirties were often occupied in putting out fires or solving crises and concerns that often flared up in the lives of my peer group. In retrospect, it now seems to have been an endless exercise in fire bucket passing. Few seemed to give any thought to what was causing the constant eruption of flames. The thirties were also the time for centering my spirit. While they included a period of incarceration, it was a time rich in God's guidance and provision. The forties yielded a rich experience in business and education but included the hardship of failing as a parent to my children. I missed the mark big time, both morally and spiritually. My fifties were rich in the experience

of working with others and identifying the remarkable similarity of human experiences. That learning was amplified by the development of a broadened understanding of the complexities of humanity and its eventual marriage to my spiritual beliefs.

The sixties provided a dramatic but meaningful deepening of my faith even in the midst of severe challenges. Perhaps because of those experiences, I have been able to gain a new perspective on what is important in life. While your own journey will vary from mine, I can assure you that nothing you encounter will cause you to stumble if you can adjust your focus and put your eyes on Jesus Christ. Every twist and turn of your life and the situations you will yet encounter will mold you and your loved ones to serve to others. They will also sharpen your ability to interact meaningfully with God in the face of all problems.

My desire is to share with you the process of tapping into the power of the One who made you and your loved ones. It is not a superficial or arbitrary power reserved for a favored child; I wish I could paint a picture for you of the joy that will emerge if you stay faithful to His plan. Never again in your life will you have to walk alone, frightened, or uncertain. One of the purposes of this book is to restore your lost dignity and worth and to share a map leading you out of shame, pain, and humiliation while restoring you to a place of hope and confidence.

If these were impossible dreams, I would have told you so and recommended strategies better suited to your situation. I am not talking about some contrived reality, nor am I caught up in a world of psychotic fantasies. I share the resources I have encountered and urge you to boldly seize these ideas to create a new life for you and your loved ones. You may

have the experience of watching others stand up and make themselves seen in the light of day. The only shame is to have an opportunity to radically transform your life and the lives of your family members but to have rejected the help offered. You are free to return to your misery at any point if your life remains unchanged.

All human value and all plans stem from the love of God. Tap into that source now. You will find that you are never alone again, no matter where your journey takes you. There are no exotic rituals or prayers to be said, just the heartfelt cry of a child. There are no special schemes to touch the heart of the Father, nor are there any favored children crowded around His throne. He is available 24/7 to have a private and intimate conversation with you. As you approach Him, all other events will diminish in importance. He will lovingly ask you what troubles you, and with the love of a wise parent, He will not only comfort you and heal your wounds but also point you in directions you had never considered going.

My words are a reflection of the fire burning brightly in my heart as I see others openly suffering in the aftermath of the justice experience. It is painful to see the sheep widely scattered and lost to the tossing waves of indifference.

If I asked you to drive from your home to Harrisville, Michigan, what would you do first to prepare for such a trip? I suspect that you would look for a map or road guide around which to form your travel plans. Then you could start to grasp the nature of the task that awaited you. After measuring the distance and considering the costs of such a journey, you would also think in terms of the number of days that it would take

to complete this expedition. As you explored your options, you would soon come forward and ask me why you should make this journey in the first place.

If I told you that it is a delightful place to visit and that you will come away from the experience well rested and peaceful, few would make the trip on my recommendation. On the other hand, if I told you that there was a kindly old grandmother who lived there, one who was incredibly rich and not known to spare her wealth or influence in pursuit of helping all who came asking for help, the roads to Harrisville, Michigan, would be clogged with a surge of drivers seeking her out. One such story in a newspaper or on TV would cause people to run forward with all of their might to avoid missing the opportunity to engage in that kind of life-changing experience.

That is what God has offered us freely. Not some fantastic expression of His love after we are dead and gone, but the strong hands of a God who loves us intensely. We do not need to seek out transportation or hitchhike down the road, trying our best to struggle forward to find the house with the porch light on. God puts no barriers in the way of those who seek Him with all their heart. When you get to the front entrance, there will be no closed gates or guards barring your path. There are no visitor forms that need pre-approval, nor will you have to submit to the scrutiny of suspicious and overbearing staff members. He will be sitting on the porch, waiting for the sound of your approach. Such a smile as the one that awaits you upon your arrival, you have never seen! That is what awaits you if you take child-like steps ahead.

By now, I hope that I have transferred the vision and placed it safely in

your care. Now it's yours, not just mine. Take it into your hands and enjoy the texture and richness of His promised help. Now that it is yours, no one can ever take it away from you. Rest easy in the firm feel and the calm assurance that it is starting to bring into your life and the lives of your family members. It's not a second-hand dream. It has been designed for you and tailored to meet your needs. Remember the prodigal's robe, the comforting assurance it gave the son who had finally come home? Remember the sandals and the ring of recognition? Yours are waiting for you!

These gifts cannot be grasped or taken in a flurry of demands and emotional outbursts. These gifts can only be bestowed by the loving Father on a returned child in desperate need. Our current times do not yield themselves to qualities like humility or remorsefulness. Some of our fellow journeyers would label such feelings as a sign of personal weakness. Do you remember that the prodigal made his return based upon the premise that he would ask his father to treat him as a hired hand? That way, he could at least eat his fill and sleep in peace. In his wildest thoughts, the son did not grasp at the possibility of being restored to sonship. A workman's lot would be more than enough. There was another individual who came upon the merriment in progress. This was the faithful son who was outraged that his father would welcome his lost brother home. In the midst of the celebration, his heart grew cold with anger and selfishness. He stood outside the home, demanding an explanation of his father regarding this strange event. His sullenness demanded satisfaction. The wound to his concept of worth and ego did not embrace the graciousness that governed all of his father's actions. He stood apart even as his father urged him to join in his brother's return

from death and restoration to sonship. The Bible story does not tell us the resolution to this confrontation and ends with the father urging his son to forgive his wayward brother by letting go of judgment and pouring the oil of mercy on the new relationship.

I strongly suspect that there was a profound reason why the story stopped at that point, if for no other reason than perhaps to identify rejection as a serpent lying in the path of mercy, redemption, and reconciliation. In the full measure of joy, the serpent always waits to steal our joy (if we let him do it). Remember, he was hanging around the Garden of Eden waiting for Eve and Adam to come along. He always has a plan for our destruction when he shows up. One thing that is very important to remember from this story. *Never speak to snakes!*

Time doesn't stand still. The adults will grow older, and the children will sprout like beautiful flowers. This is not a time for despair or uncertainty. God has a plan. He has always had a plan for your life, even before He laid the foundations of the world. He knew you by name before He created your spirit. Nothing has been left to happenstance. He has everything covered! He always has had it covered! He is sovereign, but He has always been Daddy to His children, Abba Father. Keep your eyes on the destination, not on the pathway you must travel.

Let's return to the crossing of Niagara Falls that was undertaken by Nik Wallenda. With great interest, I watched a video of his feat as he made his way across the tightrope stretched across Niagara's commanding view. The wire was wet, and he made successive small steps, keeping his eyes on his goal. The falls were his backdrop to his left. Clouds of mist rose up from the surge of water crashing onto the rocks below. He kept his eyes

trained on his goal, not on the multiple distractions surrounding him.

Having visited Niagara Falls myself, I am well aware of the cacophony of sounds emerging from the tremendous flow of water into the void below the falls. There is a boat ride available from either the U.S. or the Canadian sides (Maid of the Mist) that will take you close to the currents of water pushing away from rocks. You really get an understanding of the power behind this endless flow of water. In fact, you are provided with a clear poncho to keep you from becoming soaked by the spray.

It is an awesome sight to look up at the edge of the water starting its long fall. It is equally awesome to witness from above with a broad view of all that nature provides for our knowledge and understanding. The most awesome part of the video was the last ten feet Wallenda walked before reaching the safety of the raised platform. Once he was safely on the platform, his reverie broke, and his intensity morphed into a bright smile amid the cheers of the onlookers.

If redemption and reconciliation are to become our principal goals, then we need to engage our personal tightrope with a soulful purpose. Just as I believe that one married partner dedicated to preserving a marriage can prayerfully overcome all barriers and obstacles, I also believe that we have the opportunity to become someone's spiritual advocate. It has little to do with the other person and everything to do with our relationship with God. What a position of privilege, to continually recommend another person for God's special TLC. I am sure that we will be very surprised in eternity to discover those who kept us shielded in prayer.

The temptation may be to jettison some people from our lives and to

focus on those who cater to our interests and passions. We are most likely to behave this way toward others when we lose all hope for meaningful change. In our frustration and anger, it is easier to cut the “losers” out of our circle of friends or acquaintances. But even as you erase them from your digital phone book and scrub them from any online media, who is doing the same to you? Who has finally given up on you and expressed an unwillingness to go one more step in supporting your hopeless and helpless behaviors? I remember reading of a prisoner about to be executed for murder, who turned and asked forgiveness from his victims’ family members who were present to observe the execution. It was really not much of a story—certainly not the kind of story that would have been written if he had cursed them all before drawing his last breath. We just do not know when the miracle will happen.

On a rocky outcropping of land, in a distant land and time, another prisoner was being put to death for his crimes. Something in his spirit recognized a truth that may not be visible to our eyes. He saw, in the life of another, goodness and love expressed toward those who were taking His life. There were no vile curses, just recognition of holiness and purpose. In Catholic tradition, we often call him the “good thief” or Dismas. For all the sin and misery he had produced in life, he somehow recognized the unrecognizable; he saw Jesus for who He really was and is. That knowledge and his plea for mercy brought the assurance of salvation from the Savior.

This may be a great time to leaf through the “snapshots” of your memory. Look for the missing photos; even in their absence, your spirit is filled with an awareness of their presence. It is not too late to lift them up in a

quiet moment of prayer and thoughtful consideration.

This would also be a good time to look at your children and loved ones from a spiritual standpoint. If they go astray, will others cast them aside and label them as worthless? Will there be any who will persistently recommend them to the care of Jesus Christ? Will there be anyone who sees beyond the scars and wounds and recognizes their true worth?

Spiritual worth is not a condition that appears or disappears as a function of the stressors or experiences that we endure. It is an expression of value, the value God has assigned to *every* human life. Whether I choose to see that value or I relegate a life to the human trash pile, God sees us all as His beloved children. A look at Scripture references regarding forgiveness and mercy will quickly dispel any notion that we are *not* required to treat others as we want to be treated. There is no mandate in God's law that we are to stop loving another human being. We are always responsible to keep others lifted up in prayer, regardless of the wounds they have inflicted upon us.

For those who do not know the story of Corrie ten Boom, she was a Dutch woman whose family members were imprisoned for helping Jews during the World War II Nazi occupation of Holland. Her actions after the war ended were more profound and revealing of her Christian character than those that led to her arrest and imprisonment in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp with her sister Betsie. During the course of their confinement, Betsie's health failed under the cruelty administered by one camp official. The loss of her sister was a bitter blow for Corrie, who went on to survive the concentration camp experience. She subsequently used her wartime experiences to witness for Jesus

Christ, often speaking at public meetings.

At one such meeting, while speaking openly about God's forgiveness, she spotted a familiar face in the crowd. It was the man whose cruelty had contributed to Betsie's death. Internally, Corrie experienced a flood of emotion as the man left his seat and came forward. Every fiber of her being revolted at the thought of having any contact with this man, much less forgiving him, but Jesus spoke to her heart as the man approached. With the agony of one who has lost a loved one, she collapsed internally and surrendered herself to the care of her Lord Jesus Christ.

In a moment of great courage and submission to God's will, she reached out and spoke directly to this man, the author of her most intense pain. As a result of that encounter, her ministry became strengthened and began to deeply touch the lives of others. She had been obedient to God's Word, reaching out and forgiving this man, even as God had forgiven her for her own trespasses. This was a powerful application of the law of obedience: A visible expression of God's power at work in our lives.

At some point in the future, I am sure you will have your own encounter with the law of obedience. In Scripture, it is noted that obedience is better than sacrifice.⁹ You are seeking to bring your sorrows, pain, and sadness into your prayers, asking the Holy Spirit to direct you through some horrible options. If you have had the courage to ask for help, do not fear the One who can give you peace and understanding. Don't abandon the process you have started when you become fearful. Please remember that fearfulness is the state of mind that opposes sureness, peace, and a sound mind. Christ's post-resurrection appearances were

⁹1 Samuel 15:22

always accompanied by the words *Peace be with you, My peace I give to you!*¹⁰

You may wonder how the things I have presented so far come together to help you live your life and guide those you love in a meaningful way. In the next chapter, we will start to pull all of these essentials together, building on the truth of the gospel. I have spoken repeatedly about having child-like faith. I have also noted that God Himself looks upon us as His children, though sometimes wayward children. He never stops loving us and pouring out that love in the forms of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. All we have to do is ask *humbly* for His help in our lives.

Abba, Daddy, I really blew it again. Please help me!

¹⁰John 14:27



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN HOLDING THE FAMILY TOGETHER

*“When will I ever learn to live in God, when will I ever learn...
He gives me everything I need and more, when will I ever learn...”*

Van Morrison – lyrics from the Avalon Sunset album

This book has been written on the premise that offenders’ families endure an exquisitely personal pain unrecognized by most of those who share their world or ignored by those who have troubling notions about the accuracy of their perceptions. Few in this world are willing to run toward pain or suffering. So do not let your feelings of aloneness surprise you. Those feelings and others running equally deep may actually become a form of assurance that what you are experiencing is real and not just a bad dream.

The early chapters explored concepts that may seem unfamiliar to some, but if you've been down this road, you will recognize the road signs from way off. There never seems to be anyone who can hear your truth; they are usually caught up in their own version of truth. It is a wearying task to carry this burden without relief. No one wants to pick up that load and carry it for you. But every now and then, you exchange glances with someone, and your spirit recognizes a shared truth dwelling within them. It seems like you are silent comrades trodding along the same road.

Three chapters (Justice Orphans, Spouses Without Portfolios, and Family: What Will We Tell the Neighbors) were written to zero in on crucial particulars, those private, intense realities that bar you from seeking out comfort from the uninformed. You feel that you do not have enough time to go there or enough energy to pour into countering their assumptions and ignorance. It is a very lonely place to be, but a point of necessity in surviving the justice experience.

The next step in orienting yourself is to recognize the surge of emotions that flare up as you attempt to cope with the "awfulness" of your new experiences. Then we moved onto the actual experience of prison life, both inside the institution and outside in the community. With the exception of brief spiritual suggestions, little has been offered to fight this darkness from a consistent Christian perspective. You are not engaged in a fight with the legal system or its agents; you are engaged in a fight with an enemy who seeks to destroy everyone you love, including yourself.

This is a 24/7 undertaking. Unlike movies, TV shows, and romance novels, the battle of good against evil never ends with happily ever after. It merely changes its focus. Satan will always be actively probing

your defenses to find the weakest point. Any chink in the armor will be recognized and will emerge in subsequent skirmishes or battles. There is never any rest or relaxation available to the weary fighters, except in the context of their spiritual awareness. That becomes our re-supply link, the place where we can draw strength and comfort for the challenges that lie ahead.

The one consistency about this experience is the spiritual reality that threads its way through all elements of our daily lives. To some, it may seem as if I advocate spirituality over all other aspects of daily living. We still need to pay our bills, feed the children, put gas in the car, and dress ourselves. But I commit myself to addressing these aspects of reality under the provision, by the provision, and with the provision of God. People who have no understanding of your spiritual needs will not see the value in this approach. In fact, you are likely to receive odd looks from those who live for the here and now. They have no internal reference point to inform them about spiritual matters, or perhaps their understanding of these matters has been skewed to mask their own wants and desires. Remember the basic rule: you can't give away something you don't have!

My goal in writing the Knowetics series is not to urge you to pray or become a prayerful person as a precondition to experiencing the love of God. I think for some, prayer can foster the growth of relationship with God, but many others seem to be unable to grasp the essential realities of spiritual life solely through the medium of prayer. For those individuals, I have written about five incredible aspects of God's nature—five ways of coming into a relationship with Him based upon who He is and what

we are to Him. Remember His words: Come, let us reason together!¹¹

The next section in the book focuses upon knowing God through these five realities. He is knowable; He is trustable; He keeps His promises. If your past spiritual experiences have been laced with traditions, formulas, or routines that have governed your relationship with Him, then I must urge you to shake off that set-up as a restriction to the relationship God wants to share with you. All of His efforts to reach us are predicated in His love for His creation.

If prayer were only a cold, unanswered cry in the night, it would seem to be an impossible task to maintain an ongoing relationship with God. But His words express His great love for us, and Jesus Christ is the model of His love for us here and now. Abba (Daddy) Father is not the cry of a disinherited child or abandoned family member. WE, His children, have the right of relationship with our Creator.

He does not insist upon rigidity or formality as a precondition to answering our cries for help. He is the loving Father spoken of in the story of the prodigal son! I have discovered that when I take time to pour out my soul to Him, seeking His guidance, there are no problems beyond resolution. Like any parent, He longs to hear from His children and to bless them to the extent that His children will accept those blessings. You have been reading this book, probably hoping to find some new ways of coping with your pain and sorrow. Much of the content of this book shines a light upon the reality of good and evil present throughout our lives. How do these realities emerge in our lives when we feel that we are distant from any direct engagement with spiritual influences? Our sole pathway through life, which is uniquely our own, is the trail of choices

¹¹Isaiah 1:18

and decisions we have made.

So, you might ask what your choices or decisions have to do with the reality of good versus evil. Very simply stated, there are no choices or decisions that are morally neutral. All choices are ultimately made in furtherance of good or evil. There are no exceptions to this rule. Do my decisions, emotions, and actions consistently measure up to my spiritual awareness, or do I try to slip things past my conscience and mislabel evil for good or good for evil? If you are asking God to intervene in the lives of your family members, do you believe that you can fool your Creator with a slip of the hand or a wink of the eye? If this is your intention, you might as well put this book down and move on to the task of making up your grocery list or balancing your checkbook.

You and I were created for a purpose. Efforts to deceive others about our intentions may fool some people, but they will never fool God. Either you have become desperate enough with your life situation that you are ready to come clean and ask for His help, or you have deceived yourself into believing that you can fool God. Family members with their eyes on you may not say much, but they are looking to you to see what course of action you will choose. They will most likely follow your choice.

The key to being able to implement a relationship with God is based solely upon your own ability to be rigorously honest with yourself. If you have failed miserably at everything that you have attempted, tell Him from the start. Pour out your heart, not your complaints. Tell Him where *you* have gone wrong and ask for His grace to start to correct those wrong choices. Ask for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, which is freely given to *all* who ask for it.

Resolve to live your life, from here on out, one day at a time. Prayerfully submit your concerns and decisions, asking for His guidance. If you have felt the pains of being alone in the past, one of the first things you might notice now is that the feeling of loneliness starts to fade. You come to realize that you are not struggling with that spirit of loneliness anymore. This does not mean that your problems will resolve and all of your struggles will abate, but it does mean that you are no longer alone in handling the tasks of your life.

Does this sound too fantastic to be true? Well, you know the things that you have done to fight off the emotions of loneliness. You know the shame and pain your choices have brought you as you sought to flee your situation. You also know the coldness and distance that crept into your life as you attempted to justify your choices and decisions. Now, right now, is an excellent time to put down those horrible burdens and to ask for God's help in carrying this load.

The steps you take as you read this material will dramatically affect the lives of your other family members. While your pride may say that it is your life and therefore your decision to make, consider your own past decision-making and what resulted from that process. Captain Smith's decision to pursue a transatlantic speed record and ignore the advisories about icebergs ended in the Titanic disaster. Was his decision governed by concern for his (family of) passengers or by his prideful arrogance?

Human tragedy and the long history of disasters have been fueled with the same elements of indifference mixed with arrogance or the base human emotion of anger mixed with pride. These deadly combinations have produced fatal results over the course of recorded human history.

Would you trust your future and the future of your family members to the care of the same processes? There is only one way that I know of to test my plans and responses, and that is to submit them prayerfully and then listen, not only with my ears or head, but with my spirit, for surely God will answer my prayers as any good Father would do.

It is hard to live the dualism that suggests that you are really in charge, as opposed to having a purpose in living your life honoring and serving God. This whole philosophy of living suggests endless struggle and accommodation. Your current struggles should affirm your need of a loving relationship with God. My words are not to impress upon you the need for a spiritual relationship. I write to those who experience an inner void and intense hunger for the love of God in their life.

For those who understand these words, nothing more needs to be said that advocates reaching out to Him. For those who have no inkling of the meaning of these words, I can only hope and pray that you will come to experience the love of God in some dimension of your life. Without having spiritual awareness, the following section will seem like foolishness to some of my readers.

I think of the attribute of mercy as the crown jewel in God's crown. I believe it is through this primary quality that He gazes upon our lives. He is just and righteous, but neither of those qualities diminishes His mercy. As you start to approach the next section, I challenge you to expand your viewpoint and incorporate each quality until you have a clearer picture of God's love for you as His child. In viewing these few of His magnificent qualities, you are likely to discover new facets of His remarkable character.

I believe that God's grace flows into our lives out of His mercy. In a companion book, I describe grace as "what I need, when I need it." It includes His provision not only in our lives but also in the way He anticipates our needs: Right from the very beginning. I personally do not believe in the idea of coincidence. Nor do I believe in things happening by accident. I have observed the flow of grace across a wide swath of life to such an extent that such a coincidence has become a statistical impossibility.

Mercy and grace are the qualities that drew me into a meaningful relationship with God. For you, it may be other specific attributes, but examining any of them will eventually lead you to a point where His love for us flows freely from His written words. It lives apart as a private reality that guides your life in the coming days. Instead of things falling apart, you will start to experience His grace and strength in all areas of your life. You will also see these qualities flowing into the lives of family members.

Forgiveness may become the turning point as you ponder the ingratitude, selfishness, and indifference that are evident in the lives of some who profess to be believers. Those insights are not meant to cause you to point the finger at those who live this way; rather, it is God's way of providing you with a mirror for looking into your own life. Those memories will likely trigger tears, fears, a feeling of being overwhelmed, and a strong desire to bury your shame. The problem is that we can never keep it out of the view of our Father, our Creator and our Sustainer. He knows all about each of us and still loves us.

Forgiveness is at the core of our relationship with Him. Just as the

prodigal son did not anticipate His father's love, we know all of our failings and flinch at the thought of exposing them to God's love. Since He already knows all about us, there's no reason to continue to flee from His loving embrace. Just bring the broken pieces to His care and watch what He does with your life and the lives of your family members.

You see, the remarkable thing about spiritual solutions is that they do not remain restricted to us but have the capacity to flow over into other lives as well. Most of the time, we will have no awareness that the actions we take for ourselves and our loved ones are affecting other lives. Infrequently, someone makes a passing comment, but those who live in our midst observe the consistency reflected in our behavior. The old saying "seeing is believing" is an appropriate capstone for these thoughts.

The last two spiritual lifelines flow out of our budding relationship with God. Scripture tells us that each man has a measure of faith. It also reassures us that this measure is sufficient to meet our needs. We are never without. Faith is the personal reassurance that God has His eyes on us, no matter how far gone we may feel.

In my limited understanding of theology, hope flows from my faith and goes on to confirm my belief in God, specifically the life of Jesus Christ, including His resurrection and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as a constant source of direction, comfort, and strength. My hope as it is fulfilled goes on to feed my faith, which likewise continues to restore my hope. This is not a play on words but an open invitation to experience it yourself.

In these matters, I have urged you to consider these unique aspects of God's character. But that is only one part of the spiritual equation. Out of our relationship with Him flows an awareness of ourselves as spiritual beings. This is consistent with the words in Genesis that remind us that we are made in God's *image and likeness*! If I am created in that mold, then it only follows that I am to live out the nature of God among those with whom I come into contact.

What this means is that my reality is re-oriented as I come to understand the characteristics of God. I start to experience life as providing many opportunities to practice the same virtues toward others, since God offers me these gifts freely on a daily basis. Gradually, my selfishness, self-deception, and indifference start to slip away, and my life becomes transformed and renewed. The little opportunities to bless others become wonderful experiences to share God's love with others.

These encounters will often be of the silent variety, where I use the circumstances to govern my responses. Where a rude behavior in the past would have drawn a retaliatory comment or a traffic confrontation, which would have brought forth anger and antagonism, now such incidents become fuel for me to bless others with little acts of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. In doing so, I am outwardly displaying my Father's love for those who may still be suffering from selfishness and indifference. I repay their thoughtless acts with kindness and self-denial.

Perhaps at some point, they will experience this curious response set so frequently that it starts them thinking about why it is happening to them. In showing them mercy, grace, and forgiveness, we are not only living out the law of love, we free ourselves from the burdens of endless

conflicts and grudges. I believe there is a tipping point in everyone's life, where the gracious acts of others will come to weigh heavily on their conscience and start to foster the growth of faith and hope.

When it happens or how it happens is not for me to say; that is in the province of God's care. I do these small, unnoticed actions out of my love for Jesus Christ. I rest easy, knowing that there is nothing insignificant in my service toward others, since my God judges by the intention and not the outcome. In this way, I am entrusting my family members, especially any who are away and incarcerated, in the hands of God. I focus on those who are in my care, making efforts to bless those around me. I may bless them physically, emotionally, and financially, but most of all spiritually.

To complete any of these tasks successfully, I need to be able to put my cares into the hands of Jesus and step out in faith, knowing that He will take care of me and my family. It is not guessing, wishing, or hoping that He is going to help us; it becomes a quiet and unshakable knowledge that I am in God's promised care.

The first part of this transformation process happens internally. Letting go can be very hard or painful when you're filled with fear, embarrassment, shame, and uncertainty. If you have no belief structure of your own to hold onto while you make this initial step, then hang onto *my* belief structure. While I have never seen God, I know He exists by my years of experiences shared with Him. I know that my Savior is Jesus Christ, and I have no difficulty in sharing my belief in Him.

Hold onto these threads of faith and reach out and take the first step forward. There are others just like you. You are not alone and will never

be alone again in your life. Your worth and dignity flow from what God says about you, not what your neighbors might say. He says that you are a precious child of His.

As you make those initial steps, others will notice the change in you. Some friends will criticize and abandon you. My question to you at this point is simple ... were they ever true friends?

Others will recognize the Spirit of God that has been stirred up in your life. They will cheer you onward and prayerfully give the glory to God for what He is accomplishing in your life and those of your family members.

You spiritual actions will *never* engage a neutral response from others. That will become one way to recognize the importance of your decisions. Those decisions, even when undertaken in the privacy of your own home, will eventually become a spiritual foundation in your witness and testimony. Your example will influence many other lives, not just those of your family members.

God will start to use you in other areas of your life, helping you to overcome habits, sins, crime, or other behaviors you were certain that you would never change. You will suddenly realize that God is doing for you what you could not do for yourself. When you experience His power in your life, you will wonder why you resisted His love for so long.

The spiritual lifelines section is a chance to get to know God differently. As you read this section, call out and ask Him why you have never seen these truths before. He will always answer the cry of His precious child.

PART FOUR

SPIRITUAL LIFELINES

This section grew out of my attempts to make sense out of events that had occurred in my life. Either things were going along well, or they were suddenly chaotic and threatened to become overwhelming. I was drawn to the first three concepts (mercy, grace, and forgiveness) out of my prayer life and spiritual readings. The other concepts (faith and hope) seemed to grow out of the knowledge that I had acquired from the other concepts.

Either predating this understanding or in a parallel process, I became aware of the presence of *fear, distraction, and/or confusion* whenever I experienced turmoil or upheaval. Initially, I assumed these emotions always followed turmoil and upheaval. Therefore, I would dismiss the feelings of fear, distraction, and/or confusion as a consequence of my turmoil.

Later, after considerable reading and spiritual direction, I began to notice that fear, confusion, and/or distraction *preceded* my experience with turmoil and upheaval. Since the process normally happened quickly and without my awareness of the sequence of these events, I had overlooked a valuable spiritual fact regarding my life journey. Years later, I can assure you that fear, distraction, and confusion are three of the most commonly used tools of the evil one. They are meant to steer you off course and keep you foundering until you abandon any course of action that conflicts with the interests of evil.

I spent a great deal of time in the earlier chapters laying the groundwork to help you understand the reality of the daily struggle between good and evil. Now I will shift gears and point you in the direction of *practical* solutions to these struggles. My hope is that you will start to see the commonality of experience that all human beings share but few are willing to talk about honestly and openly.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ONE — MERCY

I am a man who has broken the laws of God and man many times in my life. No one, including God, owes me anything. In fact, in view of His holiness, I should be left to stand in the dock of heaven while He metes out what I've rightly earned. No alternative, no remedy, no probation, no copping a deal, no appeal, no savvy silver-tongued attorney to represent my interests. Just a one-to-one encounter between me and the God of the Universe!

We will *all* face that courtroom scene in the future. Those of us who have had reluctant courtroom experiences in this life know exactly what the word *trial* means. If you have ever had to listen to the hateful attack of a self-righteous prosecutor, you have already tasted what is to come when Satan presents his case against you, pulling out you're your public and private offenses. All of the evidence against you will be admitted for

everyone to examine. Your life will be laid bare.

It won't be like an episode of "Law and Order," where all your constitutional rights will be carefully applied. No, sir. That is going to be the ultimate moment of truth in your life. You may be surprised at how many individuals will come into that heavenly courtroom without any preparation.

Crying out for mercy at that moment and pointing out that the heavenly clerk failed to give you enough time to prepare won't hold sway among those courtroom members. Telling the God of the Universe that you object to the proceedings because of a lack of timely notice will be similar to pleading ignorance of the law to a charge of murder anywhere in the United States. You would be swiftly informed that ignorance of the law is not a defense.

Another surprising reality will be that God will not allow you to compare yourself to others to gain any legal edge in His courtroom. You will be examined on the thoughts, words, actions, and inactions of *your own* life. You may have ridden high on the hog in this life, but in the next, there will be no honorable titles or labels of the past.

Speaking to the issue as though it were all a bad dream and calling yourself a "freethinker" will offer no hope of escaping this judgment. I can be a God denier all the days of my life and encourage others in this practice. But I will have to account for all I have been graciously given and will struggle in silence as I consider the grandeur of His presence.

Think of the shocking implications for those of us who have spent a lifetime trading on various aspects of the truth. When you see eternity

looming and all you can do is give affirmative responses to Satan's accusations, you will tragically consider all of the missed opportunities you had to embrace God's helping hand. You will hate the fact that you disregarded all the offers of help sent your way as you sped by in your hurry to live your life. Wow.

I will stand in the dock also. I will face the same prosecutor who knows every aspect of my life. There are no secrets to be kept from God. Since Satan has been a silent partner in my life of sin (crime against God), he is intimately aware of my nature and history. No use crying now. It is all there. I have nowhere to hide. One by one, I answer yes to the charges on the docket under my name. No need trying to explain. It didn't work for Adam and Eve, and they were very close to God. It's not going to help me a one bit.

Just at the closing moment of my judgment hearing, a door bangs open in the back of the courtroom, and all eyes turn away from me to focus on the newcomer, who bestows on me a look of pure love. His regal majesty, His presence silences the songs of men and angels, and for a moment, I listen to His approaching footsteps. He doesn't look anything like Caesar, whom the crowds of old awaited for the final sign of judgment—thumbs up or thumbs down. This One has not come to my hearing as a curious observer. He has come to keep His promise to me!

All are looking at Him who has entered the courtroom on my behalf, and with a solemn glance at His Father, He states, "He is one of mine, Father!" Now the proceedings will be dismissed, since all legal and devilish claims against me have been fully paid by His blood on Calvary.

He is my Savior, my Redeemer, Jesus Christ!

What I have just described to you is the supreme act of mercy. Jesus Christ is the author and dispenser of all mercy. Mercy is revealed in many ways, but it means He will keep His promises to me, not just in heaven, but *now* and *here*.

His actions on my behalf have given me a unique ability to present my case to Him at any moment of the day. I have had multiple life experiences where the conclusion was already determined before the proceedings started. It makes one wonder why it is necessary to hold such stage art and for whose benefit it is held. Like a well-rehearsed and highly anticipated Broadway play, these proceedings have great drama at the core and a formula finish to ensure that there will be limited disappointment when the finger is pointed downward. It is grand theater, but it only bears a shadowy resemblance to any element of real life.

The mercy of Jesus Christ is not theater; it is an encounter with truth itself. Nothing in this life will stir your blood like the experience of Jesus Christ coming to your aid and defense. He is never early and never late. He is a gentleman and is always on time. He is a keeper of His word. He delivers prisoners, setting us free without limits. That is mercy: God's personal engagement in my life no matter how many times I have fallen down. He lifts my head and restores my peace.

Notice how I have spoken in this chapter. Everything written is in the first tense. There is no other possible tense to describe an encounter with God.

A friend of mine, Father Paddy, returned from a holiday in Ireland. He had spent several weeks visiting family and friends. During his stay abroad, he encountered someone he knew, and the talk turned to the subject of mercy. His friend lived in a rural area where farming was a way of life. He described a recent sermon that an old parish priest had given, attempting to define this concept of mercy.

The old priest's frame of reference was the agricultural community in which he and his parishioners lived. Using that background, he challenged his listeners to imagine stumbling across a lost sheep tangled in thickets, nettles, and thorns. Unable to extricate itself from its trapped position, bellowing in pain, there it stands. It tries to shake itself loose but becomes more deeply tangled in the vegetation, creating more pain because of its struggles. The old priest painted the picture well in the minds of his parishioners and then offered them the wise observation that mercy would be their effort to set the sheep free.

That is what God does for His sheep.

Mercy is the majesty of Jesus Christ bending down to comfort a great sinner like me, whispering in my ear, "You are my beloved child. Welcome home."

He then says, "Step up and take your place at the feast table. We have all been waiting for you." He turns to an angel to say, "Bring the sandals for his feet and the new robe of righteousness." Then he smiles at me and says, "I realize that it has been a difficult journey, but you are home at last."

I am a sinner! I deserve nothing but condemnation. Nothing I have done

in my life has any worth or value apart from the great accomplished work of Jesus Christ. Mercy is the embrace of my loving Savior after He has done all of the work!

I was in my fifties before I had my own dog. He was a wonderful animal, and I was ready for the experience of unconditional love. Barney was a rescue dog. He had been abandoned when his owners had moved from their house to another location. They left him in the backyard with no food or water. He was discovered later as he was chewing his way through the wooden fence that surrounded the backyard. As a direct consequence of that act of abandonment and his survival attempts, his canine fangs were worn down to nubs.

He was sensitive about letting women approach him or pet him. On two occasions, he took a nip at female friends. The last one cost him a trip to the dog pound for ten days until it was determined that he did not have rabies. Surprisingly, Quinta, my wife, never had any problems with Barney. In fact, before her arrival from Indonesia, Barney had been my dog. Shortly after she started making meals for both of us, I lost his fidelity to another master and found that he even accompanied her outside to get the mail without being on a leash. He never did that for me!

Barney quickly adjusted to living with a psychologist and a dentist. For me, it was a time to learn things that I had missed in younger years. Barney at times could be almost human with his own wants, needs, and opinions on a variety of topics. As all dogs occasionally will do, Barney would do something annoying, and I would scold him for his behavioral breach. It was then that I found this mysterious quality in him: he always conducted himself with meekness after incurring my annoyance.

I came to realize that he was waiting for a signal from me; any signal might do, but he needed a signal that I was going to be merciful to him and reinstate him in family life. Those beautiful brown eyes that brought delight to so many of our family members and friends could look into my heart and always find a spot of loving friendship. Soon we would both be engaged in playing with the other, and the trifling matter was quickly forgotten.

My relationship with Barney quickly reinforced what I had been learning about the way God relates to me. When I blew it and found myself on the distant side of sin, I knew that it was important to make it right with my Redeemer. Initially, I would put that process off for as long as possible because, frankly, I did not know what to do to make matters right. I was waiting for a signal ... any signal to let me know I was forgiven. When I had to scold Barney, immediately his ears would go back close to his head, and he would hang his head in embarrassment and ease his way up next to me. All the time, in my heart I had already forgiven my beloved Barney. He never needed to do anything more than be loveable old Barney.

God has always loved me with the same sweet mercy and compassion that had stirred in my own heart toward Barney, only with much more intensity. Out of the loving relationship that I shared with Barney, I came to understand the meaning of God's mercy toward me. I did not need to convince God to be merciful to me. That was His natural disposition.

The love between Jesus Christ and myself has taken shape in the realm of mercy and compassion. Out of that awareness, my consciousness toward others has changed, and I have learned to look beyond their displays

of offensive behavior. Now my heart strives to understand their needs, and a desire to touch them in some small meaningful way is triggered. It does not matter how they respond to me; all that matters is that I have been merciful to others as God is merciful to me. I do this not out of an attempt to pay God back for His blessings to me. It gives me joy to honor my Father.

By whatever I share with you about God's mercy, I have already limited His greatness in your mind. There are no limits to God's mercy, so anything I say might miss the mark in your life. Though my words may be awkward and ungraceful, they are the only means I have to communicate with you.

I believe that if God's attributes (virtues) were jewels He would wear in a crown, then mercy would be the chief crown jewel. How can I possibly stir you to look at its many facets? You must look for yourself. You will surely see it. You will surely find Him, if you seek Him.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

TWO — GRACE

Knowetics is not a substitute for practicing the faith you may have embraced in your life. It is the personal fulfillment of that faith. If you are a non-believer, it is not an attempt to sway your beliefs or attempt to convert you. You are a unique being with an individual body, emotions, a substantial, thoughtful life, and a long history of attempting to put together your views on life. Knowetics does not try to take away your basic views of life. Hold on to what you have.

If you travel by air from New York City to Singapore, you do not surrender your ethnic background or culture as part of the process. You are still the same unique individual in the other hemisphere that you were back in the heart of America. Surrender to God's care and protections flows naturally from having understood the true meaning of His love for us. His grace (unique and individual favor) offers us the opportunity to

understand His nature through the everyday practice of talking with Him.

God has a way to reach us in the most desperate of situations. He also has ways to reach us when we are experiencing a cloud of satisfaction and a sense of personal fulfillment. This concept of grace may invite an uninformed view of a grace factory churning out specific products for use by everyone, such as candy bars, drinks, or breakfast cereals. The manufacturer attempts to create a product that meets the taste and health standards of most consumers. We learn about our preferences as we grow, and then we go out and find things we either like or dislike.

God's grace is unique in the way it is constructed and expressed solely for my own personal use. It is not dated and does not expire or lose its effectiveness at some point in time. Rather, by its extraordinary nature, it will flow on for the benefit of others if I should choose to ignore its promise. One thing about having an experience with God: He is a gentleman and will never force His ways on us.

My sister Maureen encouraged me to come and visit her while she was living in Africa. Since I had the time, funds, and good health, I was able to enjoy her hospitality and visit four countries during my trip. That in itself was a small example of grace, given the fact that she has been a supporter, advocate, and fan of mine through all of the lost years and beyond. Unearned favor! It's not only God who creates and dispenses grace; we give or deny that experience to everyone we meet in life.

During my African adventure, I had the chance to watch many of the children wearing clothing that had obviously been made for a Western

market. Yet, here were children halfway around the world, proudly wearing these highly prized individual items of clothing.

Apparently, these products weren't needed in the markets of the First World, so they found a home on the plains and in the cities of Africa. That same thing happens with the flow of grace. If I don't use what was given to me, it will eventually flow on to someone else. In God's economy, there is no waste or meaningless activity.

Grace is what I need, when I need it.

Back in my dating life, I had the pleasant experience of knowing a young Vietnamese woman. Believing myself to be a good cook, I offered to make dinner, and she quickly offered to bring dessert. Done deal! When the day came, I gave my best effort to create something pleasant and culturally sensitive. She did the same in her selection of durian as a dessert fruit. In spite of my many travels in Asia, I had never experienced this unique fruit. Let me assure you now that if durian had been the fruit in question in Eden, it would have served its purpose with the first bite; it was wonderful to look at and tempting to behold.

I had seen hand-lettered signs in a small hotel in Korea carrying the message, "No Durian Allowed in Hotel Rooms." Unfortunately, that did not help with the decision I made at dinner that night. My guest broke out the little white, marshmallow-like treasures, which were about the size of small oranges. The smell was pungent, but that didn't stop me. With child-like confidence, I put a forkful of the offered treasure in my mouth.

Now, if you have never been a man, I have to confess that appearances

are of major importance. So there I was, seated at the dining table with my new Asian friend and a roommate (Curt) only too happy to share in the delights of a meal he didn't have to cook. We sat at that table (Curt and I), absorbed by the exotic experience awaiting us, and I noted with a quiet sense of satisfaction that my guest was making eye contact with me from across the table. What I took to be a look of interest and encouragement was more likely a humorous attempt to warn me about the life-altering experience at the end of my fork.

Into my mouth went this tasty treat. With the first bite, my life was changed into an alternate reality that involved a sudden loss of inner harmony and tranquility. My mouth was trying to tell my mind something, but my body was screaming so loudly that my mind couldn't hear it.

This experience became of great significance in my life. While I had loaded down my fork with a surplus of durian, expecting to taste something delightful, Curt had wisely chosen to try only a small bite of the fruit. You can imagine how I felt as I sat at the table, attempting to appear suave and debonair. I quickly realized that if I were to show true gratitude to my guest for her gift, I had better swallow and smile.

I overcame my gag reflex by sheer inner strength and forced the nasty fruit down my throat. I sincerely hoped I could pull this off without vomiting on the table. It's amazing how many thoughts flow through the mind at a time like that. While my life didn't flash before my eyes, my choices certainly did. I can't be sure now, but I think my guest's eyes twinkled with amusement and satisfaction at that key moment. She was trying very hard to read my body language. For some reason, I had lost the power to speak. Not to be outdone, Curt with his great sense

of timing noted that his dessert was very tasty, but he was definitely full. With the sweetest expression of Christian friendship, he graciously offered to allow me to finish his portion. So now, you've heard the whole story. Hopefully you can see how I was able to figure out that the mind is capable of functioning on many levels all at the same time.

Grace is nothing like that experience. God does not invite us for discussion and then offer us some secret (supposed) delight, only to persuade us to stuff it down our throats at the moment of truth. And He doesn't remind me disapprovingly that it was an experience created by my own choice (the free will mystery). When He interacts with me, I find Him soothing and comforting because He knows everything about my spirit, my preferences, and my life history. His responses to my everyday situations are tailored to my own needs, and that gentle assist He always offers matches the true definition of grace.

Scripture tells me that grace is God's unearned favor. The experience of grace becomes lost in the seriousness of the words. Think about it in terms of vanilla ice cream. If you never taste vanilla ice cream, then you have no reference point that will help you make sense of my description of "ice cream"—especially vanilla ice cream. As hard as I might try to describe it, you'll never understand my experience with vanilla ice cream. The more I try, the worse it gets. "Let's see; it's wet, cold, creamy, sweet," and so on. It is a communication problem matching the proportions of the complexity that faced the two scientists, Crick and Watson, who struggled with the properties of the DNA molecular structure. Once they had evidence of its existence, they were presented with the challenge of creating a model that could be used by others in education and science.

It's human nature to experience frustration sometimes, at which point we may choose not to communicate with others as we try to understand our own personal experiences. Sadly, we move away with the knowledge that we've just missed a great opportunity to connect with another human being. The other person walks away mumbling about the mystery of wet, cold, creamy, and sweet, and starts looking for their own vanilla ice cream experience—or they decide you're suffering from an overactive imagination. Pure fantasy!

And so, we've lost that incredible opportunity to share and grow. Just one lick of vanilla ice cream could create a new experience of shared knowledge. Grace is just like that experience. Before Christopher Columbus set sail, others made fun of his belief that the world was round. They decided to oppose any new ideas that challenged what most people accepted and understood. That response set was played out in the closure of many opportunities, quietly and sometimes not so quietly, dismissing his claims as the ravings of an eccentric individual. "Nice guy, but a little odd. He is so intelligent, but his fantasy life is something else. Don't waste your time. Be polite, nod your head, and quickly move away."

Columbus did not accept the continued denial of what he knew in his heart to be true, so he moved beyond Genoa, hoping to connect with someone who shared his vision. He found that person in Queen Isabella, who funded his grand scheme and was rewarded with the experience of his discovery. Columbus shared the basics of a similar discovery process as Sir Alexander Fleming, credited with discovering penicillin, and Crick and Watson's discovery of the DNA molecule. All of those things

were real long before they were “discovered.” Our knowledge that they existed was incomplete and outside of our experience.

Grace is what kept each of these individuals moving forward in pursuit of what they knew in their hearts to be true, no matter how shadowy it was at the beginning. It is God’s quiet and helpful encouragement that helps us identify what we know to be true within ourselves. Oftentimes, listening to what some so-called professionals think tends to muddy our thoughts rather than being helpful or adding to what we know to be true. Not all professional interaction is awkward or unhelpful, but we can be left with the same communication problem as the person who walked away mumbling about our description of vanilla ice cream. Only God has the sensitivity to understand our journey through life without trying to diagnose or label our behavior.

Labeling is not understanding, nor is it knowledge in itself! Labeling is a substitute for getting into the heart of the troubles faced by another individual. It’s a rare person who can selflessly engage others on a level playing field of love and acceptance. Grace is God’s gift to us that makes that experience possible. It is a meeting with love. Grace goes beyond labels and opens a new experience of shared understanding. It’s like the simple act of acceptance showed by Father Charles in the way he connected with the prisoners who worshiped in his prison chapel. He showed grace by acknowledging the lives and sufferings of these human beings. He didn’t judge them by what each man had been labeled because of prior behavior. In this way, he forged new behavioral links in those who had been deemed unfit to live in society. That simple act reaffirmed the worth and dignity of each individual. Grace will start to

make a difference in our lives if we can get past the idea of it being a religious problem and begin to see how grace has great potential in all of our lives. Whether I choose to accept it or not, life is a process, not a moment frozen in time. The same is true of spirituality, as it offers us insight into the continuing purpose after death. We either believe that our purpose is to help others and have our own lives end in the finality of death, or we believe in an alternate reality that continues in an afterlife. The love of God transcends all such boundaries and by grace, He helps us to transform our lives and reach out to others with kindness, self-knowledge, and compassion. This experience enhances the knowledge and understanding that we acquired with our first lick of vanilla ice cream.

The way spirituality works is a lot like the five fingers you have on your hand. They are all equally important, serving multiple functions at the same time. They work together to help you accomplish whatever you are doing that requires your ability to grasp and perhaps even to meaningfully interact with the world. Would you cease to exist if you lost a hand or a finger? No! But your entire life would be changed because of such a loss. The basic ability to grasp now requires some surgeons to become specialized in the field of hand surgery. The importance is played out in the creation of the artificial hand that serves to help a disabled individual regain the use and satisfaction of being able to grasp any object of interest. In fact, a whole industry based upon the development of a range of prosthetic devices has quietly grown in our midst, serving the needs of those maimed by devastation or disease. Grace is a lot like one of those operational fingers. Do you remember the story of Jesus Christ healing the man with the withered hand? Jesus recognized the whole

picture of this man's life instantly. He didn't define his experience with this man as a meeting with someone who had been maimed. Rather, His sense of compassion moved Him to restore the functional ability of the man's hand. It was an act of grace, transforming grace! That is what He is seeking to do in our lives.

The maimed man surely never imagined that his hand could be restored. He only had the surety of knowing that if his situation could possibly change, Jesus was the only One who could make it happen. He moved forward into the presence of His Maker, and with the confidence of a small child, he extended his hand. That whole experience was about grace.

The man had done nothing to deserve the gift of healing. He was not a person of remarkable reputation, great wealth, or social stature. He was only a humble and desperate (perhaps viewed by society as worthless and unworthy) individual who could not offer the kingdom of God any type of payment for his healing.

That sudden meeting with Jesus went beyond his level of understanding and his limited view of what was possible. When Jesus healed this man's hand, He also healed his soul in an encounter that transformed his life.

With a soul full of joy and love, he worshipped his Healer and delighted in reliving this experience by telling others his remarkable story. He likely did so for the remainder of his life because the experience of meeting Jesus changed him. He was never the same again!

We are called upon to discover and rediscover this experience with grace and to share it graciously with *all* others. Truth is a constant. It never

varies. Our awareness of truth changes our thoughts or expressions. Jesus Christ is the picture of truth, and He encourages us to exercise our ability to reach out our withered hands and defeated spirits in hope. It is the spirit of His grace in action.



CHAPTER TWENTY

THREE — FORGIVENESS

It humbles me that the God of life itself has given me the privilege of writing about this remarkable gift. I'm the last person who deserves His gracious embrace, but like the man with the withered hand or the blind man standing before the Sanhedrin, I'm glad to be able to talk about my limited understanding of this essential dynamic with God from the context of my own spirituality.

Forgiveness is another finger (component) that has been freely given to us to help us complete our journey of life. It's the promise of renewed friendship with God. Not the sullen experience of partial acceptance that awaits the prisoner's return to society. It is the essence of the father's embrace of the prodigal son, the stuff we dream of in our most private moments, a return to love.

I'm a rather odd type of fellow. When the waiter or waitress brings me

a freshly prepared meal and cautions me that the plate is hot, my mind refuses to accept it. I have to test it for myself. With my finger, I gingerly touch the plate, and sure enough, I burn myself. This action serves to show others my obstinate spirit. With all the forethought of a mule, I go happily (or not so happily) on my way, experiencing life. (I also find it amusing to disregard wet paint signs.)

I'm sure that if you feel the same way I do, you have your own ideas about what it's like to delight in new experiences. Have you heard the saying that doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity? I'm sure that heaven's courtroom of judgment will erupt with laughter when my personal life tapes are replayed for all of the hosts of heaven. I can even feel myself blushing with embarrassment at this moment as I privately review some of those moments. I wonder how I'll be able to handle the laughter of God's friends and associates.

The act of making unusual choices has been ongoing throughout my life. It's not something I've just learned about myself. The most glaring examples happened from the age of fifteen until thirty-one, when I was using alcohol and drugs in a way that would have impressed Don Quixote. His countless attempts at jousting with windmills were the same as my long-term use of mind-altering trials.

Not to be outdone by the obstacles associated with mastering my chemical friendships, I learned, in a moment of wonderful awareness at the age of thirty-one, that the secret of conquering my chemical problem is in giving up the struggle. That was a spiritual experience unlike any other learning experience in my life. In that moment of clarity, I was

faced with the choice of either using this newfound knowledge or not applying it to my life. Thankfully, in a moment of quiet desperation and proffered grace, I was able to grasp the offered life jacket and start the slow process of returning to sane living. While this moment marked a personal change in my life, the actual reforming came during my years of recovery. That's why it is called a healing experience.

While God-inspired, the individual has to do the reforming and be part of the personal decision-making. These past thirty-five years have brought a growing commitment to the truth. That journey has shown me the need for personal forgiveness and forgiving others for their own trespasses. I'm not an authority on the subject of forgiveness. I can only offer my own point of view on how important this is and show some possible opportunities to apply its soothing effects to life's troubles and concerns.

For those who have offended much, forgiveness offers the hope of doing better in the future. After all, Scripture reminds us that our judgments once made us enemies of God,¹² and this was confirmed by our actions. His gift of personal forgiveness is the single most important thing that helps us get back in touch with the Central Figure of importance in our lives. Its main effects are to restore our relationship, reaffirm our self-worth, and sharpen our ability to look into the future with hope and promise. That's forgiveness in action. Critical to our personal understanding is knowing that forgiveness has always started with God. He forgave us first. We don't carry a supply of forgiveness around to use for ourselves or for the benefit of others in some high-minded show of enlightenment.

¹²Romans 5:10.

God's forgiveness began with that small, still voice within us urging us to hold onto it. The mental picture I have is that of a loving parent who tries to shoo a precious child onto the school bus. The parent represents God. The school bus is life, and the child is each of us. Word pictures work for me!

For many of us, it's a lot easier to forgive others than to apply this soothing balm to our own lives. I'm likely to have a small portion of forgiveness available for others. But as for me, I run when I think that my actions have meaning in God's great plan for my own life. I actively resist the urge to accept His loving embrace. I'd rather pull out the self-censure stick and give myself a good wallop of reality.

In Borderline Personality Disorder, the patient may frequently self-mutilate or become a "cutter." This form of behavior develops because life has made the individual numb, feeling like nothing more than a shadow. The act of cutting oneself brings pain, and that pain gives back the ability to feel emotions again. The problem with inflicting oneself with pain is that the label of loser will likely become a fixture in that life.

Each new wound might bring momentary relief, but it also brings the pain of constant disapproval of the damage being done. And so the inner battle continues. I may choose new behaviors, therapy, medications, chemical substances, or weird experiences to control the chaos raging within. Since it is a privately waged battle, others can only watch our struggles from the outside. Because we usually distrust others, we can't afford to open up and admit what's going on. We begin to believe that our desperate choices are either to commit suicide or become a hollow shell, no longer experiencing life. We are just a shape with no real substance.

If we make ourselves small enough, maybe we'll just vanish, and no one will know that we are gone.

Do you remember the problem we had describing ice cream earlier in the book? The same principles of personal discovery and communication also apply to my efforts to explain this growing awareness to you. How can I even think of sharing my fractured life with you in any meaningful way? I'm beaten before I even attempt to express myself to others. I'm screaming inside that I'm just like you and that I'm in terrible pain, but my muffled roars are misinterpreted as something else, and you quickly back away from me.

Once again, I'm alone and small and afraid and without hope. I'm lost in a strange kind of time warp, beyond any hope of getting help from others. The help I seek (which I know by instinct) is a true connection with one other person. Unfortunately, this is all I know, so I continue to mindlessly self-destruct and cause myself pain with each new problem that comes along. You don't recognize how desperate I am, and I can't see that I keep on offending you and society by the way I behave.

The cycle finally leads to being totally shut out of life, making me a non-person. This shows that severicide has two important dynamics: the reaction brought out by individuals and society, and my own actions that put the whole thing in motion. The result is a song without words that I sway along to while waiting for an end to my personal pain. Life without expression, connection, or relief will ultimately lead to death or untold damage to individual lives. We can all recognize the melody because, to some extent, we have all had similar experiences.

The problem with trying to communicate (in this context) is that not everyone is aware of the volume control knob. So I dismiss the constant whines of family members or friends by thinking about my own ability to decrease the personal turmoil of life, because I know how to use my personal volume control knob. I have nothing to offer others because they should know better. I am blinded by my inability to understand that they have no idea what it means to have an internal volume control knob to help them to soften the turmoil. Besides, I am tired of trying to educate them. Why don't they just grow up? It's time to apply the things we've already learned.

Eventually, we may choose to distance ourselves from others since they don't seem to know what it takes to live life successfully. We privately label them as suffering from a social learning disorder and refer to them as "socially retarded." We don't do this because we are vindictive but because we've become so aggravated as we try to bring back some sense of inner peace and harmony. I guess we're not so different, after all! Is it just a matter of individual difference or intensity? This is another example of knowing the basic recipe and what makes up the essential ingredients. Having no concept of what the end product looks like, I stumble on blindly. I can't give away something that I don't have!

My friend Matt is serving a life sentence for the murder of a young woman during the commission of a felony. It is called the felony murder rule. The crime itself occurred in the distant past. I recognize that you may think this demonstrates a glaring disregard for the life of the victim. In an unthinkable moment, his actions inflicted grievous harm on others. There is no room for disregarding others in the context of knowetetics.

The rest of the story is separate from his crime.

I can't know what happens within an individual who is overcome by passions, pursuits, or the rage of the moment. Others may be able to write things off with their behavioral theories, profiling technologies, and statistics of the pseudo-science of societal distancing. I'm just concerned with the real people—real flesh and blood people, faceless, unnamed people, who suffer and live life as I do.

Nothing within knowetics should be used to justify the use of any form of violence against others. The reality of life is that random acts of violence do occur.

Having confirmed what we already know, let's move to the heart of the issue. What do we do in response to these events? We process the events through what we call the "justice system," and we refer the offenders to some made-up form of legally defined suspended animation. We know that they exist, but they exist outside our own lives. Our traumas usually fade in intensity over time. Mercifully, our minds are able to lessen the shock, and we go on with life. The system is dealing with offender. That is all we need to know. End of the story, right?

Once linked by these events, our lives are forever changed. Though we may "move on," we remain spiritually connected to that individual for the rest of our lives by the aftereffects of the traumatic event. This is true whether the event is murder, divorce, or just being labeled as "stupid or uncaring." In some strange sense, we're all playing out the drama on the stage of life.

To help shed more light on this subject, I would like to go back to the

world of science and discuss some things that might be useful.

Using chaos theory as a model may prove helpful, as it serves to enrich our understanding of seemingly unrelated events (acceptance of the underlying beliefs of knowetics does not preclude the usefulness of informed theoretical scientific thought). We now understand the new reality of constituent multiple dimensions, inherent in the known laws of physics. In layman's terms, there is a relationship between all the things that happen in our world. Nothing occurs randomly or in an isolated fashion.

With the thoughtful expansion and enhanced understanding derived from the theoretical work of Niels Bohr (he stated his understanding about the way large things and small things operate in the context of quantum physics), we can intellectually grasp a new understanding of how these laws may operate differently, or in conjunction with each other, on macro (large) and micro (small) levels of efficiency. This redefinition of theory has afforded us the opportunity to understand the subtle interplay between the macro and micro applications of the laws of physics.

Knowetics is the experience of our discovering the existence of truth, which helps us to look at our individual life experiences in understanding the elegance of God's Word. Individual spirituality comes from our personal knowledge applied and defined by our life's struggles and experience.

Matt's criminal actions had a ripple effect on us all. All our choices have similar effects on the lives of countless others. But this story does not

end with simply knowing this event occurred. It includes the actions of this young woman's parents, who came forward and publicly forgave their daughter's killer.

Now that is a paradigm shift! It's a new awareness, much like the "discovery" of quantum physics. Only this event was played out in a small prison chapel far from the eyes of the media. On their value scale, it wasn't worth burying on the eighteenth page of the newspaper. But remarkably, this event and others like it give us all a chance for personal discovery and expression in all of our life experiences (positive or negative). These parents actually applied the *law of forgiveness* to their tragic situation and embraced this man, who had caused them incredible personal grief, as an individual worthy of forgiveness. It's a long stretch between accepting the law of forgiveness and applying it to the most painful experience of our lives. That couple acted on the firm knowledge of their Christian experience and positively tried to repair the rip in the fabric of society and restore the worth and dignity of one offending individual. Wow! The story doesn't end there. Matt was turned over to the care of the state's prison system with a sentence of life imprisonment; the case was marked closed, finished, and complete! With a sigh of relief, society shifted into a restored sense of comfort, the police and prosecutors moved on to focus on new crimes, and those close to the family reflected upon the nice gesture the victim's family had made by offering their feelings of forgiveness. Get the picture?

Years later, lost in the daily struggles of prison life, Matt's intervention in the events of another prisoner's life may have saved that prisoner from death. Inadvertently (probably without personal awareness), he applied

the lesson learned from his experience of being forgiven to the life of another prisoner. You see, that other prisoner had been unjustly labeled a “snitch” in an attempt to set him up to be killed in the harsh prison culture.

In prison, being labeled a snitch comes with the threat of certain harm, possible death, and sure isolation (severicide) from other prisoners. Matt broke through and reached out to the other prisoner. He took the time to find out the facts of the allegations, and instead of letting the matter go quietly to a sure death, Matt sought out the truth. Given that Matt was recognized as a powerful individual within prison culture, his connection to the labeled individual was a signal to those who wanted to do the so-called snitch harm. His public actions within the prison environment had the practical effect of warning off those who might have wanted to take justice into their own hands. Later, the truth came out, but for a short while, it was touch-and-go.

Far outside the mainstream experience of society, and totally unknown to prison authorities or members of the parole board, Matt’s actions may have saved the life of another and helped to prevent the application of the law of severicide to this individual’s daily prison life.

In saving someone else—perhaps physically, certainly from the trauma of social exclusion—Matt engaged in a personally redemptive act. He may not have even been aware of the effects that his actions had at that moment, but without his choice to reach out and understand, this book might never have been written. Until now, Matt’s actions had remained hidden from the world. He remains incarcerated, labeled a murderer, but to me, he was redeemed long ago and remains a true friend of mine.

Next, let's consider another example of the possible side effects of forgiveness. Standing before Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus, the perfect expression of God's love for us, had his individual worth compared to His fellow prisoner Barabbas. That day, throngs of jeering citizens of Jerusalem were allowed to choose who would go free and who would face death. Jesus Christ? Or Barabbas, who had led a rebellion in which others were killed.

The people, being led by their leaders, examined the worthiness of both Barabbas and Christ and their potential usefulness to society. Eagerly, frantically, they called out "give us Barabbas" in response to the crafty legal manipulations of their religious and social leaders. So Christ was condemned to suffer a cruel death.

It is horrible to realize that Jesus Christ, who had harmed no one, was being compared with Barabbas, a known murderer and revolutionary (terrorist). This man, Jesus, was being compared to a known terrorist in some bizarre drama meant to be social justice. What a shameful event!

The example of His life up until that moment gives us such a rich understanding of what it means for our own lives that we don't need to look further into the biblical meaning of His death and resurrection. We can find all the meaning and understanding we need for our lives by the example of His actions as He stood on that judgment platform. He didn't plead for His life; in fact, He didn't say a word. He stood there calming awaiting His fate. He knew that He was in His Father's hands. What an incredibly remarkable human encounter. He never offered a word in His defense. He understood His own worth and didn't need to plead in front of his social judges. We can learn from this and live out the

same practical certainty in our own lives.

Individual worth exists beyond our personal knowledge or day-to-day awareness, much like quantum physics existed outside of our personal knowledge before its discovery. Truth is truth and always will be. The ultimate truth is that you are a child of God, and no one can ever rob you of your personal worth, even if society uses the worst type of labels.

Let's go back to that judgment scene and imagine what might have happened in the minutes leading up to the public's consideration of good and evil in the lives of these two men. I like to believe that there was a long hallway leading from Pontius Pilate's dungeons to the place of standing before the public. I continue to view that scene in my mind, but I'm not looking for the public moment. I'm looking for something much more meaningful that likely occurred in that hallway.

I imagine that moment when Jesus Christ came face-to-face with Barabbas. In that instant, I imagine they shared a brief glance at one another. And in that moment, I believe that Jesus looked at the desperation in Barabbas' eyes, and because Jesus knew what was coming, He looked compassionately at Barabbas, showing His loving acceptance and forgiveness of this man. Jesus surely extended the gift of personal forgiveness and its eternal consequences to an unaware stranger in that brief moment of a shared glance.

The Bible doesn't reveal whether or not this was a life-changing opportunity or what the actual impact of a powerful moment spent with Jesus Christ meant to Barabbas. But something in my spirit has always wanted to believe that he went on to live a life of personal redemption,

touched by a moment in time and never the same again.

If you can suspend your disbelief and accept the possibility that this moment played itself out, even if you aren't completely comfortable with trying to understand spiritual things, then you can accept the idea that forgiveness is the complete solution to all of our life experiences, challenges, and traumas.

As a believer, I can describe to you my understanding of forgiveness in relation to all my life experiences. But like that description of vanilla ice cream, you have to take that first lick to really understand. You have to experience forgiveness to understand what forgiveness means in your life and the lives of others.

Oh, the sweetness of experiencing personal forgiveness!



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FOUR — FAITH

By scriptural definition, faith is the substance of things hoped for, but as yet unseen.¹³ Let's be careful before we go any further; mental health theorists will think we are treading dangerously close to psychotic thought. Please understand that knowetics does not reject the possibility of encountering elements of known truth in the informed gushing of science. Rather, it speculates that personal reality is like an undiscovered landscape that occurs outside our conscious knowledge. It can include impressions, feelings, and potentials.

Now you are approaching the neighborhood of faith! Stop a moment and breathe in the scent of it. I promise you it will not be anything like my child-like faith that durian would be a treat beyond all treats I'd ever experienced. I have faith that the sun will rise tomorrow, but my belief in that fact does not make the sun come up. Can you imagine the problems

¹³Hebrews 11:1.

presented for those who were convinced that the earth was the center of the universe?

The church, my church, the Roman Catholic Church, once accepted that belief as truth and evidence of mainstream thinking. So did most of society. It was common knowledge, something that everyone knew as a single demonstration of “known truth.” Unfortunately, it was not truth at all, but something that seemed logical and could explain the shared reality of watching the repeating cycle of days and nights. Belief that the earth was the center of the universe was very similar to the later belief that Columbus encountered in the form of accepted (mainstream thought) knowledge that his proposed journey would end in failure for himself, his associates, and financial backers—as he would surely fall off the edge of the world. Among the many accomplishments associated with NASA’s mission has been the globally distributed photo of earth taken by astronauts at some distance away. The photo clearly confirms that the earth does not have visible edges (except in our hearts, as we continue to engage in sharp battles with others). What a wonderful accomplishment for man. We recognize that the now-known realities pre-existed our knowledge of them. They were always true, no matter how society came to view them or explain their usefulness. So much for the value of mainstream thought.

Let’s look at a few more practical issues related to faith. It is interesting that the state of California has a bottle and can recycling deposit law on most containers sold in the state. The application of that deposit fee is supposed to help consumers understand earth’s limited resources and the problems of waste management that become part of their individual

purchasing decisions. Great theory!

How useful this theory is in practical terms is unclear. One thing is certain; masked as an ecological solution to a hefty social problem, it has improved the coffers of the state treasury.

Consider the implications of the redemption fee. We are supposed to learn the value of a tin can or plastic bottle by attaching a monetary consequence to its disposal. That's useful for tin cans or plastic bottles, but what if we applied that to people? Would that kind of thinking hold a key to resolving the financial burdens of society in disposing those humans who have been labeled human trash?

How about legally approving a redemption bond for everyone society writes off as unreliable, unworthy, and beyond our understanding of their ability for personal change? Consider the possibilities: misfits, perverts, anti-socials, and even perhaps those charged with solving society's problems (politicians, lawyers, and healthcare professionals), all receiving the same opportunity to use a socially-funded expression of faith in the human potential for change. Farfetched?

While there is little hope that society will see its responsibilities to all citizens alike, a redemption bond would be a symbolic act that identified a commitment to even the least of our citizenry. After all, we are already funding the opposition (a prison system with two million occupants), which claims that there is no other answer to this wide assortment of social ills than to use the practical law of severicide. After all, supporters say, incarceration is the most cost-effective solution we can sell to the public! While it is not likely to happen, redemption bonds would be an

awesome application of faith! Can you picture it? A \$5,000.00 surety (redemption) bond applied to the lives of those we discard like the tin cans and plastic bottles on which we have collectively (legally and socially) imposed a five-cent redemption fee. Can you imagine a world in which we valued our recyclable products equally with the individual redemption potential of the lost sheep?

That is what God does for each of us. He is always ready to redeem His lost sheep. That is what each of us is called to do for one another, and more importantly, to do for ourselves. Oh, precious child of God. If only you knew or had a hint of your eternal value.

That reality is faith in action, the things hoped for in individual lives but largely unseen now. Are you catching on to this radical type of thinking? It is all based upon the seen and unseen truth of God's work. It's not my idea. I have only stumbled onto an element of the truth that has always existed. Long before I was born, it was truth, and far into the future, it is truth. So what does this truth mean for each of us personally?

I believe that even the worst of us can make changes. That is the exercise of my personal faith as expressed in my life's work. Want to join me? Careful now; others will call you odd, eccentric, crazy, or—worse yet—self-centered, manipulative, perhaps criminal in your intentions. Remember the mainstream opposition to the spoken beliefs of Columbus?

A more recent example can be found with those who focused on overcoming the stigma and injustice of discrimination. You only have to look to the example of South Africa and its long established reign of apartheid to see the endless possibilities for transforming human lives.

So, where is your faith—in the law of the land or the law of God? One kills the human spirit, while the other shows the incredible worth of an individual human life. *All human life!*

Let's jump into this idea of faith and explore the taste of the freedoms it offers us. Faith is not just expressed in a spiritual form; it applies to every aspect of my life. When I open a box of breakfast cereal, I have faith that I will find those welcomed little flakes of grain, not a package of lima beans. The same thing is true when I put my car key into the ignition switch. I have great faith that when I turn that key, I will soon be off to take care of my errands.

So, faith already has extensive applications in our lives. It is the substance of our lives, not just a religious belief. We all have faith!

Some years back, a group of scientists announced their discovery of a cold fusion process. I don't recall if it was published in a book, but I strongly believe that it appeared in some professional peer-reviewed journal. Journals are the way that scientists usually share their findings with others in their field. It not only serves as a way of informing others about their ongoing research, but it permits other scientists to recreate or replicate the original author's experiment and hopefully arrive at the same findings. This process is essential to the scientific method.

It's hard to imagine that a scientist who has labored through twenty years of education to acquire a doctorate and then engages in years of research would knowingly submit a theoretical or clinical model to the scrutiny of the professional community without making sure it was completely organized and ready for review.

Cold fusion theory was submitted to that same standard of review. The theory, processes, methodology of study, and subsequent findings were shared with other scientists through publication. It quickly came to the public's attention, rather than remaining hidden in some archives and understandable only to those familiar with the shared language of that particular field of science.

With that jump from the professional to public forum, speculation about future applications of these findings began to soar. As I remember, there was talk about using a yet unknown technology (based upon the theory) to generate power for all our energy needs. Can you imagine the concept of a home powered by a safe reactor?

These public speculations quickly caught the scientific community's interest and drove a surge of activity to replicate the original author's findings. As the interests of various international scientists propelled research forward, the results started to trickle in and quickly spread back to the public.

At first, there were claims and counterclaims, but sadly, this whole process ended in the denial of these fantastic claims for potential personal nuclear technology. Quietly, scientists all over the world went back to their workbenches, and cold fusion was tossed on the trash-heap of other discredited claims.

Wait a minute; let's go back to the original authors' claims. They had deep faith in the truth guiding their efforts. They believed in this truth to such a degree that they submitted their ideas for others to scrutinize. Their theories and assumptions may have made perfectly good sense as

expressed in mathematical formulas or elegantly designed laboratory experiments. Their faith in the possible future development of life-transforming technologies could not overcome what independent researchers soon discovered.

“Well,” you say, “that may apply to the world of science, but I do not see how it applies to my life.”

Consider the hype that caught the public’s attention just before the year 2000. The airwaves, print media, and e-media “authorities” warned us of the possibility of a pending collapse of life as we know it with the turn of the clock to 00:00:01—January 1, 2000. These claims were readily backed up by the wise observations of instant experts who advised us to prepare for the worst.

Computers would certainly crash. None of us would be able to use our ATM cards. The food distribution system would fail, leading to the possibility of mass hunger, possibly starvation for millions—no, cross that out—billions of people. Think of the great criminal surge that would come from such a worldwide disaster as people took what they needed in their great fear-driven race to survive.

We were strongly urged to stock up on everything. Food, water, and of course money, lots of money, since the plastic cards might not work. That led to fear-based thinking, which included everything from home-based (buried) gas and water storage tanks, generators, lanterns, batteries, real blankets (not those electric ones), and of course *guns* and *ammunition* to protect ourselves from the hordes of barbarians who were certain to run down our streets.

So, from about 1998 through 11:59:59 on December 31, 1999, all people were encouraged to acquire the essentials of life to help them through the pending crisis, while the government plotted a way to straighten it all out. Off we rushed to buy containers of water, freeze-dried foods, toilet paper, and heaven only knows what else. Don't forget the guns! Our society was influenced by what unknown experts were saying. They helped to fuel the buying frenzy.

The manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers of our country gladly met the demand for all these needs, and on January 2, 2000, they carried their sacks of money to the bank with cheerful nods of gratitude while using the politically correct expression, "Happy holidays!"

Well, it is now 2013, and I wonder if we have all finished our freeze-dried foods or sent it off to Africa like the clothing I spoke about earlier. Personally, I discovered that those plastic one-gallon jugs that contained precious water did not hold up well in the long-term. Wow, we had faith in the truthfulness of the media's concerns and the accuracy of expert thinking, and look what it got us!

Truth is always truth, and our faith in it will never be discredited. It will never sell us a bill of goods on vain hopes or fears.

The truth is that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can overcome any barrier in our lives. Now, you can take that to the bank. It's always been true and always will be true. We have faith in so many non-essential things in our lives. Why is it so difficult to have faith in God's promise of individual help?

He said that if we have faith, we can speak to the mountain and it shall

obey. Are you like me? Do you have a mountain of obstacles blocking your hopes and dreams? Who do you think gave you the hopes and dreams? Well, along with the hopes and dreams, He has promised the help to make them real.

Do you have faith? Look at the five fingers on your hand. Remember your spiritual tools and begin to grasp the significance of what you have, not what you don't have. With God on your side, whom shall you fear? You are a precious child of God. I have no personal experience with a DNA molecule. The science of biology offers me a useful explanation of its structure and properties, but I have never personally experienced a close encounter with a DNA molecule.

I accept what science says, since it seems to organize so much of what I understand from my life experiences. Remember the examples of the hot plate and the wet paint signs? Some of our best learning experiences come from these encounters. We know the simple truth that experience is the best teacher. Still, I have never personally hung out with a DNA molecule—at least, not that I recall.

Well, you may say that's absurd, that we know they exist. We have models to explain that existence, micrographs that verify that existence and, of course, DNA-based technology that is reliably used in the justice system. Still, I argue that those factors are merely the experience others had with the DNA molecule. You may tell me that I am being ridiculous in my challenge. If so, you are expressing your faith in the truthfulness of the scientific claim. I'm just pointing out that I have never had a personal encounter with a DNA molecule.

You want me to accept what you've learned as a new foundation for belief in my own life. That's kind of like taking the leap from inorganic to organic, the spark of life! You may say this life spark was the result of an accidental process, possibly started by a lightning strike. Wow, I think I'll accept what you're saying about the reality of DNA now, in lieu of the other offered leaps in faith, such as evolutionary theory and its unexplainable claims.

See, that's faith. Back to cold fusion and the survival hysteria at the turn of this century. These too were based upon known "facts" that turned out to be unreliable over the course of time. Without asking you to identify yourselves, I hope that you will be able to agree that these claims offered little to no value in the long-term.

Religion might offer us the opportunity to experience faith in the idea of a caring and loving God. The problem some have while exploring this kind of faith is found in the burdens of dogma and doctrine that go along with some religious beliefs. Does that mean that these conflicting claims discredit the truthfulness of God's Word? Not at all! Knowetics is a re-statement of the truth of God's Word outside of religion. It recognizes individual spirituality that overcomes all claims on the superiority of known truths. That spirituality is clearly recognizable in the context of our everyday lives. We experience it in our lives with each breath that we take. It is not based upon what others tell me about their experiences with "reality." It stands alone.

The shared experience of many can't change the reality of truth. Do you remember Columbus's plight? Outside of the realm of common or personal experience, he engaged, with evident inner certainty, the truth

that was part of his consciousness. So truth as it was known at that time came out of conceptual “ignorance.” Well, our inner lives lead us to the edge of a sparkling pool of awareness to drink happily. Unfortunately, most of us are on the shore, listening to others (society) tell us that the water is not safe to drink.

What has this to do with faith and its usefulness in my “real” life? Your life, your real life, is the only one you’ll ever have, now or later, private or public. Given the examples used in this chapter, I’m sure that you’ll now agree that this concept of faith is applied to all aspects of our individual lives. We use faith to make choices, and those choices become the substance upon which our lives are lived.

You say, “But I am not a person of faith.” Let me point out to you that you are already using it every day of your life; you might just be calling it something else. Expressions of my faith can be clearly recognized in my actions. Like an element of science, faith can be measured by the choices I make throughout my day. This day, today, here and now! So, it is not about getting faith; our futures are tied to using the faith that we already have ... NOW!

I have never attempted to walk on water, yet! The experiences of my life since the age of thirty-one have shown me that there are endless possibilities for people to change. Is this mustard seed faith? Have a little faith!



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FIVE - HOPE

Sometimes I see hope as a sidewalk that keeps unfolding before me as I walk down the path of life. More of it appears as I take my steps forward. So for me, it is not what's to come, but the spirit of the moment lived.

How do you imagine hope? Do you set it aside as some unused portion of your human spirit?

I have a daughter with whom I have shared an estranged existence for decades. She sees no hope in my possible transformation (as told to me by a variety of other people) as a human spirit. And so, we go through the years of our lives, bouncing off this invisible barrier to love and communication. For years, I attempted to understand this barrier and overcome it.

After relentless attempts to find the chinks in the armor of her beliefs,

I eventually stopped trying to make it happen. I gave her up to her judgments, realizing that she had made these judgments based upon her knowledge of me at a time when I was a besotted drunk and druggie. Thirty-five years later, there is another reality expressed in my life, but this is occurring outside of her personal experience.

Remember the concept that earth was the center of the universe or that the earth came with edges? It is the same about knowledge, just a different application. It is one of the realities of my life, that I seem unable to bridge the gap between my daughter and myself, but that does not mean that I am the picture of her beliefs and unable to change. It only means that I am unknowable to her the way I am now. That is a private example that will help as we explore this idea of hope.

On a professional level, I have recently run into a similar example when my words and intentions were misrepresented. This led to an investigation in which it was discovered that, in the past, I had labels attached to my life. (By the way, I was the one who told them about the “facts” that had resulted in the labels they used against me! I feel this was a witch-hunt, since they insisted I hadn’t told them the whole story.) In the process, they decided it was extremely important to tie my sad history of personal failure from thirty-five years ago to the job I was doing in the present. So, the stage was set for the drama of “officially” removing me from the project.

I have learned that there is an ebb and flow to these spiritually-based events in my life. I hired a lawyer, but I never bought into their conclusions (individual beliefs masked as the judgment of society) since I am a child of God. That did not mean that I just moved on and

accepted their actions. That would have been an invitation to hide. What I knew, or hoped for, was that God had a plan to use this ugly event in my professional life for His glory. The doors He had opened in my life were my personal experience with His truth, and I was not about to betray His love for me.

These two sad episodes, one private and one professional, are events from which I get a renewed hope that I will learn more about God's love for me. It is an intensely personal meeting with my Creator, the Author of my hope.

Do I look at the emotional mess created by these events, like the Twin Towers on 9/11, or do I apply God's Word to my life and take the next step, *hoping* that the real needs of life will turn up as I walk forward in His care? I am going to bet on God keeping His Word. It is the only reality I have known for thirty-five years, ever since I discovered the personal truth that the earth is not the center of the universe, nor does it have edges (except within individual hearts).

So now, we have arrived at the heart of the matter. How do I apply the losses of my life to my future choices? For me, it is simply a matter of using my personal spiritual ingredients in my decision-making process. If I want to cut that process down to a minimum, I have only to ask myself the ultimate question. What would Jesus do? Now that is like emergency braking from 100 mph down to 0 mph—a new understanding of old realities.

This book could have become a rant against social and personal injustice. Instead, I have made the choice to believe that in the midst of what

seems like certain defeat, God still has a plan for my life. Out of my lack, I want to extend my two mites and present this book as a gift to the ever-sustaining God of my life. He is the principle audience, but I recognize that there are millions of others who struggle with the same defeats and limits that I have experienced. Have a little hope, brothers and sisters. He has a plan for our lives: A plan for today and tomorrow. He is the Sustainer of our lives. I do not care if you are sitting on death row with less than twenty-four hours to live. Even now, it is important that you believe in His ability to offer you the hope of a new life with Him. The legal stay may or may not happen, but His offer never expires. He placed a redemption bond on all of us by giving us the hope of salvation based upon the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

My hope comes from the Lord, not from my vain attempts to reconnect with a lost family member or my struggle to survive professional changes in the mental health industry. The story doesn't end there. Those who chose to accuse and harass my professional work used local agencies to do so. God in His glory has seen me through to vindication. It doesn't matter what my peers think. I am impressed by what God does in my life. These experiences show me more of God's love. He is the lifter of my head. This love doesn't lean on past struggles or limits but on a sureness that something exists beyond all the labels and distance. I am absolutely sure my spiritual experience has transformed my life. I know it because I have experienced it. It exists as God exists. I can't prove to you that the world isn't the center of the universe, but I recognize that it is only a part of the solar system. As you open your spiritual eyes, you will discover the ultimate truth that defines all human experience.

The deeply personal experiences that I have shared with you are examples of what has given me hope in my life. My hope is that they will ultimately have meaning as I journey along life's unfolding sidewalk. I am personally grateful for the military's willingness to freely fuel my ship of hope. It is their sponsored journey that has resulted in the writing of this book.

Truth has no preferred medium of expression. Do you remember the words of Jesus when He exclaimed that if those around Him chose not to worship Him, then the stones would cry out?¹⁴ I am just one person, a very unworthy person, whom God has used to re-state His love for us in modern day thought. This story is not about me or my journey. It is only one vehicle (remember the transportation concept) for expressing truth. The ultimate truth is that God loves us, and He is the source of all hope. Hope is the reason we bear children. Hope is the reason we go to school or church. Hope is the reason we save for the future. Hope is the reason that we get out of bed in the morning. Hope is the reason we embrace others with our love. Where there is no hope, there is no life.

If that applies as a basic element in our lives, then it too is a God-given right of personhood. So what does that say about our epidemic of abortions or the legal sanctioning of suicide as a healthcare alternative? We are a people without hope since we embrace a culture of death through our actions. Whether we do so with our votes or with our buying decisions, it is either an endorsement or rejection of basic ideas that affect all of our lives.

For many, *Roe vs. Wade* was hailed as a victory for personal choice, but for millions of the unborn, it was a deadly loss. They didn't have a

¹⁴Luke 19:40.

vote in the process. Well, that's absurd, you may say. Is it absurd your mother made the choice to carry you to term? She did so on the basis that, no matter what horrible circumstances her pregnancy might bring on, somehow she would make it through all of its challenges. Or perhaps instead, she made the difficult choice to surrender you to the care of others, hoping that you would enjoy all of the benefits of life through another family's choices. The type of thinking that encouraged us to believe that we could overcome any obstacle in our lives is based upon hope. Take away our hope, and you take away the air that we breathe. The solutions offered by society offer no hope or promise that things will be better in the future.

Society's problems seem to be attached to fear at every turn. Convicted murderer Willie Horton's name was used during a presidential campaign to undermine public confidence in one candidate's use of good judgment, because Horton had been released on a weekend furlough in that candidate's state while that candidate was governor. Horton disappeared and went on to commit additional acts of violence before being captured. Overlooked in this stampede of fear was the fact that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people are involved in making the decisions of state government. All that mattered was that it occurred on that candidate's watch.

Hope flows from or is taken away by all of our actions—personal, private, or public. Picture the death row inmate as he sits in the death cell awaiting his execution. Its fifteen minutes before he is to die, and he hears the phone ring in an adjacent room. He sits and wonders what that call was all about. Suddenly, he hears footsteps rapidly approaching

his cell, but he can't see who it is. At the bar, he anxiously strains to read the facial expression of the approaching individual for any sign of hope. Thumbs up or thumbs down?

He has already been sentenced to death. He should not have any expectations other than that the state will send him to eternity at any minute. But somewhere deep inside of his psyche, he desperately hopes against all odds that the U.S. Supreme Court has granted him a stay of execution. That's raw hope, the best kind of hope, actually, because it's the point at which an individual realizes that he is totally dependent on the possibility of a life-sustaining decision.

It's the point of personal surrender. Only hope can carry me forward in the next few moments of life. Come on, you know you've been at your own breaking point at one time. What was it that kept you from taking pills, shooting yourself, or hooking up a hose to your car's exhaust system? It was the **hope** that things would change. For most of us, things did change as we took steps forward.

Hope is a gut-wrenching ingredient, like the strongest of spices. When that spice is around, we know that it's there, but at other times, we may forget its familiar scent. We can forget certain truths that make us all human. Even as the tube to inject the fatal cocktail of drugs is inserted into his arm, a prisoner may take hold of the hope that God will keep His promises.

When I stand before the judgment seat, I have no illusions that Satan will overlook even the most minor of my failings in seeking a sentence of eternity in hell. His mission is to challenge God to condemn me to

permanent separation from Him (actually, I would be the one who made that choice when I refused to accept the salvation plan that God offered me for my life) based on my thoughts, words, and actions. What a sinking feeling in the soul, like the man being led to the execution chamber. Any hope, please ... please!

Well, like that man, I can choose *at any moment* to accept the gift of hope God promises. Can you imagine how happy the prisoner would be to find out that he could stop his own execution by accepting the offered full pardon from the governor? Even though the governor called the prison moments before his execution, that execution will still occur if the prisoner doesn't consent to this extended gift of life. Now, here is a serious problem: suppose the warden or other staff members never told him of the governor's offer. The prisoner would walk to a certain death because he had never received the message.

I am nothing but a sinner like you. I'm here to deliver the message. I'm here to make sure you get the message in this unusual situation. A story of bad choices, lots of tears and pain for others and myself, and then in the brilliant flash of God's love for me, *redemption!* "I hope in you, Lord, and I am only too happy to accept your gift of new life." This is how I use the ingredients of spirituality as I journey on in hope.



PART FIVE

PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND APPLIED SPIRITUALITY

The following chapter, Perimeter Psychology, was originally written for the offender's book. As you read its words, you may be struck by the distinct difference in its tone. It has been designed to give offenders a significant reference point with regard to their lifelong behavioral choices. Additionally, it offers the sharp contrast of examining our lives in terms of good and evil. It explains how that battle is played out in the world and fought over each individual life. Perhaps most usefully, it moves the focus way from our individual histories to the reality of evil as a spiritual force that shapes our choices and our lives. This chapter has been included in this volume to offer a unique perspective on the truth.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

PERIMETER PSYCHOLOGY

There are vampires among us; are you one? That is the idea that Dr. Albert J. Bernstein puts forth in his book, *Emotional Vampires: Dealing with People Who Drain You Dry*.¹⁵ He uses a novel approach to explain personality disorders.

A personality disorder is an entrenched way of relating to others. It is usually a lifelong pattern of behaviors that brings us into conflict with others. Since it is a continuing pattern of behaviors, mental health professionals usually have little to offer to those who suffer from these disorders.

The terminology of personality disorders is listed in the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV published by the American Psychiatric Association). Among these diagnostic terms is the category

¹⁵Albert J. Bernstein, *Emotional Vampires: Dealing with People Who Drain You Dry* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012).

of Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASP), which is usually applied to offenders, especially those sentenced to prison.

It is important that you know and understand the way this label will affect your life. We all need to be conscious of the ways we use this information to work on ourselves and reduce or remove this pattern of behavior.

Yes, I said to remove or reduce this offensive pattern of behavior. Change is possible. Once locked into this kind of classification, it was previously impossible to counter the limitations it imposes, but knowing about how these diagnostic criteria were developed will give you insight on how to handle this issue.

There is no one on the planet without worth! That is part of being a child of God. I have often believed that these diagnostic assignments are a way of writing off those of us who have offended others. It can be a way of saying “they are beyond hope of change.” Don’t you believe it! Until you draw your last breath, there is always hope.

What I would like to do at this point is to introduce all of the personality disorders and then focus on those that are most relevant to offenders. Please remember that everyone has some of these characteristics in their personalities. So don’t start to diagnose yourself as you read my descriptions. Otherwise, you will find yourself becoming quickly overwhelmed by feelings of despair and hopelessness.

If God made you, and you went down the wrong path, learning things that offend others, He can rewire you with your cooperation! The world tries to change us from the outside. He changes us from the inside. He does not use the world’s system of valuation. The DSM-IV classifies a

personality disorder by the following criteria:

An enduring pattern of behavior that deviates markedly from the way that others behave themselves within one's culture, usually evidenced by two or more of the following ways of experiencing the world:

- The way we view others or events
- The way in which we respond emotionally (appropriateness and intensity of response) to others and events
- The way in which we relate to others interpersonally
- The degree to which we control our impulses

Additionally:

- This dysfunctional pattern occurs over broad areas of our lives.
- It causes distress or impairment in most of the ways we function.
- It has existed for a long time and usually started to emerge behaviorally in adolescence.
- It is not the result of another mental disorder.
- It is not the result of short-term transient effects of substance abuse, medications, or head trauma.
- It can be measured by the impact it has on the lives of others and the situations in which we live.
- It is enduring because it repeats itself time and again, and we never seem to learn from past events.

Given these guidelines, it is time to take an honest look at the way you relate to others as I list the various types of personality disorders below. Each disorder will be given a short explanation so that you can understand the different ways in which they influence others.

Paranoid Personality Disorder: This individual views others with suspicion and distrust. He has serious concerns about the intentions of others and can't seem to trust others. It may also include the way he views organizations or the government.

Schizoid Personality Disorder: This individual is detached from social relationships and seems emotionally distant or has limited emotional expressiveness.

Schizotypal Personality Disorder: This individual experiences discomfort in close relationships with others. It happens because of distorted views and/or odd behavior patterns.

Antisocial Personality Disorder: This individual has displayed a pattern of violating the rights of others. They may be regularly in conflict with rules, regulations, or laws.

Borderline Personality Disorder: This individual demonstrates a pattern of unstable relationships. It affects how he sees himself, his emotions, and his ability to control his impulses.

Histrionic Personality Disorder: This individual regularly seeks excessive attention and tends to be emotionally excessive in the way that he relates to others.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder: This individual demonstrates an ongoing

need to be admired; he has poor empathy for others and tends to have an inflated self-image.

Avoidant Personality Disorder: This is an individual who feels inadequate; he is unlikely to be engaged socially and is extremely sensitive to being evaluated by others.

Dependent Personality Disorder: This individual's behaviors can be described as overly submissive and clingy. He is the kind of individual who needs to be taken care of.

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder: This individual demonstrates a need for control, perfection, and orderliness. His actions cause others to resist the constricting effect on relationships.

These are the major personality disorders. A brief reading will reveal the overlap between each of the categories. We all have elements of each of these characteristics in our own personalities, so don't take this information and apply it without understanding. It is provided so that you will have the ability to look at how you relate to others.

Now that you are aware of the meanings of these terms, I would like to move the focus ahead to explore five of these categories more deeply. If you find yourself dwelling in these diagnostic shadows, please take heart. It simply means that you have the insight to look within yourself and see how you relate to others. This is an excellent start to changing the reality of your life.

Dr. Bernstein focuses upon five of these disorders by identifying the most destructive personality disorders in terms of the damage they do

to our relationships with others. If you have come to a point in your life where you're sick and tired of the way you interact with others, then this section might be the stepping-stone toward a new life.

While Dr. Bernstein does not address the concept of good and evil in his work, another professional, M. Scott Peck, M.D., has devoted extensive effort at identifying the field of good and evil. Two of his most outstanding books on this subject are *People of the Lie* and *Glimpses of the Devil*. If you are committed to changing your lifestyle, these books will be valuable resources.

Good and evil exist as surely as day and night exist!

Dr. Bernstein chose Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASP) for his initial step into the dark world of personality disorders. He calls them "lovable rogues," though those who have been stung from encounters with this type of individual would certainly not continue to see that individual in the context of "loveable." Those who suffer from this disorder use other people shamelessly. Both genders can have this type of personality, though it is more often recognized among males.

According to Dr. Bernstein, ASP may manifest itself in individuals as the daredevil, the used car salesman, or the bully. Without going into detail, it is my belief that a true ASP can shift within these behavioral manifestations. To others, this ability to shift from warm and caring to the coldness of the bully is a frightening experience and causes those who witness that shift to step back from future meetings. The individual with ASP may get what he wants, but not without significant cost to others and himself. ASP's are addicted to excitement.

An individual manifesting ASP can change, but that takes work. Mental health workers often write them off as being unteachable and manipulative. The only hope of meaningful change is to recognize the behavior pattern and to submit oneself to finding a spiritual solution. The focus is on internal beliefs, not on external realities. While the world of mental health care is usually given to writing off this personality type, I want to assure you that meaningful and profound change is possible, but it will take hard work and yielding to the spiritual. Curbing the demands of the flesh can be a tremendous battle, but it's not impossible.

ASP's are demanding, selfish, and insensitive to the needs of others. If this describes you, then let me give you some good news: change starts with the ability to recognize character flaws. It is the first step on the path to freedom. A great way to recognize this disorder is to check out your personal history of aggression. If in doubt, talk to those who truly love you and let them educate you about what they have seen and experienced in their relationship with you.

Next, let's cover Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD). When you think of this type of personality, remember the term "show business." Dr. Bernstein notes that for these individuals, relationships play out like soap operas.

The HPD is likely to use whatever opportunities she has to seek out attention and approval. Dr. Bernstein notes that she will sing and dance her way into the hearts of others. She has an ability to make others think they are important, and then she uses that skill to prey upon her victims. The result is a superficial individual who uses others for her own gain.

The key to understanding the HPD is to recognize that she is “always acting,” putting on a masterful performance. This type of individual can be found in both genders, but may be easier to recognize in females. The key to understanding individuals who have this disorder is to identify their speech patterns. They use words as manipulation tools to control their own internal needs. They are likely to be unpredictable, which is troubling to their victims. The response of others is to move away from relationships with these individuals.

If these individuals get a flash of insight about their own style of interacting with others, they quickly become unsure of themselves. This feeling of insecurity makes them seek reassurance from others. They become consumed with getting back their sense of internal stability, seeking attention, and needing approval, which wears others out. The key emotional response to HPD individuals is the feeling of being drained. Change requires a spiritual understanding that God’s grace and mercy is enough.

Another notoriously emotional vampire type is the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). An encounter with these individuals will always be marked by the “Big Ego,” with everything else being unimportant. They believe they are the most talented, the brightest, and all around best people. Such individuals have no problems with modesty or humility, nor would they understand such concepts in others. They drain others through their constant self-interest and neglect of the needs of those who are unlucky enough to have to share space and time.

Encounters with the NPD will be marked by their insatiable needs. They are special people with special needs. “Little people” would not

understand what it is to be such a special individual, so the NPD is indifferent to the needs of others. The picture that comes to my mind is of these individuals standing in front of the mirror telling themselves they are beautiful. As others pass them, they are so absorbed in preening that they are not even aware of the presence of others!

The greatest fear of an NPD is “being ordinary.” Dr. Bernstein describes their needs as “tremendous.” He notes that they cannot be connected to anything other than themselves: “The world revolves around them.” What they need from others to exist is “worship.” These individuals will generally evoke mixed feelings in others.

Bernstein goes on to note that they love their “accomplishments, but hate their conceit.” In that sentence, he describes the internal conflict that rages in the mind of an NPD. The key word here is insatiable. They can never be satisfied with anything. Their intense inner needs twist all encounters.

Please do not confuse the role of self-esteem with narcissism. They are not related. The behavior of an NPD will always be marked by their indifference to the Golden Rule. Their needs are and will always be superior to the needs of others. Feeding them compliments only feeds the monster that lives inside them. They will grow stronger in front of your eyes if you try to appease them with this technique. Spiritually, I would guess that they would have a difficult time embracing God as being their Creator. Such a view would violate their belief system that tells them that they are the best in everything.

Next up is the individual who suffers from Obsessive-Compulsive

Personality Disorder (OCPD). Dr. Bernstein characterizes these individuals as primarily seeking “too much of a good thing.” They are usually angry because they seek perfection in others and in themselves. That type of standard will drain any kind of relationship. Nothing is ever good enough, and their thinking is marked with a one-sided focus on the “product versus process.” Can you imagine the struggle of realizing that you yourself are imperfect but must deal with a “perfect” OCPD?

There is a difference between Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and OCPD. Usually the disorder can be managed with the use of medications, while the personality disorder seems to be rooted in the mental wiring of these unfortunate people. OCD is likely to respond to medication management. Those showing signs of OCPD seem to lack the ability to benefit from the chemical actions of medication. That is why it is described as a personality disorder. These behaviors are an entrenched way of dealing with the world, and this personality type sees nothing wrong with having this kind of an orientation. Interestingly, those with OCPD may not respond to medications but often embrace substance abuse as a way of coping with reality.

Inwardly, they see themselves as protecting you from your unacceptable impulses, and in doing so, they have no need to look at their own imperfections. Dr. Bernstein describes them as “an Antisocial trying to claw its way out.” These individuals will only find a sense of peace when they have made others equally obsessive-compulsive; thus, they spread their disorders to others through use of this behavior. They can excite in others a fear of making even the smallest mistake.

I once had a clinical supervisor who embraced this as a form of

“management.” He could see the smallest mistake and would quickly point out his suggestions (mandates) for change. He was unable to recognize any viewpoint but his own. Coming to the understanding that he had this personality deficiency helped me to free myself emotionally from his controlling behaviors.

Dr. Bernstein describes the individual with OCPD as seeing that “punishment is equal to justice.” The sting of encounters with these individuals will last as long as your own memories. You often come away from this type of interaction with a feeling that nothing will ever be good enough for them, so why keep on trying? When thinking of these individuals, you might remember the phrase, “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” The frightening part of dealing with such individuals is that they actually believe in this idea. The issue is an inability to see their own behaviors or the effect that their actions have on others. My reaction to these encounters can be summed up in the phrase, “God, grant me the serenity ...”

Our last personality type is the Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD). Please do not confuse being fearful as a device to guide you in dealing with unfamiliar situations with being consumed with suspicion and mistrust of others. Dr. Bernstein describes these individuals as people who analyze everything that is said to them. Perhaps the most prominent thought in their minds could be summed up in the question, “I wonder what they meant by that?” The doubts and suspicions about others will dominate all of their relationships. It is impossible to get inside their minds. They keep you at arm’s length but will readily use you to acquire their own desires.

Put another way, for a PPD, two plus two equals four—but there is something about it that seriously disturbs them. Things that occur accidentally are likely to set off a firestorm of suspicion and mistrust. The more that you try to point out an event was unintentional, the more that the person with PPD will be suspicious of your intent. A person exhibiting PPD is seeking “disciples” to prove their theories or worldviews. They are consumed with “minimizing their losses” rather than “maximizing their gains.” The term “close-minded” may give you a better appreciation of their operating rules.

PPD’s view others as a means to an end. This way, they can justify using others. *I had better do it to you before you do it to me.* This results in fragile relationships with others and may cause others to back away. Of course, this action would only confirm what the PPD already believes about others ... you can’t trust them. Their interactions with others leave their targets with a sense that PPD’s are consumed at some deep level with fearfulness that manifests itself as suspicion and mistrust of the motivations of others.

Follow what you feel inside when dealing with these types and don’t try to pacify their doubts. You will only feed the monster within. Recognizing the behavior and becoming aware of the need to trust in something beyond yourself is the first step in recovery from this disorder. Let that small window of light illuminate your soul.

PPD’s can’t tolerate the fact that your actions are well intentioned. They must be constantly on their guard in case you’re trying to harm them physically, mentally, emotionally, etc. They can promptly change their feelings, so they see all sorts of dangers in lowering their guard. They can

always figure out how to “teach others” something about how you “don’t measure up.” Those with PPD are even willing to use religion as a major weapon, cloaking themselves in a sort of false righteousness. Yet their actions will be marked by a dramatic inability to apply these lessons to their own lives. Beware of pointless encounters!

This chapter has been written to give you some insight into the spectrum of disturbing behaviors that are evidenced by those with personality disorders. Their actions are enduring and seem to resist any effort at enlightenment or change. Most people respond to these encounters by writing off these individuals as “unteachable.”

If others have given up on you repeatedly, there may be something to learn from these rejections. Go back over your history and look for a pattern of responses from those who have shared your journey. You may find some gold nuggets of insight and understanding.

There is a tool that you may use to wrench yourself away from these dilemmas and move yourself forward to a place where your spirit becomes teachable. That tool starts with hope and the knowledge that whatever you lack, God’s grace is sufficient for your need. You are not in a war by yourself. An army of support will surround you if you will just take note of the graciousness of God’s mercy and grace. You and God make an unstoppable majority.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop on belief therapy. At this encounter, I experienced an epiphany. After twenty-five years of professional practice, I saw that this information (belief therapy) completed all of the knowledge and experience I had previously

acquired. I came away *knowing* what is meant by the statement, “My grace is sufficient.” If you will only initiate the effort by telling God of your personal state and asking for the grace to change, He will respond instantly and start the process of healing you from the inside out. It doesn’t matter what others think or say about you. You are a child of God. He will never abandon you. Give it all over to Him and watch Him move in your life. Your journey has just started, and I hope to meet you on the road we both share.

God’s grace and mercy have NO expiration date. His Word has been the same in the past as it is in the present and will be in the future. He is immutable, which means that once He has spoken something into existence, it is a settled matter. The application to our situations is simple and extraordinary. If we reach out, He will respond. In our brokenness, He will reach out to each of us and make something beautiful of all the rubbish. There is no one that is so far gone that God will not show him mercy and forgiveness.

It’s not about walking around the neighborhood with a Bible tucked under your arm. It’s about quietly surrendering to Him—giving Him everything, your treasures and your trash. Give it all up and feel His love start to touch your life. You can be doing life or waiting for execution. You have nothing to lose.

I know what He has done in my life. My reliance upon God’s Word for answers is based upon my unshakable belief that there is a largely unseen struggle between good and evil going on at all times. Though we may be unaware of these forces and the influences that they exert upon our lives, the spiritual reality transcends all of life’s struggles and reduces

these “realities” to the level of child’s play. The real battle is a spiritual battle! It will be waged throughout our lives, and it ends in our personal appearance before God for our arraignment in the heavenly court of justice.

I know this reality to be the truth. I had my first encounter with evil while serving a term of incarceration at the California Men’s Colony 1979-1983. After arriving at CMC-East, I was assigned to become the Catholic chaplain’s clerk. By accepting this assignment, I became the target for intimidation and threatened violence if I did not give up the position in favor of a lifer who would use it as a stepping-stone to get a direct, favorable recommendation to the state parole board.

My guess now is that the priest was oblivious to the dynamics occurring in the chapel. It ended with my giving up this job and moving on to something else. But not without the lifer first setting me up to be harmed. I thank God that in these encounters, I was under His protection; the turmoil the lifer stirred up eventually passed with the help of someone who took an interest in finding out the truth.

On a side note, the lifer seeking this position had previously been convicted of first degree murder. It seems that he had worked for a state agency and had been passed over for a promotion that he believed rightfully belonged to him. When it started to sink in that he was not going to get that job, he resolved to murder his new supervisor ... which he did. He was apprehended shortly afterwards and convicted of murder. The most remarkable part of this experience was my realization that he was engaging in the exact same behaviors that had brought him to prison in the first place. He had not even tried to change his tactics.

He just repeated his behaviors boldly in the prison environment. The only difference was his target and the year that this happened. I didn't give up my religious beliefs, and I continued to worship at the Catholic chapel. The individual cited above also served as a Eucharistic minister at the chapel, performing a communion service in the absence of the priest. As I went to communion one afternoon, he stood before the altar, holding the host and pronouncing the words, "The body of Christ." But as I approached to receive the host, he looked at me and smiled with an evil, satanic, coldblooded garishness that chilled my soul. In that moment, I realized that evil could exist anywhere. Even in the house of God. The encounter frightened me deeply. For the first time in my life, I recognized that I was in the presence of pure evil. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I believe that this individual was possessed by Satan. The man was not intrinsically evil himself, but his spirit was given over to satanic influences. I'm not sure if he was even aware of how this influence was expressed on his face.

In that moment, I knew at the deepest level of my soul that evil did exist. I never returned to worship at the Catholic chapel, nor did I discuss that encounter with anyone until long after my release from prison. (Eventually, he was released from prison on parole, and I believe that he re-entered the world worse for his prison experiences.) Instead, I started to worship at the Protestant chapel and nourish myself on God's Word. My spirit grew in knowledge and grace. What this individual had meant for harm, God used for my good.

After my release from prison, I had a second encounter with evil. I was having lunch in a Burger King located on Harbor Blvd. in Costa Mesa. A

man walked into the building. As he entered, he looked like the presence of evil itself, which my spirit recognized. He made no nod or eye contact with me, but the actual presence of evil was so strong I had to quickly leave the building and abandon my lunch. It was not just walking away spiritually; I sought to flee this experience. It took my appetite away in the brief moment of spiritual awareness. Both of these experiences have remained as strong confirmations of the struggle between good and evil.

If you have ever been in the presence of true evil, you will understand what these experiences were and how they helped to shape my awakening spirituality. Evil exists and evil is real. Evil is not some silly encounter; it is a spiteful force that seeks to destroy us (Satan hates anything that resembles God's character). Plain and simple, that is the truth. This is why the focus of this book is upon God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness and our response in the form of faith and hope. This book is about our ability to ask for God's help at any moment in our lives and how He responds to our cry. We are all His favorites. Meaningful life changes are one prayer away. Don't take my word for it. Ask Him yourself.

I recently had the privilege of attending a spiritual knowledge workshop in which the Word of God was the central theme. I had an opportunity to see firsthand how spirituality is the essential element of our natures. Furthermore, I came to believe that it all boils down to believing a lie or believing the truth.

The author of this material, Dr. Paul W. Carlin, Sr., and presenter David Rodriguez clarified the issues and presented them in terms of condition versus position. My spirit resonated with this basic truth. Once you

experience the truth, it will set you free. As a result of your spiritual nature, you will recognize the enemy's lies.

I have renamed these concepts situation versus location to avoid willfully compromising the integrity of their work or using their creative resources without permission. These concepts and their meanings are easily understood.

Consider your current situation. That is likely to be the center point of your immediate concerns. It may appear that if you were released from prison tomorrow, all your problems would be solved. If you don't understand the difference between situation and location, your problems will start all over again as you walk through the gate.

Your situation is not your primary concern. Believe it or not, God has given you an opportunity to focus on the struggle over situation versus location. If you have accepted the fact that you are a child of God, then you are located in His hand. Nothing that you struggle with is foreign to Him. Please remember that He was a prisoner, a condemned prisoner like some of my readers. He knows your struggles, shame, pain, humiliation, fears, and feelings of defiance. Unlike worldly supports, He is ready to see you through the rest of your life. One day at a time.

You know what your best choices brought about in terms of consequences. It's not a fun experience to be locked away in a prison far from family and friends, or to be a family serving its sentence in the community. It hurts even worse to think of the mess you left behind for your children, spouse, and family members. The hardest thing you will ever struggle with is accepting your own powerlessness. That is just the precondition

that renders your heart suitable for Him to start working in your life. At that point of surrender, a whole spiritual world opens up for you. That world is best described as a walk with Jesus. He will guide every step along the way and make something beautiful of your life. But he requires an ongoing attitude of surrender. We all try to take over control in our lives, and we make missteps, bad decisions, and poor judgments. He has promised never to leave your side, no matter how harsh your existence may become. Think it over and see if your spirit doesn't echo with that basic truth. If you find yourself rejecting this simple premise, you may be so caught up in the struggle that you don't even know where you are located on the timeline of your life. Or you feel hopeless, so much so that you have come to believe that you are too far gone to be valued and loved. That is a lie of the devil. If you are a child of God, then you are located in His care.

Do not accept the lie that comes masked as location delusion disorder (heaven is our home, not this world). If you know the truth, it will set you free in multiple ways. Know who you are and whose you are. One of the key symptoms of location delusion disorder is that small inner voice that tells you no one would have you and that you are too far gone, truly without hope. That is the voice of Satan trying to keep you locked into his lies. Remember that he is the father of lies and the prince of darkness. The Word of God is your light source and immediate help. The light chases the darkness away. Don't be shy to cry out and ask for help. It's your time, and help is one cry away. It can be as simple as saying, "I don't know what to say or where to start; please help me, Lord Jesus." That's all you need to do to open the door wide to His love. He will initiate the change process within you at that moment of surrender.

There is important information I need to give you now. These concepts are essential to your spiritual development, and they provide a gateway through which Jesus Christ will continue to pour out His mercy and grace in your life.

During twenty-five years of professional practice, I've seen evidence of a personal hierarchy of evil. Ranging from the most severe to the less severe, they include:

- Deception
- Distortion
- Distraction

They are equally powerful when used in a direct attack against our spiritual natures. But like any workman would tell you, they are tools, and each tool has its own use. You wouldn't use a hammer to do the work of a polishing cloth. You wouldn't use a polishing cloth to do the work of a hammer. When Satan or his demons use these tools against us, they do so with great skill and care that is designed to cut us off from the grace of God. These attacks are often very successful because we develop a case of spiritual amnesia. The hallmark of Satan's work in our lives is a feeling of confusion, primarily about the truth of events, people, places, and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

One of the most useful elements from the spiritual knowledge workshop that I attended was the time devoted to recognizing deception in our lives. It is a satanic trick as old as the Garden of Eden. I firmly believe that there is always a lie at the center of his efforts to thwart our relationship with God. If he can't "infect" us with evil, then he has no power to carry

out his plans in our lives. If I don't open up the door to his voice, I won't have to wrestle with the consequences. Satan is not a friend; he is a fiend determined to wrestle away all control over your life, one decision at a time. He is patient and hates all human beings for a simple reason. We were created in God's image and likeness. That's enough of a reason for him to seek our destruction. But just as with Eve, he will never reveal his real intention.

His initial entry into our lives starts with the remember series:

Remember when such and such happened to you and how painful it was?

Remember why this happened and how hurt you were?

Remember how much anger you have inside of you?

He uses every element of your human nature to conquer your resistance.

- 1) Physical Sensations
- 2) Mental Turmoil
- 3) Emotional Chaos
- 4) Spiritual Uncertainty

He is incredibly skilled at using our human senses to trigger responses targeting our human nature. He may target one, some, or all in his work of oppressing your spirit. Rest assured that when he attacks you, he will aim directly for your weaknesses. He recognizes them all, and he is familiar with all of your behavioral triggers. That is where prayer becomes your best weapon.

A parade of lies will start to pass before you to set your slide into sinful behavior in motion. The following summary is an adaption of work presented at the belief therapy workshop:

A) Constellation Lies: This is an attack where a number of lies are fused together.

B) Clever Lies: This is an attack in which original lies are (remember series) masked as responses to memory reflections.

C) Custodial Lies: This attack is focused on preserving the historical basis that will reveal the causes of fear, turmoil, chaos, and uncertainty. It is generally fixed on specific memory points to stop your pursuit of the truth.

D) Chipped Lies: This attack is usually a lie of lesser significance that is discovered after we are able to discover the major lie in our lives.

E) Cosmotic Lies: This attack is usually oriented around things we absorb visually or aurally (sight and hearing) and then incorrectly believe.

F) Changed Lies: This attack focuses upon triggering responses in our human natures to seeming threats that no longer exist.

G) Collateral Lies: This attack incorporates elements of several forms of lies. These can be bewildering experiences with feelings of being overwhelmed.

In all of these attacks, your principal weapon is prayer!

Backsliding: This is often our response to the influence of Satan's lies. It is always noticeable in our attitudes and behaviors. It's my belief that this

process is usually initiated as a reversal (bottom up) of the hierarchy of evil and that it starts as a subtle process (for a visual presentation of this data, see Appendix D). Others can usually perceive it in us faster than we become aware of this insidious process.

In professional practice, I have routinely found that the slide occurs with some injury or perceived injustice that we privately nurse into a grudge. The grudge then takes on a life of its own as we become focused on our wants, needs, and rights. When we are consumed with looking inside ourselves, the next step is the small satanic whisper that “it’s not a sin, and really it has been such a long time since you let go.” Please remember:

Spiritual Diversity = Spiritual Danger

The Essential Response System (ERS) lies in a specific order that shapes us as individuals in terms of cognitions (thoughts) → emotions (feelings) → behaviors (actions). The ERS is triggered by going back to believing the lie. We all struggle with this process throughout our lives. Remember what Jesus Christ said: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Please take a moment to consider the reality that everyone in this world struggles with the ERS. It is the basis for our ability to function and to interact with others.

It is essential to be aware of the essence of our humanity. We are:

- Body
- Mind
- Spirit

All elements of our nature are interacting with each other at all times.

That is what makes a human being a complex and different creation from a plant or animal.

A plant has a BODY.

An animal has a BODY and MIND.

A human being has BODY, MIND, and SPIRIT.

The intent of this book is to offer a practical introduction to Christian Recovery for the Offender's Family. It is not meant to be a complete text on prayer, practice, and patience. You'll develop these are characteristics as you respond to the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit. I would like to offer a way to quickly begin the life transformation process.

Get right with God. Tell Him all about your mistakes, errors, and sins.

Involve yourself in a Christian community; seek their prayer and support.

Victims need to have constant prayer to bring about a healing experience.

Evidence your position as a child of God by making daily connections with others.

The G-I-V-E principle will offer a straightforward way to start the process of change in your life and initiate a deep spiritual healing through God's mercy.

This chapter began with an informational description of the various diagnoses of personality disorders. I explained that these are deep

patterns of behavior that control the way these unfortunate individuals without fail relate to others.

I have seen little evidence of effective long-term change in the literature on psychology and psychiatry. In fact, most mental health providers tend to resist long-term therapy with these individuals, since the common belief is that they are untreatable and that they drain the emotional and intellectual resources of the clinicians or therapists. There may be some types of treatment, but usually the assignment of a personality disorder diagnosis sounds the death knell for realistic recovery. This is usually due to the way these individuals go back to their old patterns of behavior when under stress or pressure.

I believe that personality disorders exist, but I also believe that these diagnoses are the scientific communities' attempt to explain the existence of human evil by watching various behaviors. In general, the mental health industry doesn't want to acknowledge a spiritual side of things to explain bizarre and twisted lives. And so they choose medication, therapy, hospitalization, or incarceration as a treatment. A pill, therapy, or a hospital or prison stay will *never* change an individual's spiritual life. Yet, the industry continues to mask, explain, treat (unsuccessfully), or punish the bad behaviors. Nothing will change until there is a spiritual change!

Having said that, it's time to move on to understanding the spiritual basis for these behaviors, how we become "infected," and how to treat the spiritual infection. Both M. Scott Peck, M.D. and Malachi Martin, Ph.D. observe that there are distinctions between people who frequently exhibit hurtful behaviors toward others and those who do so without

giving any thought to the harm that they cause others. They define this difference as imperfection possession versus perfect possession. The underlying facts are historically documented and can't be explained away with claims of ignorance or superstition.

Consider the cold reality of the last 100 years. Hundreds of millions of people have been annihilated or have suffered under the hands of various dictators, despots, and fanatics. These people have lost their lives due to one inescapable fact, and that fact is that evil *exists* in this world and has throughout the history of the world. This is merely a confirmation of God's Word. Read it for yourself.

Satanism is the worship of Lucifer and a personal commitment to furthering the work of the father of lies. Just as Christians pray to Jesus Christ for our essential graces, those who are committed to Satan pray to their god. They work tirelessly to accomplish his goals of world domination and the loss of souls.

It may be difficult to believe that there are individuals who would seek death and destruction rather than life and peace, but such is the nature of the battle between good and evil. The battle is real, and we are all in the midst of it each day of our lives. Some enter into this battle seeking some future reward for their efforts from Satan, while others are often unaware of becoming his pawns over time.

Those who seek a relationship with the evil one are beyond the scope of this book and are desperately in need of God's mercy and grace. Those who find themselves serving the father of lies without having made a definite choice to embrace evil may have come to such a position one

small, unnoticed decision at a time. Acting upon their impulses and emotions, their every new and willful expression draws them ever closer. They may be behaving out of pain, anger, rage, or devastation, but they are making a predictable series of small steps leading them into a deeper relationship with Satan; nevertheless, it does not happen overnight. You know your loved ones better than anyone else does. If you see this trend in any of them, it is time to recognize that they are being swept away into the pit of hell, one small decision at a time. Satanism is an end, not the beginning of the process. If you have any questions in your soul regarding the accuracy and truthfulness of these observations, submit the question directly to the Holy Spirit and ask for wisdom. He will show you clearly and definitively.

While I cannot speak to the future of the perfectly possessed Satanists, I know that **all others** can be redeemed (Appendix E). This involves you in a direct role as a prayer warrior for your loved ones and yourselves. Jesus Christ is interested in our daily lives, always seeking to extend His mercy, grace, and forgiveness to those who are willing to seek Him. I do not care how badly someone seems to have gone astray; do not use worldly systems of worth in evaluating their potential for redemption and salvation. That is God's job; He sees us as His children *no matter* what wrongs we may have committed. His Word and the life of Jesus Christ are all about what is possible, not what has happened in the past. *Please* do not abandon your loved ones to Satan's domain. With God, *all* things are possible.¹⁶

The subject of spirituality is often shunted aside since it has the ability to make one think of the ultimate truths in this life. That is why the vast

¹⁶Matthew 19:26.

majority of “good folk” still want to think of themselves as acceptable. Our righteousness, our very best is like filthy rags in the presence of God’s goodness, holiness, and glory. None are worthy. There are no degrees of separation. Therefore, if I as a sinner am to seek His salvation, I become acutely aware of the desperate need of each individual for His mercy and forgiveness. None are worthy, so let’s not continue to believe that we are better than any of our fellow global citizens.

Spirituality is an explosive subject because it goes directly to the heart of the reason we live. That is to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. Given the natural conflict that arises in choosing to serve God versus my own ends (Appendix B), one of the most important questions we will ever ask of ourselves is this: Do you serve him by serving others, or do you continue to serve your own interests (Appendix C)? Honestly asking yourself that question now will challenge how you spend the rest of your life.

Spirituality and sexuality can quickly lead to a chain reaction of events beyond our abilities to comprehend. One involves the recognition of God as the ultimate authority in our lives, while the other represents the extension of His ability to create new life. Both are gifts that come with the role of being human. Satan has particularly effective strategies for these two areas of concentration, since both of these notions are largely mediated by our thoughts and emotions, only emerging into the light of day when we have made the decision to act upon our beliefs (Appendix A). The world touts these central themes as “private” so that we can declare these subjects off-limits to others. In the privacy of our hearts, we come to believe Satan’s lies about our role in living out our lives. In

that belief, we tell God that it is our affair; after all, He has given us free will to choose. Others may observe our behaviors and even express their concerns, but ultimately, it is our personal choice to make the decision who we will serve (Appendix A).

Demonic possession, exorcism, deliverance, and redemption are facts (Appendix E). The Word of God bears witness to these facts. I would like to take time to explore the experiences of a medical doctor-psychiatrist whose spiritual development led him into a series of encounters that deepened his faith and opened the door to understanding the spiritual dynamics that shape our lives. Before I launch into this story, I would like to list the names of four books I have found helpful in developing my understanding of this issue.

M. Scott Peck M.D., *People of the Lie* (New York: Touchstone, 1983).

M. Scott Peck M.D., *Glimpses of the Devil* (New York: Free Press, 2005).

Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil* (New York: Reader's Digest, 1976).

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

This small library will start your journey of self-discovery and change every part of your life. Taking this journey will be like sweeping from your mind all the ideas you may have had about evil. While your personal journey won't be without pain and suffering, once you have done it, you aren't likely to return to ignorant acceptance. The devil is in the business

of lies. That is his primary weapon and it started back in the Garden of Eden. [The word *devil* means *liar*.] He re-tools his lies to match the flow of culture and history. But a careful study of his attacks on your life and the lives of others through history will likely show you how consistent he is in his primary attack. Don't be afraid to approach this subject matter. Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and spiritual protection and take the next step forward. You are undertaking an eerie journey. But, the truth will set you free...

The spirit of these books is setting the record straight about people who make evil choices as they encounter others. This isn't a new problem. It's been identified throughout the ages. Not everyone who is engaged in an evil activity is naturally evil in themselves. Sometimes they are being used unknowingly for Satan's purposes. Those who are classified as having personality disorders are not necessarily people who suffer from imperfect or perfect possession (Appendix D). The authors I have previously cited refer to the fact that among likely candidates for a diagnosis of demon possession, few actually have the disorder. The majority of these individuals are quirky, but not merchants of evil.

As you read about these factual encounters, only you can decide the state of your soul. Few individuals in this world have an accurate understanding of possession and exorcism. Many know the value of deliverance. But there is a distinct difference between an exorcism and a deliverance service. It has to do with how long the possession has existed.

Most individuals with experience in this field consider the fact that one has to give permission to be possessed—a valid understanding.

Giving your permission to a demonic or satanic influence can be done unwittingly, since we know that lies, deceptions, and falsehoods are part of how the evil one works. However, surrendering control to the evil one seems to be how this happens in the first place. It's sort of a precondition to possession.

Another fact is that once demonic or satanic powers "possess an individual," they fight against giving up their "home." Since these evil creatures are *spirit beings*, their power comes from the individual's body, mind, and spirit. These spirits seem powerless without bodies that allow them to show off their evil works. Consider the Bible story in Matthew 8:31, in which the demons who had been cast out of the possessed man by Jesus begged to be sent into the herd of swine on the hillside. It seems consistent with the belief that they have no power without someone or something to possess. Draw your own conclusions.

In their writings, the above referenced authors make note of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual characteristics of those who'd been possessed. It isn't my intention to go through a broad review of the literature on demonic or satanic possession, but I imagine many of my readers will find the topic thought provoking.

I believe with all my heart in the presence of good and evil, but I don't view the occurrence in a direct line running from one idea to the next. I'd like to use an illustration in the form of a cross with good represented by the vertical line, while the horizontal line represents evil. (Appendix A)

I believe that this image better shows how our inner battle of both

behaviors happens in our daily lives. Being conscious of God and having an active prayer life are the principal weapons of self-defense against the evil one.

This introduction to spiritual realities of life is not meant to be a complete text on the subject matter. But I'm thinking it is a useful addition to help those who struggle with a shattered inner life to see their conflict from another direction. It is my belief that the number of individuals struggling with this problem is frightfully large. Essentially, they are cut off from others in a graphic illustration of secedence.

I will not open this door and then neglect to give you enough information about the nature of this raging conflict. First, I need to ask your help in developing a clearer picture of demon possession. This book contains an information page providing contact resources to help you explore your concerns with knowledgeable individuals. Please use that information to reach out for accurate information and spiritual support. I encourage you to use this resource to provide me with feedback about your needs of further understanding, and I will respond in future writings. Please remember that it is a journey for me, as well.

My father-in-law sent me an e-mail that contained a statement that helped me pull together a clearer understanding of the influence of evil in our world. He noted that *everyone* is under oppression by the evil one. We all have struggles in our daily lives. There is no one without this burden. Humanity struggles with sin and wrongdoing. This universal problem infects all human beings. The outcome of this battle doesn't rest on my shoulders or my personal efforts. It has already been decided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All we need to do is

ask for His help. No one will be denied.

I have attempted to provide you with enough information to understand the limits of healthcare or governmental policies. These are worldly tools being used to fight a spiritual war. They will *never* be effective since they can't make changes in our spirits. But the good news is that you have the tools you need, *no matter* your situation. God has you covered because you're in the palm of His hand.

I would heartily encourage you to correspond directly with me through the information provided at the back of this book. I invite you to explore this concept of evil with me and your understanding of the effect it has had on your life and the lives of others. Let's shed some light on a dark topic. If you permit me the opportunity to understand your unique experiences, I would like to begin a serious scientific study of demonology and Satanism with the goal of publishing my findings in a scientific publication, as well as writing a book for the general population. I can't do this on my own. Your experience is critical in making this study a success. Pray about it first and then follow your heart in responding.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

RECLAIMING THE PAST

Scripture says that the Lord will restore what the locusts have eaten.¹⁷ In the Book of Hosea, there is a beautiful description (Christological allegory) of that process in the context of a man's love for the wife who abandoned him and their children in favor of the excitement of fast living. These scriptural references are treasures that speak to the process of overcoming past losses.

The key to reclaiming the past is to realize that we are creating the past now, one day at a time. "The Past" is nothing more than a file of todays that we have lived and are living even as you read this book. Therefore, if you are plagued by thoughts about the past, the solution is two-fold. First, remembering what has been offered you through your spiritual lifelines gives you the tools to live out the rest of your life without shame, fear, and guilt. This stems directly from becoming reconciled with Jesus

¹⁷Joel 2:25.

Christ by accepting His gift of salvation. Second, out of that simple but profound action, you come into the awareness that *all* have sinned (crimes against God).¹⁸

About the nature of your particular sin: It is not any blacker than the sins of others. All sin is offensive to God.¹⁹ There are no degrees of offensiveness; sin is sin. The fact that others do not wear their sins publicly does not mean that they are without sin. In fact, you may be ahead of the game as you ponder the wretchedness of your past decisions. Those with the darkest of sins have the greatest claim on God's mercy! The past ceases to become a viable factor in the life you have ahead you. Forgiveness means that it has been wiped away... all of it has been wiped away out of His love for us. That is unconditional love in action.

Now about the future, I pointed out that we are **now** creating the past one day at a time. Therefore, we all have an opportunity to create a brand new past based upon the choices we make from this day onward. Remember the loving example of the prodigal's father who showered his returning son with love. The return of the son brought joy to the father; he did not receive him with guilt and recrimination. The same example applies to each of us. Your presence in a relationship with God brings Him joy. Your presence in a relationship with God brings *you* freedom from fear, shame, and guilt. So with that said, let's turn to the task of building a new past.

The actions of the past are not under our direct control, but what I do from today onward is under my control. How would you live out the rest of your life, or what changes would you make, if you set about the task of making a new past? Time does not stand still, but time can become a

¹⁸Romans 3:23.

¹⁹Isaiah 64:6.

great asset in creating a new past for yourself and your family members.

Once you have thought about the preliminary changes that need to be made, start by implementing one idea. God will help you make this effort successful. You are now creating a brand new timeline of events that you will share with your loved one in prison. He or she may not be able to engage directly in these events while incarcerated, but your efforts to create and share a vision of life allows your loved one to participate in family life and to enjoy the victories and celebrations the family achieves. This is a very intimate sharing between family members. It is a sharing of current life activities and strengthens each family member who reflects upon their individual contributions.

Another aspect of this strategy for daily living is the fact that it is establishing a recognizable pattern of predictability for everyone to reflect upon. For the loved one in prison, it becomes a visible indicator that the family is moving beyond the chaos and turmoil of early incarceration. For the family members, it becomes an ongoing record of commitment to a primary relationship. It establishes evidence of the importance of staying connected by developing a chain of events that mirrors that commitment. It also creates a sense of predictability that will help the post-prison adjustment process to proceed smoothly. Everyone knows how to act, because everyone is focused upon the same common pathway.

That predictable flow of events is creating a new past so that when the family is reunited, it becomes a period of transition rather than a dreaded obstacle to family harmony and peace. The idea of creating a new past affords all family members the opportunity to adjust to the

changes and to participate in family matters as they occur. There is no huge gap when a loved one comes home and is suddenly confronted with the many changes that have occurred. The timeline provides a stable point of connection grounded in the day-to-day affairs of living. To successfully create and maintain this tool will require effort and, above all, a commitment to the relationship. Using this tool means that nothing that occurs is too insignificant or unimportant to share. In communicating this way, you start to build daily links with each other. It should be a two-way process with a flow of information from within the prison, informing family members how life is being transformed.

One must invest him or herself in the relationship if this process is to work. It is easy to allow hurt feelings, lack of understanding, or the demands of living to shade the level of communication. But if that happens, you are presenting a blurred view of your daily struggles. That handicaps the others since they are not getting a full view of the challenges affecting your life. If you want family members to appreciate the substance of your commitment, then you need to take the risk of being real every time you write to each other. All correspondence should reflect a sense of reasonableness in terms of what each family member is experiencing and what they are able to do. No one wants to feel used or abused. Nor is this recommendation offered as a vehicle to inflict guilt upon each other. These interactions are building a new past and are best guided by using the spiritual lifelines: mercy, grace, forgiveness, faith, and hope.

Every life has its share of difficulties. No matter how good people look on the outside, we all have failings and achievements. Personally, I relate best to those individuals who manage to live their lives without

masking their true selves. Each life has happiness and sorrow, fear and strength, grief and joy, shame and delight, dignity and dishonor. No one is exempt from these experiences. Rather than accepting this statement as a quiet pat of reassurance, look at the bond of humanity that links us all together. My understanding of my own life and the lives of others is not conditioned upon someone else's opinion of how I have lived my life. Any attempt to compare myself with someone else is doomed to failure, since I am comparing my insides with their outsides.

Given the uniqueness of each life, there are multiple things that may be found in the past that will help us along our future journey. Those moments are often overlooked in the crushing condemnation that we heap upon ourselves. Part of the process of reclaiming the past requires you to take out a clean sheet of paper and a pen and start listing the high points in your life up until the present.

Those moments are unlimited and can include things like births, deaths, marriage, graduations, overcoming a serious obstacle, recovering from a devastating illness or another life condition. Can you remember the first paycheck that you earned, or even your first kiss? Life is not just about failures; it also contains celebrations and accomplishments. The moments that brought you so much joy at the time are still alive and well, deep within your memory. Now is the time to dig them out, dust them off, and remember them when you are confronted with thoughts of past failures. It is important that you write these events down so that you can frequently go back to the list to reaffirm the positive aspects of your life, your marriage, and your family. They can help to carry you through any storms that you encounter on your journey.

Make the list and share it with each family member, especially the loved one in prison. Then encourage EACH family member to make a list to be shared with all family members. In doing this, you are building bonds of intimacy that strengthen everyone and harness each member to accomplishing the goals of the future. It can be something as simple as growing a tomato bush successfully or buying a car without help. Each of those events is a milestone marking some accomplishment in your life. If you do not initiate this task and encourage everyone else to do so, then you are missing out on an essential part of building the bridge to your future.

In taking the time to re-examine these moments, you will find strengths that you had previously forgotten. You will tap into dreams that have yet to yield fruit. You will discover your own personhood and move along the pathway to discovering who you have always been. In returning to these moments, you will also uncover essential truths that you misplaced.

A friend of mine told me how to apply this kind of thinking in my spiritual life. You see, we all have had the experience of God showing up in our lives when we were desperately in need. We have all prayed for a miracle to carry us through a difficult experience. The problem with being human is that when the crisis is finally over, we tend to forget that God performed a miracle on our behalf. Somehow, that time of desperation gets lost in the flood of emotions that follows resolution. All the promises that we have made drift into the back of our consciousness, and soon we're back to living our lives as we please. This concept of remembering the times that God has shown up in your life is a powerful tool for living the experiences you will encounter on your journey.

In my own life, I enjoy remembering the times when God showed up and delivered the tuition money needed for my college work or the admission to a doctoral program in the face of indifference; the significant pay raise that provided the money to pay for student loans; completing the impossible task of finding a wife who matched my life, and successfully marrying her even in the face of numerous obstacles; the comfort of having a memory of my father and mother both telling me that they loved me before their deaths; being sustained in my recovery from alcoholism for thirty-five years; the ability to use a four-year prison term as an opportunity to complete two college degrees; the joy of having worked as a professional for twenty-five years and experiencing the most intimate of connections with others.

These are a handful of burning bush events that have illuminated my personal pathway. I do not mean to imply that there were never conflicts, pain, or negative consequences. My life would have been incomplete without these experiences to provide contrast. But I know that my prior experience with God sustained me through every trial. That is what He wants to do in your life. Check it out for yourself. Read the Psalms and treat yourself to observing the God of the Universe working in the lives of others.

Reclaiming the past is about recognizing those things of value that you want to continue to celebrate in your life and discarding the rest to the forgiveness of God. It is about reading that list often and taking a few moments to relive your joy. Most importantly, remember that today you are making a new past through your actions, words, and thoughts. When your loved one's prison sentence is over, the timeline of events you have

shared becomes the foundation of a new life together. Catching up on the time apart becomes insignificant since you have made a new past together.

At the center of that happy reunion is the best celebration of all: the opportunity to share with family members the ways God showed up in your lives. It reaffirms the reality that God is a living, loving person who is always seeking our best interests. It also serves as a humble reminder that even though we have messed up our lives, He will never abandon us. With God, all things are possible.²⁰

The past can become a bitter swampland of regret, anger, and despair if that's the reality we hold onto, but we can take the initiative to make a new past. That step is strictly between you and God; no one else need know of your decision. But you will not have gone far down this pathway before others start to notice the changes in you and the ones you love. I would love to meet you on this journey and perhaps hear your stories of reconciliation.

This chapter has been written in one twenty-four-hour period that has now become "the past." It is a past that has been well lived, and my hope is that it will become a bridge of understanding that reaches others.

²⁰Mark 10:27.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HEALING THE WOUNDS

In any attempt to reconcile ourselves with our past actions, we will invariably come across a huge collection of wounds and intense feelings about the events that affected our lives and the lives of others. The prior chapter focused upon creating a new past, while this chapter focuses upon the need for healing the wounds and grief of moments past.

Events and individuals are fairly fixed in the dimensions of time and space. We cannot restore someone's lost honor or bring someone back from the dead. Therefore, healing must focus upon an honest assessment of the underlying facts and a willingness to restore what has been lost. Willingness is the key word.

The key to activating that sense of willingness lies in the extent we are willing to forgive those who have offended us, to forgive ourselves, and to seek the forgiveness of those we have offended. If God in His

mercy is willing to forgive me for the harm I visited upon others, then it is essential that I adopt the same principle in my life. There are no exceptions to this rule. I know that seems like a tall order now, but it is not based upon your own abilities that I make this comment.

There are people in each of our lives who have wounded us deeply. We may be unwilling or unable to muster up the personal decision to forgive them. Nevertheless, we must somehow come to terms with this situation. While in prison, an inmate received court papers from his ex-wife that gave their children to the wife and denied him any right to know their whereabouts. This action came as a complete surprise since the prisoner had been maintaining a relationship with both children for two years, using whatever means were available to sustain ongoing and meaningful contact.

With the signature of a judge, all future contact was swept away, and the offender was banned from future contact while he was in prison. Since he had several more years to serve, this was a tremendous blow. He had nurtured his hopes for the future based upon maintaining frequent contact. He built his day around the belief that he would be reunited with his children after his release. Taking that away from him was like taking away the air that he breathed. With that hope dashed to pieces, he sank into depression and hatred for his former spouse. He saw her actions as vindictive, even though they had not shared any contact for years.

The anger and rage festered as the long months followed with no contact with his children. He eventually came to realize that if he did not deal with his emotions, he was sure to act on his impulses at some future

moment in time. The problem was compounded by the fact that he was a Christian and, as such, needed to forgive her for these actions. He could find no peace as long as those emotions continued to boil up within him. He felt like a spiritual fraud because he continued to struggle month after month with his intense hatred. During this period, his involvement with his faith diminished, and the pain increased.

In an enlightened moment, his AA sponsor suggested that he start to pray for his ex-wife, her husband, and his children, explaining to God that he was incapable of doing this on his own. The substance of his prayer was to ask God to forgive the former spouse through him, since he was devoid of any ability to muster a shadow of forgiveness. This prayer odyssey started with biting, hateful cries to God made between clenched teeth. It eventually evolved into part of his daily prayer life and within six months, the prisoner found that he could say this prayer and really mean it. While he had no idea of what was happening on the outside, inside those prison walls, the offender's life was being changed one day at a time. That is the effect of prayer and a willing spirit.

Perhaps your own wounds center upon your spouse's drug use or unfaithfulness. Even now when you think of it, tears well up in your eyes. For some, it may be the pain in their hearts for actions that they have taken since their loved ones went away. These actions are usually fueled by anger left from wounds that have not healed. Those events, which seem to be so unforgiveable now, can be healed and fellowship restored and strengthened. There are no limits on the power of forgiveness.

But forgiveness is an inside job. It has to start with a desire to make the situations right in our lives somehow. That may seem like an impossible

task if you stop and consider the extent of the downward slide in the relationship. But nothing is impossible with God. It's that simple; this is the application of the law of forgiveness.

Like the prisoner who growled out his prayer of forgiveness in the shower, it starts with the concept of willingness. Do you want to keep hold of that wound? Do you find satisfaction in hurting the one who has caused you pain? Don't you see how this kind of thinking is circular and never-ending? We all want the last word. It is part of the painful condition of being wounded. But it does not have to persist. Even if you have a sincere belief that you could never forgive the other person and that you could never do enough to hurt them in return, there is no gain to be had in living out this battle. Something has to give.

Recognizing the wounds of others and your own need for healing becomes the first step in overcoming this situation and removing the scar tissue of bitterness from your life. Putting the wounds given and received in the scarred hands of Jesus Christ is the first step toward permanent recovery. It is impossible to sustain a relationship in which the principles continue to wound each other; creating a new past means that you are choosing to do things differently.

Trying to maintain a loving relationship while living together can be difficult at times, given the wide spectrum of needs, wants, hopes, and dreams. Many of these die quietly in our spirits. To maintain a relationship through the walls of a penal institution requires a new sensitivity and willingness to pardon tender issues and resist the surge of feelings that accompany feelings of being neglected and ignored. Your time to communicate with each other is seriously limited by a host of

considerations, so it is essential to use your time wisely.

I am not suggesting that you ignore the pain in your heart caused by a harsh word or a careless comment. But your response to these incidents also needs to be balanced with the fact that you may not communicate again directly for a week or two. So it is extremely important to end your contacts on good terms that reaffirm your love for each other. If something has been said that wounds, then it is equally important that it be resolved immediately so that it cannot become an open, festering wound.

Each partner needs to be able to admit to the other that a comment or action created some discomfort. I am not suggesting that you have a prolonged conversation about the substance of the abrasive words or actions. Trust that the relationship is strong enough to resist petty tempers or hissy fits. When someone tells you that you offended them, disappointed them, or caused them discomfort, ask to be forgiven. After that, the subject can be closed to further discussion. In that simple act of acknowledging that you could have done better, you have already started the process of healing.

If you fail to speak of your concerns, then you are straining the relationship more than it is already. Love between family members readily welcomes small, intimate corrections and produces awareness that the love relationship is strong and healthy. Holding something in because you do not want to disturb your partner or you want to keep the peace will only hurt the relationship in the future. If you cannot be yourself with the one you love, then with whom can you relate? This willingness to forgive one another quickly leads to applying the principles of mercy, grace,

and forgiveness that were previously discussed. As a result, everyone's faith in the relationship grows, and new hopes emerge from these small moments of truth.

These small moments also become the foundation upon which you are building your future relationship with each other. Every attempt to be open and honest with each other produces a new brightness to a landscape that has previously existed in darkness and turmoil. These brief encounters also become the external evidence that things are changing for the better in your relationship. These are only small steps, but they will yield a harvest of benefits over the long-term. Out of these encounters, you will soon find yourself able to talk about the things that matter most.

If I carry around a series of small wounds, eventually I will not look forward to getting a letter or making a phone call since there has been no opportunity to heal the little hurts that accumulate as a result of interacting with each other. Gradually, I will find myself backing away from mail, phone calls, and possibly visits since they produce internal feelings of unresolved conflicts.

Deal with them as they emerge, then put them behind you, and move on. It will introduce freshness to your relationship that had vanished over the years. It will also serve as a model of what is to come in the years ahead.

We cannot interact with each other routinely without occasionally stepping on each other's toes. I believe that is another unwritten rule of life. But in accepting that reality, I also accept that these moments

are not personal attacks on me, nor do they have to represent a spirit of indifference in the relationship. They are moments to be taken at face value without demanding answers to an endless series of questions.

Living in Louisiana while my wife completes school in Colorado has revealed the endless number of circumstances that could contribute to misunderstandings. Through many of these encounters, we have learned how to manage simply because we have had to work through them. I have learned that I am quite territorial about my phone time with my wife. Those minutes on the phone each day help me to balance my needs with her needs. When unforeseen circumstances have arisen, like one of us leaving our phone at home, the result can manifest itself in thoughts of insensitivity and inconsiderateness, either of which is a powerful precursor to disturbed feelings. Unpredictable events happen and cannot be controlled all of the time. For those moments, we use the system discussed above, and after re-establishing contact with each other, we discuss the situation and ask for forgiveness if the response has been strained or insensitive. With this simple step, we have learned to be able to sustain our focus upon the relationship, knowing that each partner takes this responsibility seriously. This accommodation to individual needs has made it possible to sustain our affections for each other even when circumstances disrupt our plans. I have learned that my wife loves me and wants to be in a relationship with me. Out of those feelings, she reaches out and connects, which reaffirms our commitment to each other. When those occasions arise where our communications are hampered, I rely on my experience of her love to dismiss concerns or inappropriate emotional responses. Perhaps you will be able to draw upon the example of our long-distance relationship and the way that we

integrate forgiveness into our marriage as resources that you can apply in your own family.

Finding a way to apply the concepts of mercy, grace, forgiveness, faith, and hope goes well beyond the words printed on these pages. Their usefulness is only limited by the number of ways you apply them to your life and the lives of others.

Most of us have experienced the pain of a headache at one time or another. We quickly become aware of the pain at its onset and may take some remedy to help us alleviate the pain. We are quickly conscious of pain in our lives, but as the pain slips away, we are less likely to notice its absence. Then, we suddenly realize that the pain of the headache is gone.

The pain of unhealed wounds works on the same principle. We recognize the onset of another encounter with our personal pain. Then we apply the medication of forgiveness to those involved and go about our activities. Later, we come to realize that the pain has not come back again, or it has only had a diminished return when it has reappeared. We come to realize that God Himself is taking care of the things that cause us pain and discomfort. Then I can focus upon creating a new past without the continuing hindrance of internal conflict and turmoil.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TRANSITIONING TO COMMUNITY LIFE

The justice industry is set up to reward failure. It is a mega-business based upon the expenditure of billions of dollars each year to maintain its functionality. Like all business, its primary goal is to make money and continue to stay in business. There is no statutory or philosophical rationale for rehabilitating or transforming the lives of offenders. Keeping the prison cells full is the secret to continued funding. Therefore, it is ludicrous to believe that the justice industry is willing to embrace diminishing returns as a realistic policy.

Everything is set up to accommodate the flow of people through the system. America has a population in which 50% of its citizens are at or under the poverty line, and we boast the largest prison population in the world. These two realities do not speak readily of substantive change.

Therefore, when a loved one comes home from prison, it is essential that the family work together to help the offender complete their period of parole or probation. It becomes a family project to keep everyone free and safe. While one of the stated principles of justice legislation holds rehabilitation as a goal, a more thorough review of these policies and practices will reveal an agenda devoid of meaningful assistance to the offender or their family members. The system recognizes that rehabilitation must be initiated by the individual, not the system. A brief examination of prison administration will reflect significant curtailment of activities that would support personal growth or development. Most existing institutions have policies that are restrictive of individual efforts to acquire a wide range of new skills needed for life after incarceration. In their defense, those prison officials would cite the number of offenders that they are caring for in a time of significant budget cuts. Such rationale offers no hope of spurring individuals to seek out new ways of thinking and living that are essential to making a successful transition to community life.

Basically, the individual is released with the same skill set acquired before incarceration, plus all the things they learned in prison to help them take care of themselves. You see, the ultimate lesson learned in prison is that it's me against them. That lesson is carried back out into the community, where the prison skills honed over long sentences are now applied to the principles of surviving in a hostile environment. "Above all else, I must survive." Once learned, these principles are difficult to extinguish or change. One such principle that is frequently observed is the inner belief that "no one will ever take anything away from me again." That becomes a core belief and governs an offender's thinking and actions.

This book was written in part to help those who love an offender understand what life in a prison environment does to the individual. Without this knowledge and early intervention in the incarceration process, attitudes like this slip into one's way of thinking and coping. The planning for transitioning an offender back into the community must start before the door slams shut in the courtroom. The family must be prepared to recognize personality disorders or changes and deal with them as they arise. Their principal tool in meeting this challenge is continued love and support—keeping the offender connected to the family.

Waiting until 90-180 days before release simply will not do. That is part of the official foolishness that is masked as treatment initiatives. It looks great on paper, but talk to the men and women it is supposed to help and you will get a number of insights that are unheard in the community. Is it any wonder that released prisoners have no trust in the system? Such notions as self-empowerment and self-management strategies fail to diminish the learning about social indifference that has occurred behind those walls. The only useful tool that family members possess is their love and commitment to their loved ones.

Planning for that day of release starts with the awareness that your loved one may be sentenced to a period of incarceration. That planning will require input from everyone in the family to develop a plan of action that will work over the years ahead. It is best to commit this plan to paper so that when situations present themselves, there is a reference point to which you may return to reorient yourself.

Try to picture yourself being out of the country and receiving news long

after the events have taken place. Imagine that you are in a Third World environment where your primary interests are focused on day-to-day matters. Then, imagine that during this period, your country has moved “forward” in terms of the substance of daily life. When you return, you discover the landscape of reality has changed dramatically in your absence. Consider one small aspect of change. There are people who have been locked away for decades who will eventually be released.

Can you imagine their surprise when they are exposed to the changes in American currency that has occurred over recent decades? Some will look at the new five, ten, twenty, fifty, and one hundred dollar bills as if they are monopoly money. That is one small example of how society has changed in the years that they have been locked away. Another might be the changes in automotive designs, with hybrid cars now using electric and gas propulsion systems. These are very small examples of the culture shock that offenders face upon release from incarceration.

The things that you take for granted, having witnessed those transformations, are foreign to those who have been locked away. The newly released prisoner is not likely to be able to articulate their reactions as they try to reorient themselves to the “free” world. Therefore, it is essential to bear these things in mind as you anticipate the experience your loved one will have encountering the changes. The longer someone has been confined, the more profound the culture shock will be.

Earlier, we discussed the problem a child faces when unable to explain needs or concerns. Now, apply that understanding to someone who is an adult and is experiencing significant internal discomfort while trying to assimilate the ways that life has moved on in the individual’s absence.

With the emerging awareness of these changes will come emotional responses evidenced in behaviors. Once returned home, the process of re-learning life begins anew. Little things like seeing how the children have grown and changed will trigger feelings of emotion and grief. While you and the children anticipate feelings of joy and happiness at being reunited, the former prisoner is experiencing a sense of emotional isolation. It's impossible to tell you what is happening inside because that loved one is just responding to surges of emotions that occur in the attempt to make this adjustment to community life.

Another aspect of this transitional process will be sensitivity to the reactions of others—a hypersensitivity that will mark all interactions for some time after release. To help offset this crippling self-protective mechanism, it would be very helpful to have associated yourself and your family members with a community of believers who practice their faith. If you noticed, I did not recommend that you just find a church. It is important to center yourselves in people who understand their own need for mercy and forgiveness. These individuals can help to smooth the rocky road of transition through their acceptance and understanding. Actions speak louder than words.

Do not wait until the release date is pending to initiate this contact. Give yourself a chance to experience the healing effect that true caring and compassion will bring into your life and the lives of your family members. Give yourself an opportunity to sink your roots deep before you try to manage the approaching emotional storm. While you would expect this to be a time of joyful reunion, nothing will prepare you for the emotional scarring evident in your loved one's life. Having developed a support

network in advance will give you and your formerly incarcerated loved one the opportunity to achieve a sense of stability and peace.

I want to say that this should be a time for lots of talking and sharing, but the truth is that most released prisoners have no way to put their experiences into words that would convey an accurate picture of their prison experience. The words will usually follow a behavioral episode or anger flare up. Be prepared to temper your own words so that they express your concerns and affections. Having experienced the trauma of social indifference, your loved one will be on their emotional guard for anything that might suggest rejection. It is a normal response to having been locked away in an environment where it is every man for himself. Knowing about this reality will help you to prepare for the return of your loved one.

Men and women returning from combat or similar traumatic situations are afforded an opportunity to develop an understanding of the scarring process that may impact their lives in terms of physical, mental, emotional, sexual, spiritual, and social issues. They are counseled to be aware of these symptoms and to seek out help if any of these symptoms emerge later. They are also advised that the symptoms can emerge years later and seem to be unconnected with their daily lives. Knowledge is power.

As a trained clinical psychologist, my belief is that confinement in a prison facility or detention center has the potential to produce scarring the equivalent of that experienced by those who have been exposed to significant trauma. I refer to this as institutionally-induced PTSD. You will not find very many mental health providers willing to accept this

reality, but that does not alter the fact that it exists and contributes to the problem of recidivism. Not only do you live under the threat of bodily harm from guards and other offenders, you experience these conditions over an extended period of time. During that time, there is no respite from the stressors or pressures of prison life. These matters will be covered more extensively in a separate publication. Right now, it is important to take the time to read up on the signs and symptoms of PTSD so that you can be familiar with these facts for yourself and family members.

Your preparation now will help to ease the transitional process. It will also help you to develop an awareness of the complex issues at the heart of incarceration as a tool of social policy. Do not expect to find any support for these concepts emerging from the government. It is not going to happen, because the precondition requires an acknowledgement that there is a scarring process taking place. We know from studies about PTSD that these problems can grossly affect one's ability to adjust after exposure to significant trauma. The domain of mental health is invested in standards of practice, sanctioned ways of doing business. Few providers are likely to confront the reality that institutionally-induced PTSD exists.

Somehow, the fact that incarceration is considered a just punishment excludes prisoners from the realm of those who suffer from the trauma to which they have been exposed. Not all prisoners will exhibit these characteristics. Nor is it likely that those who can manifest a continuing spirit of brutality toward others are susceptible to developing this disorder. But it is certain that many will experience signs and symptoms

and are highly unlikely to discuss them freely since they may feel like they are losing their hold on personal control. At a minimum, this goes to the issue of how we view ourselves.

If I begin to suspect that I am losing control, going crazy, or am beyond help, then I am immediately challenged at the level of my personal competency. Few of us share relationships with others that can encourage that kind of dialogue over personal woundedness. The best tool for coping with this situation is to prepare yourself for its possible expression after your loved one returns home. Then you will be in a position to broach the painful process of identifying it and moving on to healing the wound. Your willingness to talk about these matters freely will help your loved one to explore their emotions and discuss their adjustment problems.

Transitioning starts at the time separation is looming and continues throughout the rest of your life. If you remember that God has a plan for your life and the lives of your loved ones, then you will find the way together to overcome all hurdles and obstacles hindering your path. While the adjustment is a lifelong process, it gets easier with the passage of time and the presence of loving support for each other.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE FAMILY ON PAROLE

The release from a prison or detention facility does not constitute final freedom and independence. Your loved one is likely to have a parole or probation requirement that will span a number of years after release. Some jurisdictions impose a three-to-five year “tail” on their sentence so that any subsequent violation of parole or probation requirements will return the prisoner to prison. Remember my words of caution that the system is set up to maintain its interests. It does so by keeping the cells filled up. Even a mild breach of parole or probation requirements is likely to return a prisoner to confinement.

Living under that sort of mandate affects everyone in the family. No one is immune to the scrutiny or observation of the authorities. Therefore, the family must work together as a team in order to accomplish the goal of staying together. Your privacy has become a thing of the past,

since agents can search your home at any time without a warrant. No family member has any kind of legal immunity if you are living in the same house. This is another aspect of your sharing the offender's prison sentence. All family members are vulnerable and live in a precarious state of existence.

Given the strain imposed by these conditions, it is a wonder that any marriages survive intact. The fact that they do survive is a testament to our ability to adapt to situations that strip us of our personal dignity. These are quiet affronts that affect the quality of lives among all family members. They leave us with a sense of insecurity that haunts the entire period of probation or parole. Under these requirements, it is difficult to feel safe and secure in your own home. Everyone suffers.

If your teenage son or daughter possesses marijuana, if you have a bottle of unmarked medication in the bathroom cabinet, or if another family member looks at provocative online materials, your loved one may be headed back to prison. Your personal things, your e-mail accounts, and even your car may be subject to an unannounced search. The way you spend your money is subject to the scrutiny of others who may ask you to show receipts for purchases or even church donations. Under this system, nothing is considered sacred or untouchable.

Most families of offenders have no idea that they are subject to these rules and are shocked when they encounter such restrictions upon their private lives. It is highly intrusive and adds considerably to the stress the family is experiencing in the transitional period. Out of such encounters, it is not unusual for resentments to rise up in us because we are paying the price incurred by the offender. Therefore, to some extent the family

shares in the scarring process by default.

Autonomy and freedom of decision and movement is curtailed or restricted. The family may want to go to Grandma's house, but there is a barrier to traveling outside the community or state. Foreign travel is out of the question. All travel plans that include the offender must be cleared with the appropriate authorities. There is little in the way of spontaneity available within this type of a structure. If there is a curfew in place, the offender had better not be found outside during the hours of curfew, or he will be on his way back to prison. Rule out that evening movie that ends after ten o'clock and instead choose a home-based activity. Even though the rules apply to the offender, every member of the family is affected under the requirements that they impose. Freedom of association is constrained by virtue of the fact that there may be prohibitions placed on the offender to refrain from any contact with another felon. If a fellow family member has a felony record, it may be difficult to avoid social contact. For some, this imposition will mean a new barrier to social interaction, further straining the post-prison adjustment. Within this context, everything must be considered beforehand to avoid unanticipated conflict with supervision requirements. Most of us would find this burden to be unacceptable in our daily lives. But the system is inflexible and onerous in its demands. This is just another example of how the family serves out its sentence within the community.

Privacy is another matter. In the process of supervising a released offender, parole or probation officers can speak with employers, neighbors, or even the administrators and teachers at the school your children attend. They can seek out information from anyone without restriction

and use that information to make any number of decisions about your lives. Since the use of this authority is largely done without oversight or any standards of accountability, the information obtained may be used in a capricious or arbitrary manner to add additional burdens to the supervision requirements. There is no practical or realistic way to challenge that information for accuracy or applicability. These decisions are rarely appealable. So you hunker down and try to ride out the storm as best you can.

The key to managing in this type of environment is to make sure that all family members are aware of the burdens of supervision and the penalties that will be imposed if there are violations of these rules. Meet these adjustments using a team approach in which every member covers everyone else's back. That way, everyone wins because everyone is on board. Practicing this plan may be initially difficult in an environment where some members are territorial or bruised from the justice journey. The key to navigating these barriers successfully is discussion, discussion, and more discussion, followed by group and individual prayer for the success of the family. Do not be afraid to discuss your concerns; other family members may be feeling the same way but are too shy to speak up.

Outwardly, you seem to be like any other family, but inwardly you are all bonded together unlike other families. In some jurisdictions, there may be zoning restrictions applied to offenders who have committed certain offenses. You may not be free to just up and move away from an antagonistic neighborhood. Personally, I would advise you to wait until parole or probation requirements have been terminated before selecting

a new area in which to relocate.

Talking with employers and school authorities before a loved one is released may help to ease the adjustment back into community life. This is best decided upon after talking with members of your faith community and/or your pastor. Do not try to make this journey by yourself, as you will soon become worn out with the struggle to handle the burdens that come with the territory. Scripture states that good decisions are made in the counsel of many advisors.²¹

It is difficult at best to live under the observation of others, especially when the rules are vague and arbitrary. Parole and probation officers wield great power, being able to return someone to custody based upon their judgment and understanding of circumstances. Therefore, the possibility of incurring even a small violation has considerable impact upon every member of the family and introduces an element of incredible stress to all family interactions. The most effective method for dealing with this tension is to develop a family dialogue in which all members have an opportunity to share their views, acquire necessary knowledge, and receive reassurance that everyone is operating with the same understanding.

It would be highly unusual for some family members not to have resentments and anger over having their lives adversely affected through the actions of the offender. Therefore, to minimize the possibility of splintering within the family, there needs to be an understanding that no topic is off the table when it comes to family communications. Out of an atmosphere where everyone can express their own feelings, a unity of purpose will emerge. This will also be helpful to the offender in the long-

²¹Proverbs 15:22.

term as they begin to see the consequences of their behaviors affecting those they love.

I speak to the need for dialogue since the reality is that talking about these matters once is insufficient. The key is to build a common purpose and tap into the strengths of all family members. Even the smallest children can appreciate having a part in the family's responsibility. Another resource that may be helpful in dealing with family stress and tension is to engage in scheduled counseling sessions sponsored by your church. I do not encourage the use of outside agencies, since they are often understaffed and have little formal training in handling these types of concerns. Using a church pastor to guide the process will keep the focus upon spiritual issues, rather than digressing into unresolved struggles that may dominate home life. Another consideration is that as all family members become focused upon the spiritual applications, each member's faith is strengthened, and the family grows stronger as a result.

It is important to avoid an US versus THEM mentality. That kind of thinking will only foster further distance and produce a climate of suspicion and mistrust. It is not the family against the world. It is the family submitting itself to the authority, power, and protection of Jesus Christ. This book was developed as an informational resource for those who are or will be exposed to the justice experience. Any remedy or solution proposed that excludes a spiritual component is like putting an adhesive bandage on a broken leg; half-measures will not work, so spare yourself pain and disappointment if you consider these recommendations as extreme.

Consider your family as a living body. This body has suffered a major injury and will need loving support and time to recover from these events. When we look about us, we do not see anyone bleeding or bandaged, so the first impression that comes to mind is that everyone is doing okay. That is a mistake, since we are unable to determine the extent of injury to all family members in terms of emotions, mental health, and trust—to name a few of sites of injury. Furthermore, members carrying such injuries may not be consciously aware of the extent of their wounds. Treading softly and slowly are excellent strategies for family healing. If the obvious wounds are wrapped in spiritual bandages, they will heal. After all, we are entrusting this work to the Great Physician.

Specific efforts should be made to become aware of the various triggers that are likely to set off an emotional response in the offender. It can be difficult to balance their need for privacy with your need for information so that you can be helpful. None of us will readily show our battle scars, and in fact, those affected the most seriously by emotional scarring are highly *unlikely* to willingly expose their most tender places to the view of those they love. I remember, after my release, attending a family get-together where a relative asked me, “Aren’t you going to tell us about it?” I am sure that no offense was intended, but I felt violated again and politely deferred their questions.

In an atmosphere of loving support and encouragement, these matters will gradually reveal themselves in a variety of behaviors. Some of these actions may not make any sense to those at home, and do not be surprised if children come to you and ask what happened to Mommy or Daddy. The children are likely to be the first to observe the differences in the

former prisoner's life. But out of a sense of insecurity or an unwillingness to intrude, these matters may just slip by.

After release, family members might notice that the loved one wants to sleep alone. Or that they experience nightmares, sleeplessness, or other sleep disturbances. An individual may refrain from eating with other family members, preferring to eat alone. Maybe it's a habit of eating standing up rather than sitting at the table with the other family members. An individual may be very touchy about certain music or TV programs. The former prisoner may exhibit anger related to territorial issues ("I told you not to touch that"). Given the extensive constellation of signs and symptoms that can emerge after release, it is impossible to include a comprehensive list of behavioral indicators in this book. But you can rest assured that if you are experiencing concerns over manifest differences in your loved one's behaviors, they are likely tied to the trauma of prison life. Do not pry or point out these changes, since the former offender is likely to feel that he is the subject of unjustified scrutiny. Be patient and loving, and with much encouragement and understanding, the wounded will start to heal and let go of painful reminders. It takes time, patience, and a great deal of love to go through this process. At the same time, you are trying to heal yourself and the rest of your family members. The sad thing about this situation is that millions of people around this country have been left to sort out these matters for themselves without any professional guidance. Any behavioral explosion can return an offender to prison to serve out the rest of their prison term. Therefore, having a safety valve to release pent up fury is important. Perhaps you will develop a time-out process for those situations where voices are raised and tempers flare up. Do not count upon physical

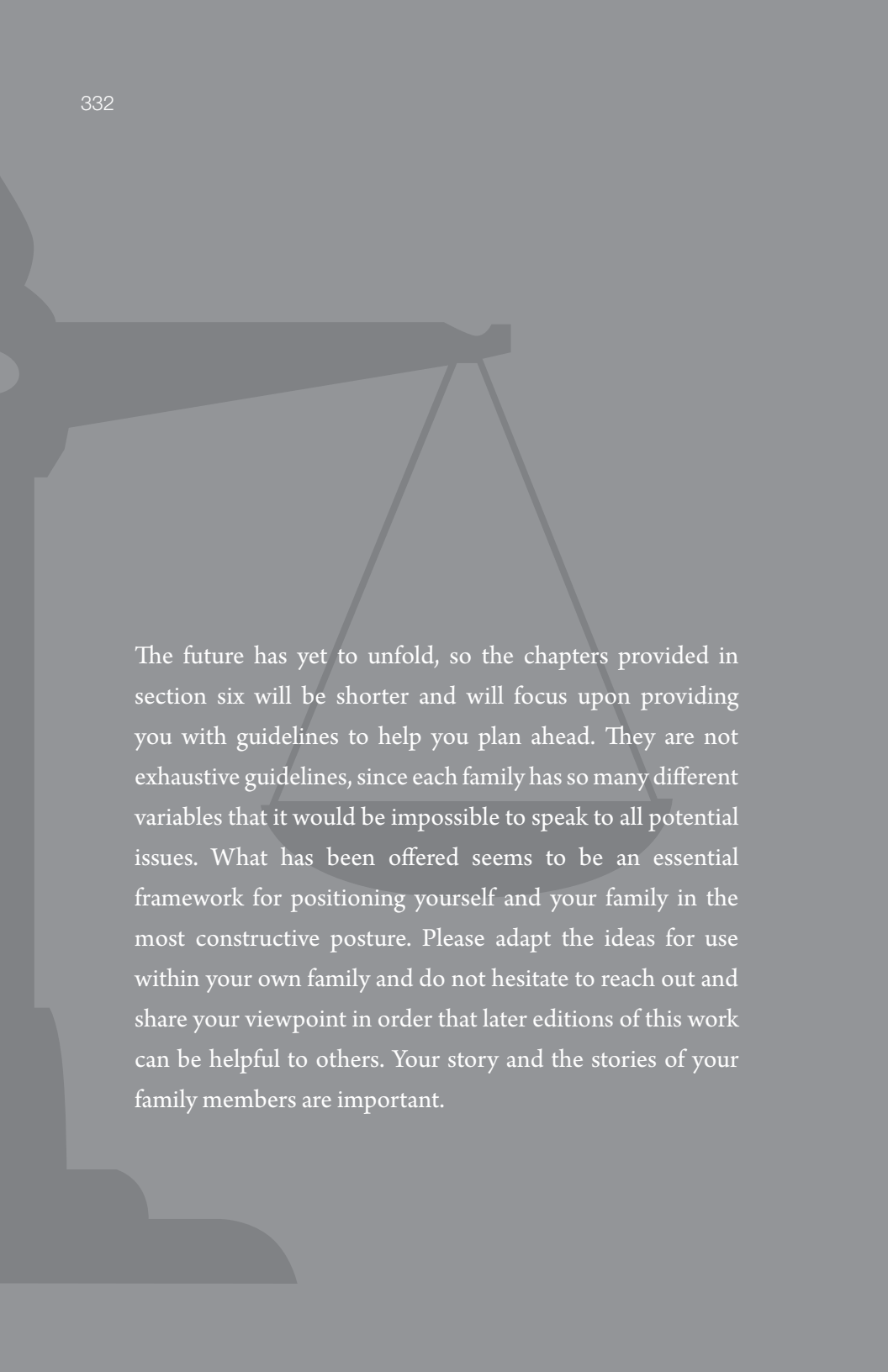
intimacy as your safety valve, since the nature of emotional and mental injury may impair that possibility. Becoming intimate will be a process, not a physical activity. Do not assume that all is well because someone can perform physically. The true measure is the ability to relate to each other in a loving relationship. Given the tensions and stressors incurred during the parole or probation period, don't be surprised if it takes time to achieve true intimacy with each other again.

Out of those efforts, all other family members will become aware that there is an adjustment going on, and they will take their cues from both you and your spouse. The key to navigating this period is to build a "safe place" for you and your family. Don't forget to ask for help regularly; our Father is always willing to provide what we need. Rely upon Him, and on a day-by-day basis, you will notice that the burdens start to lighten.

PART SIX

POST-PRISON DECOMPRESSION

Returning home is the start of a transformation process that affects everyone in the family and the community at large. There is much work to be done at the family level since their wounds need healing, but ties within the community may need repairing as well. Earlier in this book, I discussed the idea of betrayal. Now the work begins in earnest to recognize the damage caused and restore a sense of peace and harmony to those who have been injured. Primarily, I view this as the offender's responsibility, but the family will need to be aware of these considerations and take an active role in restoring what has been lost. This section deals with making these goals achievable. As you help others to heal, you are indeed healing yourself.



The future has yet to unfold, so the chapters provided in section six will be shorter and will focus upon providing you with guidelines to help you plan ahead. They are not exhaustive guidelines, since each family has so many different variables that it would be impossible to speak to all potential issues. What has been offered seems to be an essential framework for positioning yourself and your family in the most constructive posture. Please adapt the ideas for use within your own family and do not hesitate to reach out and share your viewpoint in order that later editions of this work can be helpful to others. Your story and the stories of your family members are important.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

POST-INCARCERATION TRANSFORMATION

Now, for an interesting topic, when does an offender stop being an offender? That is the essence of post-incarceration transformation: leaving behind the labels of the past and moving forward with life. Society will always maintain a record of our failures; that is the way the system works. Nothing that “society” attributes to the past has to define our future. With that realization comes an awareness that life is what we make of it. After the initial transition period of 90-180 days, it is time to move on and make realistic plans for what lies ahead. Given the vast number of individuals who have criminal records, society is slowly being forced to acknowledge that the justice business has created more problems than it hoped to solve. That being said, what you do with the rest of your life is your business and the business of your family members,

no one else. Given the state of technology, those who choose to obtain government funded training will be in unique positions to establish themselves in a niche position where they can work at an occupation without major interference from law enforcement. Therefore, this is the time to take stock of the things that you can do well and to carefully assess the family's intellectual and vocational resources. The former offender may not want to return to school, but perhaps the spouse will forge ahead and earn a professional degree that stabilizes the family's finances.

There are a number of vocational training programs available to former offenders based upon their interests and skill sets. Training may also be undertaken through a number of trades that offer special slots to those who are prior offenders. Most of these programs require some degree of initial disclosure, but this information is not used in placement and may not be problematic regarding employment after training. Most trades, technical areas, and vocations are more interested in finding people who can do the work and those who want to work, rather than in what happened five to ten years ago. Individually, people can often be quite compassionate and considerate.

The post-incarceration adjustment may also be positively affected by trying to secure skills training while in prison. Various prisons offer a spectrum of entry level training programs, though there may be special qualifications attached for acceptance into these opportunities. At the very least, one can focus upon completing a GED as a first step toward entry into a higher level of training classes. The important thing is to keep your eyes focused on completing your goals.

If a family member decides to pursue college level work and subsequent graduate level studies, it will be important to consider any licensing requirements that may become an impediment to employment after graduation. That does not mean that one should give up on a dream. Rather, it will be important to tailor that dream to the realities the offender encounters. One may not qualify for licensing as an X-ray tech in a hospital, but the same basic interests can be applied to becoming a professional photographer, where there are no licensing restrictions.

Few educational or tech training programs have advisors specifically trained in helping new students to find alternate skills training. This may therefore require lot of the footwork. One ex-offender could find no suitable employment. In discussion with others, he noted that trees were shipped in for sale to customers at Christmas time. A few friends put together a small sum of money and purchased land to establish a tree farm up North. Since this is a renewable resource, they were able to get the business off the ground and sustain it through the first three years. Thereafter, they were even able to buy an eighteen-wheeler and flat bed trailer to transport their own trees to market. A seasonable opportunity transformed itself into a year-round business.

Another offender bought a heavy-duty pick-up truck with trailer and launched a “hot shot” delivery service across the Southeast. Another contacted people living in local mountains and offered to pick up and deliver their mail during the icy winter months. That start soon blossomed into a small personal delivery service year round. I have read of talented individuals who have developed home-based businesses around setting up and maintaining scheduling or billing services for

local professionals. Another individual is currently importing select items from Israel, which he then offers for sale to those who attend his church. An eye for technological changes and an individual drive can be crafted into a small but secure income base. The best part about these approaches is the fact that once you have built it, it is totally yours, and you are not obligated to explain it to anyone.

With a small sum of money, one can launch a tape/CD/DVD repair, restoration, and media transfer service. These are some of the literally hundreds of things that an individual can do; It just takes claiming them and shaping them for individual needs. It pays to be creative and, most of all, to be bold. This is about carving out a new creative place for oneself and one's family members.

What I am talking about is not just making a living, but finding something that you can do well and something that brings you a sense of accomplishment. That is the difference between a job and a vocation. Then, when you put your name or trademark on that product, you can enjoy its creation with a real sense of satisfaction.

From this point onward, your life is a clean slate. What you write upon it from this point forward is the substance of your new past. Scripture confirms that "all have sinned," so there are none among us who can stand superior morally, spiritually, or socially pointing the finger at you.²² They all have their own issues. I understand that the difference is that your failures are public while most of theirs are private, but it does not lessen the fact that they have no moral, spiritual, or social advantage. Death has a way of leveling all matters. All pasts are equal in God's eyes. Therefore, do not fret now about differences that you may perceive.

The important thing now is to finish the race well. In Scripture, Jesus describes the owner of the vineyard as hiring people throughout the day to come and work.²³ At the end of the day, when it came time to receive their pay, those who came last received the same portion as those who arrived in the early morning to start their work. In God's eyes, all that matters is that you show up. That is the evidence of His mercy on us. He values all of us and does not differentiate between those who came to Him late in life versus those who arrived as adolescents or young adults. It is never too late to grasp His hand and ask for help.

A life transformed has a number of visible qualities reflected in the actions of the one experiencing transformation. Scripture tells us that when we come to Jesus Christ and accept His offer of salvation, we become new creatures.²⁴ This is a verse I have claimed and applied in my life. Being a new creature means living a new way of life. Something inside is fundamentally changed, and the experience of life takes on a new meaning. This is a process, not an event. Our role in this process is to accept the challenge of a new way of living and daily make new choices.

I do not make these new choices out of a burden or resulting from some bargain that I have made with God. I make the choices because I start to see the futility of the past choices I have made, and out of this awareness comes the realization that there is another way to live. I make the choice, one choice at a time and one day at a time. I have been sober for thirty-five years. In light of the pain I caused myself and others, I have only had a few occasions in which I found myself craving a drink. The same is true of other mind-altering substances.

²³Matthew 20:1-16.

²⁴2 Corinthians 5:17.

Nevertheless, there are elements in my character that seem to reemerge regularly under moments of stress, pressure, fear, distraction, or confusion. Out of these encounters, I have learned that there are times when I am vulnerable, and it is necessary to take actions to keep myself from backsliding. A behavioral slip today is much more painful than it was in the past. You see, I have not only failed my loved ones and myself, but I have failed my beloved Savior. I am not immune to temptation or trials, but I have learned that all of these events can be managed with care. Part of my self-management program is talking with my wife when I become aware that I am struggling again. When I share the problem, it becomes half a problem.

Jesus Christ knows me intimately. He knows everything about me. So He is well aware of my needs. I can always pursue self-deception, but I will never deceive Him. When I start to engage in the process of self-deception, I justify or rationalize some desire that will cost me and others if I pursue that end. I have had an on-and-off-again struggle with smoking over the years. Most recently, it seems that struggle has intensified, and when I give in to that practice, I open up other doors of temptation. The battle starts and ends in my mind.

The fact that I continue to experience personal struggles in some areas of my life does not mean that I am not a Christian. What it means is that until the day I die, Satan will try to deceive me by offering me choices that will destroy my walk with Jesus. The solution to these incidents is really quite simple. I ask for help in a rather informal way: “God, please help me!” While there have been significant past battles, I have never been put into a position where I had to do it all by myself.

Paul, the author of many New Testament works, had his own struggles. He mentioned that in his prayer life he asked God to remove a certain thorn in his flesh.²⁵ He did not identify that thorn, and he asked for that relief not once, but three times. The response he received applies to us today. “My grace is sufficient for thee.”²⁶ In other words, the battle does not belong to us. Once the commitment to Christ has been made, Jesus assumes full responsibility for the outcome of all these personal struggles.

The key to applying this knowledge is in understanding that these struggles work in a way that prepare our character so that He can use us in His plan for our lives. The very fact that you continue to experience certain temptations means that the work of shaping your character is incomplete. Jesus Christ will use every event that happens to us to make us useful in His kingdom. His strength is sufficient. I have experienced the feeling of being overwhelmed many times, and I realized that I could do nothing on my own power. It is a frustrating experience to realize that you are stuck.

It is only when we get to the point of recognizing the futility of our own efforts that we become moldable in His hands. That is when you start to see His work in your life. That is when the true transformation will begin. It is like a series of small but remarkable miracles that continues to happen as He sets you on a path of His choosing. At some point, you will realize that these situations have been authored by the Lord of Life. At that point, you start to understand that the recurrent temptations and struggles are traps. More importantly, you resist them out of a spirit of love for God, not out of a sense of duty.

²⁵2 Corinthians 12:7.

²⁶2 Corinthians 12:9.

Transformation is a God-authored process, and when it occurs in a family, it affects the life of everyone. As lives are changed in the family structure, it is evidence of the awesome blessings of God. These are not random encounters; these are your birthright as a precious child of God. Make a timeline for yourself of one year, three years, and five years and put down those goals you have set for your family. Then commit the process to the care of God and watch Him start to work in your lives.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE **RECOVERY**

Recovery is the bridge between the past and the future. Unfortunately, not much has been written professionally about this journey, so up until this point, each family has tried to find its own way. Some have been successful, while many have failed in the attempt. One of the reasons for these failures has been the lack of clear understanding of what the family will face as they move through a justice experience. The atmosphere of dark shadow living has always been a pungent element since mankind started to wield the sword, shame, and humiliation against family members of offenders. The sullen stance that attributes the failures of an individual to their family members has been accepted as a way of life. Its stigma is easily attached and resists most attempts to remove it.

We are at a point in the history of our country when millions of citizens have been branded and therefore subjected to the practice of severicide.

Given the overwhelming number of people living under this shroud of fear and pain, it is time for individuals and families to stand up and make themselves heard. There is no shame in failure, only in the repeated patterns of failure that occur because of society's attempts to exclude millions of its citizens. It is time for family members to be able to talk about the crippling after effects of incarceration and to openly voice their concerns without attempts to silence this population. Nothing I have said in this book should be construed as an attempt to evade or undermine the interests of justice.

When veterans come home from wars, we willingly recognize that many among them will have needs to be met in order to facilitate a transition to civilian life. Families who have experienced the justice system have the same needs, only they are unrecognized and thought to be an element of the punishment imposed on the offender. Little has been done to openly recognize the plight of those left behind or to find ways to reach out and support those who are making this journey without a choice. In the theater of justice, the trend toward harsh and capricious punishment matches the lack of any identifiable policies that embrace community reintegration. Nor is the justice system likely to acknowledge this discrepancy.

At the end of this book is a presentation called "A Theory of Victimization," which seeks to identify the wide spectrum of victims of the justice business. It also puts the offender at the center of this course of action. Crime introduces an element of social fear and distrust based upon the nature of the victimization. The community is launched into uncertainty about safety and reacts with shock waves flowing through

the whole community. The resulting turmoil and chaos undermines the personal security of everyone affected. Punishment flows out of that realm of thinking as the only practical resource for coping with the ever-increasing level of crime in the community.

I believe that even though the culprit has been caught and punished, the problem of crime alienates us from each other and results in social distancing, even between victims. There appears to be a lack of sensitivity that everyone suffers because of criminal activities. Homeostasis is never completely restored because there is a tear in the fabric of society. Arresting someone and sending him or her to prison for decades is seen as a corrective course of action. But it offers little to assuage the pain of those left behind. After sentencing, we move on and assume that somehow things will return to normal, even though it may be a new normal.

This legislative creation is offered as the remedy of choice. The problem is that those left behind soon find themselves trying to manage the aftermath on their own, with limited resources and little personal knowledge to guide their adjustment. Removing people via social distancing does nothing to repair the tear in the social fabric; it only creates factions that vie for their own interests. Somewhere in that hubbub, we start to lose our humanity and our hope. As the offender is at the center of the storm that initiated this process, it is necessary to find a way to provide offenders with the opportunity to return to the community and to help restore what has been lost. Without participation in the clean up process, the offender has no real understanding of the tenuous bonds that hold us together.

Symbolic acts of restitution and acts of public service offer no real connection between the events of the original offense and arriving at the point where an offender has come to terms with their offensive behaviors and seeks to restore a sense of balance to the community. Recovery, in the sense used in this chapter, means that an individual has realized the inherent harm engendered by their behaviors and chooses to find some tangible activity to offer as a personal pledge to somehow make things different, to set things right, to whatever extent is humanly possible. This recovery effort must be an individual, heartfelt response to the costs incurred through criminal behaviors. Like rehabilitation, it must be initiated on the part of the offender, though these efforts can be sustained by family members and the residents of the community.

With one or more actions, an individual inflicts pain upon others. With a different awareness, the former offender can now work toward the process of restoring community healing. One cannot return from prison and live outside of community life. At some level, we all need to interact with others. The nature of those evolving interactions is the substance of the recovery movement. It calls for a dialogue, perhaps starting with minimal contact. Perhaps the contact is made symbolically with other citizens who support the restoration and rehabilitation process. Later, that demonstration project can be extended to include a wider scope of community members. In helping to restore a lost individual, the community starts to experience a healing process.

A terrible tragedy occurred when twelve people were killed by a disturbed individual. He apparently was floundering in his academic endeavors, and a deliveryman later noted that he had been receiving

multiple shipments of ammunition to his apartment. The downhill slide had been going on over a period of months before the massacre. No one seemed to notice that he was tipping over the edge or, if someone noticed, evidently made no personal connection. Events like this one do not just happen; they smolder for a length of time before erupting in violence. I have no personal knowledge of this individual so cannot state with any certainty that an attempt to reach out would have altered the events. But it is remarkable to note that there are people in every community who long for connection and who slowly wither away into despair and isolation in the absence of meaningful human contact.

Recovery means that everyone is important. There are no exceptions. Everyone counts. It is not a mandate to rescue others or befriend those who are unwilling to accept gracious contact. It is an investment in the life of another person that affects my own quality of life. Ideally, these encounters are fostered at the family level, but there are many who live among us who have no visible family support. For them, recovery means finding a point of connection, even if it is only saying hello and extending a small smile. While recovery is an individual phenomenon, its roots are based in the community. Recovery is an unnecessary task if the community has not experienced some sense of violation from the offender. In years past, alcoholics were viewed by community members as hopeless cases. They routinely violated the norms of the community and were thought to be destined for prison, life within an asylum, or eventual death from a life of dissipation. Today, we know that such individuals can and do recover from their disorders. Offenders could fit a similar mold if they are integrated back into community life, even passively restored.

An offender's family cannot expect recovery to be a one-sided affair; since there has been a substantive injury to the community, it is essential to think of recovery as a bi-lateral task affecting everyone within the community. While family members have no direct ability to foster a climate of recovery, just having the knowledge that there is a need to repair and restore what has been lost will help to make the adjustment easier. It is not easy to make these changes, but it can be started one person at a time. At the center of this storm stands the offender. Their actions will determine to a large extent the nature of the transition that lies ahead. In our recent history, we have experienced incidents that have been captured on film of crimes being committed, only to hear later that the offender had pled not guilty to the subsequent charges. It would seem that the healing process can be initiated by the actions of the offender in acknowledging their unlawful behaviors and accepting the judgment of the court. I full well understand why few offenders are willing to do so in a system that routinely imposes draconian sentences.

The result is the expenditure of huge sums of money, both public and private, in trying to obtain a legal edge, which can be exploited to the advantage of one side or the other. The system offers the vague fantasy that an offender will fare better with a jury than by just acknowledging their own actions. Thus, the real process of healing must await a verdict; during the time between the offense and the subsequent conviction, the community's wounds are festering and desperately in need of care and closure. I am reminded of a local case in which an adult was charged with sexual offenses against a young female member of the family over an extended period of time. The abuse went on for several years and occurred in multiple jurisdictions in which the family had gotten

together. Therefore, charges had been filed in two states to address the crimes. The matter had been pending in local courts for several years with a seemingly endless number of postponements. The young lady had matured and had arrived in her adolescence. The family had been split over the claims and counterclaims, and all seemed to be stuck in a state of suspended animation pending resolution. The agony went on adding to the injury of the original offenses. In that case, the offender had an opportunity to set the matter right and move toward healing the family's pain and suffering. I can understand his fear and turmoil over having to face a stiff prison sentence, but delaying that process by failing to acknowledge responsibility only adds additional injury to the process and fosters a climate in which healing is never fully realized. The offender has an opportunity to act out of real love, but seeing no way out, grasps at the straws of a possible legal miracle.

This process is being played out in courtrooms all over this country. The result is a belief that justice delayed is justice denied. The result is a loss of public confidence in the system, since it seems to serve its own interests.

Worse yet, it undermines confidence in the fact that we are all children of God and therefore in need of mercy. It is hard to plead for mercy in the case where an offender is well aware of his behavior and fails to acknowledge his own responsibility. It is a difficult reality for someone charged with a crime to embrace the consequences without looking for a way to manipulate the system for his own advantage. In part, this happens because the legal system accommodates this approach to processing criminal cases. The system does not encourage the individual

to “man-up” and move on. So everyone is left in a maelstrom of turmoil, bitterness, and hatred. In that context, the family of the offender is gingerly trying to pick its way through the wreckage without setting off a firestorm of protests and negative responses.

It is not just offenders who bear the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, it affects all family members. Therefore, it seems important that the family respond to the situation in a realistic manner, since they will share the post-conviction burdens. The family can help to shape the response to criminal charges by encouraging the offender to act in a manner that respects the needs and future security of all the other family members. In that way, the family takes a positive approach toward healing. This response helps to initiate a climate in which the family can reasonably plan for the future and start to heal themselves.

Every crime causes a rent in the social fabric. Every crime triggers any number of unforeseen consequences. These actions are not isolated events; they ultimately filter down and affect everyone. The justice system is an adversarial process in which each side seeks its own advantage. They each work toward putting their case in the best possible light. The truth lies somewhere in between. Justice can only be served when those involved work toward openly establishing the truth. There is a term that was born out of the efforts of the Justice Department; it is called restorative justice. That term implies that justice can be restored and the scales can be balanced.

As a society, we have done little to establish a recognizable baseline of what constitutes restorative justice. Within that concept, recovery is a foundational element that must be considered to restore what has been

lost. The justice process does not end with a conviction and an imposed prison sentence. Recovery moves to the head of the line because the long-term issues of community reintegration have taken precedence. Most individuals who have been incarcerated will eventually return to their communities. Ignoring that fact only postpones the reality of truly restorative justice at the community level. For the present, the strategy for reintegration is supervision and control, poor substitutes for rebuilding meaningful connections between people.

Nothing in this book should be construed as advocating a “soft on crime” approach to judging offenses. Rather, what is advocated is the realization that those who have failed in their social responsibilities will be living among us again after their prison terms are served. A policy of social indifference—or, worse yet, a strategy of severicide—will continue to impair and hinder attempts to restore what has been lost.

True remorse is not produced through a period of incarceration. It stems from the heart of the offender, who comes to realize that he has damaged the community in which he lived. It produces an internal drive to make things right again, even if only symbolically. It grows into a drive to take multiple small steps that manifest in pro-social behaviors. This drive is not fostered in a public environment but reveals itself in the willingness to become accountable by moving into the gap when confronted with opportunities to be of service to others. Without public recognition or acknowledgement, the offender chooses to express commitment for caring and concern toward others. That is the heart of personal rehabilitation.

The importance of a spirit of recovery at the individual and family level

is that it serves as an indicator that a restorative process is underway. Seeing this concept emerge among offenders and their family members is a solid indication of a desire to move past the indifference of the past and accept the challenges of living as a productive and loving member of society.



CHAPTER THIRTY

SERVICE - HELPING HANDS

A spirit of service is the opposite of a spirit of selfishness. Christian service springs from a heart that is joyful and seeks to express itself in countless small acts of kindness. These acts stems from the awareness that all life is precious and that we share responsibility for the world we live in. They are gifts of gratitude offered to a loving Savior out of the joyfulness of personal reconciliation and restoration. There is no room in this context for self-interests.

Service is the outward expression of care and concern for others. Self-initiated and anonymous service is the highest kind of personal outreach. It is a hand extended without asking for help. It is a loving act motivated solely out of love for God and others. It is the manifest goal of all those who seek to make things right and to leave the world a better place for their having been here.

It asks no reward, harbors no expectation, and remains wrapped in the mystery of anonymous love. There are so many forms in which these events can be accomplished that it would be impossible to provide even a fraction of the venues available.

Nevertheless, there are some general ways to approach this mission. The first element is a heartfelt desire to touch others for good without possible repayment. The second and perhaps most important aspect is to make these small acts without keeping track of what you have done. They are all just pure acts of kindness and concern motivated by the spirit of gratitude for what God has accomplished in your life and the lives of family members.

You will soon discover that, as you bless others, you will also be blessed in return. God will not be indebted to any man. Pride and the expectation of return blessings have no place in a world of generosity and affection. As you move forward, you will be amazed at the way each event changes you. When you get to this point of spiritual development, there is no turning back; you discover that joy flows freely with each new effort on behalf of others. It becomes a new way of living out each day. Suddenly, you realize that righteousness comes from the gifts of God at work in your life, not from what others think about you.

Service does not mean being subservient. Service does not mean being a slave or held in bondage. Service is an action that flows from the spirit of wanting to make things right—even if you were not the one who wronged the individual for whom you perform the service. It is doing right for right's sake. Christian service is the manifestation of small acts of loving kindness toward others, fueled by a profound sense of gratitude

that God has restored us to sonship through His graciousness in His application of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. It is giving to others freely out of a spirit of loving concern.

It may sound old-fashioned to open a discussion about love of country, but that is also a component of true service work. America has offered a vision for the people of the world—a place where equality meets opportunity and goodness streams out of the efforts of many for the good of all. Love of country in this context does not subscribe to the vast and endless differences that set us apart. Instead, it flows to the small, subtle ways in which our common needs are made manifest. It is the recognition of our sameness, not a focus upon individual differences. There is no way to measure the impact of a kind act upon the life of another. It does not stop with those who receive the gesture but flows on to influence those we will never meet.

These acts need not be extravagant or public displays; in fact, the more private an act, the more effective its outcome. Holding a door open for someone else, returning a shopping cart, smiling at someone who looks weary, and sharing a kind word costs us nothing. But they can make all the difference in the world to someone who is feeling terribly alone and isolated.

Disrespect is a commonplace event. The clerk in the store lies because it is easier than helping us. The salesman makes promises with no intention of following through. The driver in front of us cuts us off with no visible recognition that we are even in the same environment. None of us need hunt far to identify an endless stream of activities that diminishes individual lives.

Service-mindedness is about looking past those momentary engagements and finding those opportunities to offer a different response to strangers. It is a pro-social initiative that starts to dominate our thinking and our behavior. It eventually becomes an attitude and then manifests itself as a habit. It seeks nothing in return and has no value until it has been given away freely. In this context, I proceed with my life one day at a time and one person at a time.

I can put up the newspapers left in my neighbor's driveway while they are away on vacation. I can plant a tree in a forest to replace something that I have destroyed. I can pay the toll for the driver who is waiting behind me in line. I can give the waitress an extra five percent tip, because she seems to be having a rough day. I can send a greeting card to someone who is in the hospital. I can listen to someone who does not seem to have others in his life. I can routinely say thank you when someone does something nice for me. I can choose to offer a compliment rather than grouse about some perceived flaw. The possibilities are endless, and the rewards are tremendous. I can remember that no matter who comes into my life, they are someone's son or daughter. They are created in the image and likeness of God.

I can refuse to waste my life speculating endlessly over the past and turn my attention toward those things where I have an opportunity to make an impact for good. True service flows from an inner experience of caring for others. It seeks to find the humanity in everyone I encounter. It sets an unspoken personal standard that celebrates fairness, love, compassion, and concern. It is its own reward.

A book written by Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*,²⁷ sets forth

²⁷Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2000).

the principle that actions done by enough people will eventually create an outward influence among others. Can you imagine how our society would change if only offenders and their family members were to grasp this simple principle as a life-changing reality? There would be millions of people autonomously making personal decisions to look beyond their own needs and to touch others for good. We have that capability within our grasp. It starts with each of us, and it moves like an unseen force among the general population. In the book *Chaos Theory*, seemingly random events are explored in terms of their interrelationships. It is beyond our understanding to appreciate how these simple acts of kindness influence and reshape the world we live in. But they do, and they will.

We are only here for a season. It may seem very unlikely that a single behavior toward others would be meaningful. The truth is that no action goes unnoticed, no matter how small a gesture it may be. That spiritual dynamic governs life. Everything we do counts, and there are no wasted endeavors, only wasted opportunities. Service springs from an awareness that we are all in the same lifeboat together and that we need each other—even the worst among us. God does not make mistakes, so that means that everyone counts.

In a companion book for offenders, I will explore a number of things that can be done to reshape our communities, states, and country, and even influence others who are far removed by distance and culture. In writing that chapter, it seemed to me that the greatest resistance we encounter is the belief that we as individuals do not have the capacity to make meaningful change in our environment. Nothing could be further

from the truth. Anyone who suffers is my neighbor. The common enemy is a spirit of isolation and indifference. The corrective spirit is a concern for the well-being of others.

It does not matter how those others react to our efforts. It only matters that we have made the effort. I believe that every day we are moved by countless events in our lives to which we could respond. But our most frequent response is to dismiss those opportunities without further consideration. Each of those encounters has the potential to lessen the suffering of the human condition. When we dismiss them, we reject the blessings that could flow into our lives from helping others. The size of the project undertaken is unimportant; only the spirit in which it has been taken is important. The key to understanding the true nature of service work lies in the impact it has upon our lives and those of our family members.

If an awareness of community recovery is a foundational indicator of changed lives, then anonymous acts of service are the wellspring of renewed community life. Plant a garden with lots of flowers, buy a toy for a nameless child, and speak kindly and softly when speaking of others. Defer self-interests in favor of the interests of others. These are the tools with which we can start to reshape our world and restore lost dignity and worth to individual lives. Hopefully, we all want to believe that we can contribute to the world in which we live and not just leave a legacy of consumption and greed. Even if I had no spiritual beliefs to underscore these efforts, I could recognize that other men, women, and children are seeking to live out their lives with some degree of harmony and peace.

In recognizing that fact, any action that I undertake to further that goal

has an unseen effect upon the quality of every life. This concept of service is a direct reflection of changed lives and needs no reinforcement or acknowledgement to prove its reality. The word love has been distorted to mean a number of things in the modern world. Service is an outward expression of love for others. It never trumpets its message and is best offered in the context of humble anonymity. Once it has been shared with others, it reflects its magical quality to make you feel happy inside.

So what does service have to do with the adjustment of the offender back into community life? It offers a pathway to reengagement in the lives of others without incurring the risk of unwanted intrusion. It plays out one event at a time and starts to transform the heart of the one whose past activities have been self-centered and selfish. Life starts to take on a new dimension of meaning, and the joy that flows from each small effort restores the individual's sense of personal dignity and worth. It starts to become a way of living our lives and needs no stimulation to produce a new crop of ideas.

Within the family, members start to notice the changes within the offender and, more importantly, hope starts to emerge for a different life. Hope is a potent remedy for feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness. Children and then adults begin to recognize that the offender has had some indefinable personal experience that manifests itself in a changed life. Perhaps one outcome of this remarkable process becomes the shift in the lives of individual family members as they begin to mirror a similar attitude toward life. This concept cannot be taught or imposed by command; it can only be modeled.

One small act at a time, I begin to make the world a better place to live

in. This concept will escape the logic of those who only seek to further their own interests. But the advantage is that those who truly seek redemption and restoration will be sustained in a new way of living, while those unfortunates who lack that understanding continue to pursue their own agendas. Having the privilege of living in this country incurs a responsibility to ensure that it survives intact for those who are yet to come.

Hatred, arrogance, and deception have no valid place in the actions of individuals who are committed to making things right. Our lives will all end at some future point, and what we have left behind to bless others will be our personal legacy. Be bold, be creative, and be resourceful. There are millions of ways to affect other lives for good. Ultimately, you will reap the fruit you have sown. No one can deprive you of the joys of a life well lived. In this rich soil of personal transformation, you will be surprised how labels lose their ability to scar or affect you negatively. Deep inside, you will know that you are no longer the same person you once were.

It does not matter that you may have gotten a late start on living this way. All that matters now is that you begin today to bless those who live among us and to create a new family tradition of loving service.

Children, spouses, and family members of offenders are in a unique position to encourage and champion new awakenings. These shifts of attitude will not emerge from nagging or imposition, but they will usually grow naturally in the lives of individuals who enjoy the experience of being made whole again. They should always be celebrated as family events.



CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

GRATITUDE

Like a spirit of recovery and a spirit of service, a spirit of gratitude grows out of having our lives transformed by God. These are the major markers of individuals and families on their way to true healing. I cannot envision these dynamics occurring outside of a spiritual relationship, because the activities that support each are not enough to sustain forward momentum. These activities flow from a life that has been transformed; they do not bring about the transformation itself. The only meaning that I can identify that maintains this change of purpose in life is the reality of having had a spiritual awakening.

Bitterness and resentment have no place in lives focused upon gratitude, but they may indicate that the individual is experiencing inner turmoil. If they appear, it is appropriate to talk about the feelings that have brought them to the surface. By confronting the negative feelings in a loving and

accepting family environment, others come to an understanding of the individual's struggles and become enlightened about how to help the former offender make a reasonable adjustment. Ignoring the emerging problems or expecting the offender to shoulder the complete burden are unwise coping strategies. If someone in the family were sick, we would not respond to the illness by ignoring it. I have sought to avoid labeling anyone else's behavior as "sinful." I only know that so many of the choices I have made in life were sinful choices. Today, I clearly understand the battle of good versus evil, and I can accept the actions of others as falling into either domain. Defining others as bad people is not an acceptable alternative. God loves the sinner but hates the sin. That is my personal challenge as a twenty-first century Christian.

My experience with God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness has given me the assurance of His love for me in spite of my sinfulness. More importantly, it has provided me with the experience of personal freedom. The outcome has manifested itself in freedom from oppression, want, and impulse. I know that those who have struck out against me were probably driven by their own destructive whispers.

Once understood, it becomes easier to let go of hatred, pride, arrogance, and a desire for revenge. I firmly believe that no one is going to get away with anything. If you have been wronged, then quickly offer the gift of forgiveness. If you have wronged others, then quickly seek forgiveness from those individuals and always from God. One of the areas I struggled with as a young man was the burden of my harmful or malicious behavior toward numbers of individuals. It was a burden that I carried and could not shake loose. It produced a certainty within me that I was lost with no

hope of help! My faith has led me to understand that all have sinned; we only vary in types and frequency. None can stand before a righteous God in sin. His sinless state cannot abide the presence of sin, just as light and dark cannot coexist in the same place at the same moment. Either I am covered by the blood of Jesus, or I am making the choice to personally bear the penalty for my actions.

Like a starving man, I do not need to know how the food was grown and harvested, how it was cooked or seasoned, to benefit from its nutritional value. I only need to reach out and enjoy the feast. Likewise, I do not have to have a perfect knowledge of the Trinity, or understand how Jesus Christ walked on water, to benefit from His sacrifice on the cross. I merely have to accept the gift He has freely made available. It's that simple. No wonder gratitude is the closing subject of this book.

I do not need to understand great philosophical or theological constructs to experience the love of God. All I need to do is to reach out for that love and assurance of salvation. Nothing more! I am a child of God, and nothing will ever negate that truth. So those who judge us and rush to cast stones are like children without any knowledge except those elements that constitute self-interests. They are merely acting upon the impulsive nature common to us all. It is a form of ignorance.

God does not want us to be ignorant of His will for our lives. I believe with all my heart that if you take your daily struggles to Him in prayer, He will hear you and guide your decision-making with the practical assistance needed to live through each day. Knowetics is about coming to that level of understanding. It is about knowing that you are finally free and not subject to the surges and struggles of life. It is about that

special Father/child relationship that overshadows all of the conflicts of life.

Like the vanilla ice cream problem, you may “know” about vanilla ice cream without ever having tasted it. If, in the course of my life, I miss the experience of tasting ice cream, I have lost nothing essential. On the other hand, if you are waiting in your cell for a judge to schedule your execution date, or you are wasted by a dreaded disease and lying in bed awaiting the relief and finality of death, then you are faced with an essential choice. Do you show up in God’s presence and try to plead your cause, or do you ask Jesus Christ to speak for you? It’s your choice exclusively!

If I were allowed the privilege of spending a complete day with you, I would tell you the story. I would not leave out the alcohol or drug addictions, the arrests, trials, convictions, and imprisonment that followed my misadventure. I would then get down to the incredibly painful and lonely life of living for myself alone. I would share the burden of constantly being in conflict with God’s Word. Together we could talk about always missing the mark. I would share with you my deepest pain and sorrow. I would hold nothing back from you.

Then I would lift my head and tell you about my deep sense of gratitude that all of these events occurred in my life. Yes, I said the word gratitude in the same context as describing my sufferings. You see, that is what it took to open my eyes to God’s promises and blessings. That is also why I’m so certain today of the reality of spirituality in our lives. It is perhaps the most under-used asset we have in life. Yet its harnessed power makes nuclear power seem like child’s play. We are talking about the glue that

holds the universe together and moves it forward according to God's plan. Please do not take my word for it: Like ice cream, it needs to be experienced to understand its true nature. Knowetics is truly about the power of God in your life. But it goes beyond anything that you may have experienced religiously or theologically. It stands apart and stands alone. It is totality independent of any other aspect of life. It is the nature of your relationship with God. I wrote these words for you because if you are like me, you need to truly experience this truth.

I cannot make the choice for you. It is absolutely your own choice. No one will force you to accept the free gifts of God. But if you miss them, then let me hasten to tell you that you are missing the essence of life itself. Even now, it is not too late to ask Him if what I have written here is accurate. I know my Father; He will not withhold any good thing from you. If you sincerely seek the truth, He will show you and also confirm it to you. My experience as a Christian has been that when God shows me something important, He always confirms that experience through someone else. It is like the quiet assurance that my spirit craves, to know that I can step out and trust His Word. You see, my friend, I am convinced that He never intended for me to make this journey alone. Close your eyes for a moment and consider where you are in your life. Do you want to continue on alone, or could you use some company?

If you have no conception of how God wants to interact with you, if you lack the ability to believe what I have told you, then use the next best thing. Hang on to my faith, my belief, and my hope. I gladly share it with you. Sit down and, while your struggles are fresh, write to me. Tell me about those struggles. I will reach out my hand to you in love and

support, as so many others have reached out their hands to me.

While I have often chosen a lonely and isolated pathway for myself, there is no requirement that you do so. Suffering and loneliness are optional from this point on. One of the great discoveries in dealing with my alcohol addiction was the reality that I was not alone. In twelve-step meetings, I discovered that there were virtually millions of people just like me. I was not a freak of nature or a hopelessly lost individual. Later, I moved on to the experience of discovering that my sin condition was not unique to me. Suffering is still optional when the grace of God is available to sustain you through every trial of your life. The incredibly good news is that we are all the same. Some of us have acted overtly and consistently demonstrated sinful choices. Others have harbored those choices covertly within their spirits. Either way, we are all guilty before God. Do you remember the standard set by Jesus Christ? There is no difference between committing the act of adultery physically or in our minds; we are all equally guilty.²⁸

Therefore, the good news is that you do not have to go about hanging your head like a public sinner. Look up and see what the Son has done for you. Today we are free. That is His great gift to us at the cost of His life. *No one else is fit to judge you!* He has paid the complete price for your freedom. Now live like the free person you are and let the spirit of gratitude flow into your life and through your interactions with others. They will notice the difference, and you will become a shining light to them. Jesus Christ will use you right where you are; this is a faithful saying. Do not take my word for it. Ask Him right now!

²⁸Matthew 5:28.

What He has done in your life will be multiplied in the lives of others. They will start to receive the blessings given freely to you because you live them in your daily choices and actions. One day at a time, your spirit will be transformed and renewed. Until you act upon these words, they remain words on a page. Stop and envision the governor or president signing a full and complete pardon. It has your name on it. Would you resist that gift? If you were suffering from a terrible terminal illness and your doctor hurried to bring you news of a drug that might reverse the course of your disease, would you argue with him or her over this gift of life? Not likely!

All at once, where despair and anguish ruled your days and nights, you will feel the stirrings of hope deep inside of your heart. Out of that experience will grow the tender shoots of faith, manifesting a different outcome and the hope that it was all true. Later will emerge a profound sense of gratitude that you survived pending death. Your spirit will exude the glow of those who were lost and then found themselves in the eternal realms.

Nothing I said or did would shake your belief in the reality of your experience. Gradually, your gratitude would take on a quality of personal transformation, like a badge of honor that you proudly display to everyone you meet. In that way, gratitude becomes the hallmark of the process that has occurred in your life. Others may not be aware of the specifics of your encounter with God, but they can observe the difference it has made in your life. No one could convince you to deny your experience.

Therefore, it is quite fitting that gratitude is the final chapter in this book. It is the evidence of your healing for all to see. Do you remember how Jesus reached out and touched the lepers, healing them of their dreaded disease?²⁹ We know that one of the ten returned to worship Him for His great gift. The former leper was grateful for what God had done for him personally. God is about people, not institutions or governments. That does not mean that we should continue to live in strife with these elements of society.

I am quite sure that after his healing, the leper sought to bathe himself and to clothe himself in clean clothing. He had changed on the inside. He had been given a brand new life. So he acted outwardly in a manner consistent with the gift he had been given by Jesus. As he told others of his experience as a former leper, you can be sure that there were many who discounted his story of the miraculous encounter with Jesus Christ. After all, there was any number of persons who called Him a magician, denying His divinity.

Who do you say He is?

To me, He is Lord! He is my Healer! He is the restorer of my life! I have no desire to return to a time when I had the leprosy of selfishness in my life. That infection manifested itself in all kinds of sinful behaviors. Today I stand before you and freely tell you about my leprosy. I don't seek to somehow diminish the repulsiveness of my disease. In fact, I gladly embrace my history as it gives me the opportunity to reach out to others who are just like me.

We are not alone. We are empowered by the gifts of God. We are new

²⁹Luke 17:11-19

creations. We are His righteous goodwill ambassadors in all things. We have a burden to help others, now that we have been set free.

Fear is just an illusion. It has no power on its own. Please remember that Jesus was human and divine. My spirit knows that He experienced every human feeling right up and through His death. Still, on the cross, He asked His Father to forgive us, since we did not know what we were doing.³⁰

Let us take an inventory now and see what we possess that we can freely give away to others. How can we support, educate, and bless others as we emerge from the long night of sin in our lives? We all have talents and abilities that can be useful to others. Until we give them away, they are merely the potential for good. Take stock of your situation and decide on one thing that you can change today. Then do it. Sometimes a smile or cheerful nod can be more meaningful than a check for a hundred thousand dollars.

None of us is so poor or so deprived that we do not have some small gift to offer others. There is no one trapped in a death cell or a dying body who does not possess the potential to bless others. The question becomes, do you give it away freely, or do you keep it to yourself? Only you can decide, and only you and God will know your decision. Please join me. Let's make a new start today, just like the leper in the Bible story. All it takes is making the choice to act with the grace of God.

Ten lepers were healed. Only one returned and gave thanks. Sounds very believable in terms of modern society. For years, every time I got myself into a difficult situation, I would try to make a quick deal with

³⁰Luke 23:24.

God: if He would just rescue me one more time, then I would Today, I know that everything that has happened in my life had a purpose, and all those events have served God's purposes in some way. I also know that, no matter what I felt at the moment, I was never alone. God's grace was with me. Today, I can express my gratitude for the substance of my life, since God has used it to serve His divine purpose and to glorify His holy name.

If you are a "leper" or can relate to the experience of exclusion, please contact me directly, and I will be happy to share the path and promise of personal redemption. The justice experience is like an endless wearying night that falls upon us and feels as if it will never end. It is my desire to shed light on the pathway for those who find themselves of this journey now or in the days to come. It is a painful and hard journey to make, but please know that you are not alone. The information provided in this book can help you forge a new life for your family. More importantly, my hope is that you will use this information to look at yourselves the way that God looks at all of us. We are all His precious children.



ADDITIONAL NOTES



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS A THEORY OF VICTIMIZATION

Who are the victims of crime? In an age in which the word victim is bandied about by the news media, it is useful to address the obvious from the beginning. So who are the victims of crime? This author has developed a schema of victimization in order to appropriately define the course of destruction regarding various sub-populations. We start by classifying the first group as the primary victims of crime. These are individuals who have sustained a direct injury related to criminal activity. This membership has the potential of incorporating families who have experienced murders, mayhem, or serious personal injury, along with those who are victims of loss due to home or business burglaries or ID thefts.

Membership is based upon vertical factors like generational membership

and cross-sections of the community affected (consider 9/11) to horizontal membership, which may include regional, financial, social, religious, and geopolitical influences. Usually, victims of crime defined in terms of primary victimization exceed the single digit events inherent in news reports and multimedia's flow of information. These individuals are accorded the distinction of being positioned at the beginning of the victimization process or alternately listed as the primary victims.

Nothing in this book is meant to suggest that services to these individuals should be sacrificed in order to accommodate the other levels of newly emergent victims. At the same time, it is imperative to educate those with direct losses to the true nature of victimization so that the community functions as a responsive voice of all its citizens. Just as the devastation associated with Hurricane Katrina affected all classes, creeds, ethnicities, and types of citizens as it rampaged through Louisiana and Mississippi, crime has the same impact upon all members of the community. Only recently have we begun to expand our knowledge base of the insidious processes that emerge in the aftermath of criminal activities.

Another level of victimization might be referred to as the secondary level, and it includes family members and friends of the offender who are likely to be caught up in the chaos following the commission of a crime. It can include family members experiencing shock at finding their son or daughter has been arrested for alcohol abuse or drug use. It might also be another incident in a long line of increasingly serious charges that seemingly confound all efforts to extinguish these behaviors. The most appalling of these encounters remains those incidents in which family members and friends learn of events from a media representative or via

a phone call from law enforcement seeking assistance in defusing some highly charged and dangerous situation.

For those who find themselves in this critical group, they are likely to be thrust into a situation beyond their knowledge or ability to cope. Additionally, they are now engaged in a helping role, which means that they assume some level of ownership for the outcome. Consider the family members of Klebold and Harris on April 20, 1999, when Columbine High School became the center of a worldwide media storm. Reporters and TV personnel besieged their homes with intrusive questions before these family members had the opportunity to understand what had happened.

Eventually, the public response drove these families to escape by moving in the direction of social invisibility. The same mechanism of action spun up in response to the McDonald's killings in San Ysidro, California, on July 18, 1984, when James Oliver Huberty committed a nightmarish massacre in the local fast food franchise. His wife and family members were hounded out of the area as a result of his actions, though they had no advance knowledge of his intentions.

Or alternatively, consider the case of the family members of JonBenét Ramsey following her death on December 25, 1996, while living in an upscale Boulder neighborhood. Various family members were plagued with accusations and insinuations that drove the media firestorm that consumed their individual lives. Following the death of his wife Patsy, John Ramsey sought some restoration of his privacy and relocated to Atlanta, Georgia. In 2002, the parents and brother's DNA was used to exclude them from further investigation. But by that time, they had

sustained a six-year battering of allegations. Social or economic status, ethnicity, occupation, financial worth, and a host of other distinctive markers fail to preserve the privacy of family members and friends in this type of situation.

These cautions may apply to lesser offenses as well; it all depends upon the media environment. Given the oft-heard murmuring that the rich have a different set of rules, the plight of this family should enlighten public perception and inform policy makers of the dangers inherent in rumors and half-truths.

In a more recent incident, when the “person of interest” refused to speak directly with law enforcement investigators, his actions were offered to the public as evidence of his involvement in the original crime. The fact that this citizen sought legal counsel was held up as an indication of his guilt.

This tendency to smear others with half-truths and innuendos has become an unpleasant fact in the American Justice System. If “they” cannot get to you, the next goal is to get to a vulnerable family member and hammer that individual until “they” can reach you directly. When their ill-conceived plans go awry, the soft-shoed sleuths of modern America are quick to absolve themselves of wrongdoing in the follow-up public outcry.

Consider the case of Josh Powell (February 6, 2012), who killed his two young sons and then committed suicide. He took this action after months of allegations and harassment directed even against his own father. If I back a dog or a cat into the corner, the animal will eventually

come out fighting. Josh Powell chose a sad venue to engage the fight. I do not support such extreme behavior at the cost of innocent lives, but I can well understand his plight and desperation.

According to the U.S. Constitution, we are all entitled to due *process and equal protection* (14th Amendment) under the law. This applies to state and federal proceedings. Be careful in all your legal undertakings. Enforcers of the law will quickly tell you that ignorance of the law is no defense. They neglect to inform you that they are authorized by law to lie, deceive, use, and secure information without prior notification of their tactics. If you lie to them, you will be charged with a crime; if they lie to you, they are just doing what is expected of them. It is always best to speak through legal counsel. The pathways of justice are torturous and unforgiving, so be forewarned, engage in any legal dialogue or conversation that has the potential for legal consequences at your own risk.

It is reasonable to consult with counsel prior to answering any law enforcement/justice related inquiries *no matter how innocent they may appear to be*. You will not find any representative of a law enforcement agency willing to expose himself or herself to scrutiny without having the protection of legal counsel. The same is true for companies, corporations, and other legal entities. Be wise, be silent, and be informed.

The third level of victimization incorporates the community members at large and those who may be involved in the administration of justice in its various forms. Scientific research has offered some clarity on the vicarious effects of exposure to violence. A good example of these effects can be referenced, if you happened to be exposed to the continuous

replay of the video showing the planes crashing into the World Trade Towers on 9/11.

A friend who has served in a southern sheriff's office described the scene of discovering an infant's body on the sidewalk after her mother had thrown the child out the window. Though the event had happened years earlier, his verbal description conveyed the level of emotional scarring that had affected him following this incident. He is likely to carry that through the years, just as those of us who witnessed JFK's killing or 9/11 will carry those memories with us until we die. These examples are useful in establishing the border effects of tertiary victimization.

Inherent in the problem of victimization is the behavior of the offender at the center of the storm. The offender becomes his or her own "victim" in this behavioral ballet of actions and consequences. Their actions have the effect of initiating a legal process that will end in arrest and possible imprisonment, most certainly some level of probation or parole oversight. After incarceration, these individuals become wards of the court, and their lives are subject to management by the custodial agencies or pertinent prison system.

It might seem odd to consider the offenders or participants in initiating the criminal justice system response as elements of the resolution process, but without a fair and thorough legal review of the actions of the offender, the community is effectively denied the opportunity for closure and healing. Nor can that public examination process be used as justification for the crime or be masked as an attempt to diminish the recognition of pain and suffering of victims. That would make a travesty of the trial and sentencing.

The potential usefulness in recognizing levels of victimization is the possibility of incorporating both vertical and horizontal analysis of community disruption in terms of loss. Given the clinical utility of examining the concept of community loss, we are free to examine all co-factors without attributing distractions that associate worth. In this context, loss is loss. Its impact has effectual blowback for all citizens. If one suffers, we all suffer.

The schemata of victimization has previously been explored as a function of federal grant applications and observations offered in various formats for the purposes of informing policy and practice decisions. Given these previous efforts, little more will be developed to offer further exploration on the levels of victimization. The practical purpose of this book is to define the process, role, and effects of membership within level two of the schemata of victimization. It is an attempt to illustrate the after effects of betrayal by family members on one hand and the practical effects of exclusion within society on the other hand.

Most children, spouses, and family members of offenders are caught up in the aftermath of crime without any forewarning. But unlike other members of the community, they are charged with shouldering the burden of responding to the how's, why's, and the wherefore's of what happened. They also carry the burden of shame, because rarely are they afforded privacy and almost never the privilege of anonymity. Therefore, they assume a position in no-man's land, without the comfort of family and friends and far beyond the reach of empathic understanding by neighbors or community members. What a frightening and isolative experience this must be, and there is no time limit on the experience of

future repercussions. Can you imagine living in such an environment? No chance for normalcy since one can never predict when past events will fuel future struggles.

When the courtroom door closes and the defendant is taken out in handcuffs, the family members stand behind in bewilderment and confusion. At that moment, they are pretty much left on their own to manage the emerging events that will shape their lives and future. Usually they do so by trial and error, having no guide to educate or prepare them. Given their unfortunate family connections, there are few resources available to help them survive this traumatic experience. They are alone, and if they did not know this before, the grim reality is starting to sink in, along with emerging feelings of despair and the awareness of being overwhelmed.

Much has been written since the beginning of the age of the victim, but most of it relates to level one and level three constituents. Family members of offenders do not tend to generate much empathy or outreach. This book has been written to identify their plight, both seen and unseen, and to give voice to their helpless cries in the night. Most of all, this book has been written to recognize their right to recover their dignity and worth. Sad to say, there will be succeeding generations of families who will have to learn the arduous pathways and twisted trials inherent in navigating the road to justice and the subsequent road to recovery. I have attempted to offer a semblance of structure to guide those who are caught up in the turmoil and terror of crime.

Contrary to popular opinion, the road is clogged with refugees who have had no practical experience in facing these matters. As with any

other target group, there are predators standing off to the side, waiting to swoop down on the unknowing victims. This book can help you prepare yourself emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as you trod this grim path.

One of the first blows is likely to come in the form of suggestions and recommendations about your marital status or continued relationships post-conviction. Try to avoid making a decision under pressure. Take your time and seek appropriate counsel from one who is not blinded by the initial fury of anger and indifference. Though a prison or jail now houses them, your son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, mother or father is still that ... your family member.

They are not likely to draw much sympathy from any casual observer. Such lack of empathy will not eliminate the need to consider how you will define your family, the steps to take to hold your family together, and the goals of making long-term decisions about divorce or reunification post-incarceration. These are all serious steps and should be approached when you are fully informed and well supported in your choices.

The goal of this book has been to provide an information resource that is reliable and responsive to your needs. There are several million families across the United States that are dealing with the same pain and shame thrust upon your family. They may become a resource for you, and hopefully you will become a resource for others once you find your voice.

Your voice, joined by a million other voices, calls out for individual dignity, the recognition of personal worth, and the hope for restoration of your family while walking through the darkest of valleys.



CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

REFLECTIONS

A KILLING AND THREE DEATHS

At the end of the day, I am confounded with multiple thoughts, a whirlwind of emotions, regrets, grief, and a profound awareness of my diminished humanity. You see, I took a life in a moment of miscalculated intensity and misguided strength, fueled by the urgency of imperious demands. My wrong actions resulted in the death of another human being.

I have no way to convey the horror of that personal experience, nor could words describe the incomprehensible fear that shook my frame as the awareness of my actions slowly took shape before me. The hardest moment of all was that instant when I realized that nothing I could do would restore the life of my victim. Up until that moment, I scarcely recognized this person as a victim, but the absence of life, caused by my

behavior, soon produced the shattered reality.

While this moment in time drove me to control further expressions of my wanton behavior, the chase was on. It was only a matter of time before I was captured and jailed for my offense. Once publicly identified, I was rightly confronted with the evidence of my wrongdoings. No place to hide, least of all deep inside my consciousness. My name is known and associated with my actions. There is nothing to be gained by a public review of the historical facts.

At this time, almost four decades after my crime, the only meaningful reflection that I can offer is the ideas I have set down for you to read. My moment of dyscontrol has catapulted me through a lifetime of bodily and spiritual incarceration. In that timeframe, I have had to acknowledge and manage the futility that my choices wrought and accept the person I became.

These ideas are not offered for compensatory value to society. There is no way to repair the tear in the fabric of the community I offended. Neither are my words an attempt to recreate myself in the vast void of time that has transpired since this crime. No, my words are nothing more than an expression of the life path that I have experienced. That path of development has led me to the reality that my actions have engendered a responsibility that cannot be lessened with the passage of time.

You see, it matters little whether the parole board declares my prison journey at a close or if the dust of my substance is committed to an early grave. Neither are remedies for the harm I have perpetrated in my youthful years. I am also reconciled to the belief that my place in eternity

will bear the marks of my behaviors, modified and mediated by reality of a promise. I am certain that the mark of Cain associated with my name will yield to the quiet cleansing and welcoming of the gracious Father.

This is not an attempt to escape the horror of my actions, but rather an acknowledgement that even the most reprehensible human behaviors yield to the ultimate dynamics of spirituality. People are dispatched to a lifetime in prison or an exit from life itself in the form of the death penalty. But these are human attempts to define and respond to the ill-fated passions of offenders. They are temporary physical solutions to spiritual problems. Limited in scope and utility, they seem to satisfy the demands of the moment.

And then, the problem disappears from your immediate vision, and you settle in with the mental accommodation that everything has been resolved. Therein lies the misassumption that invisibility and exclusion are the solution to the problem. Remarkably, the dying continues to go on, though largely unseen at the community level. Instead, the resources of the public are now dispatched to clean up an accumulation of broken relationships and hurriedly attempt to restore a façade of peace and tranquility in the name of law and order.

“Everything is okay now,” you are assured. “It’s all over. Go on home, folks,” the community leaders urge those who assemble, trying to make sense of the latest act of violence. It is an elegant masquerade offering the hope that control is the equivalent of a restored sense of community. Even as the people return to their homes, they are troubled with fears and suspicions about all the others. The reassurance is unsettling and merely makes us more cautious about the faces behind the masks of

civility. That is a death that has occurred at the community level—a direct result of a loss of another’s life. And so, slowly, the ripples in the pond begin to spread beyond our comprehension or ability to absorb their meaning.

The community was the first to suffer as the news surfaced about yet another killing in a city suffering from an onslaught of crime. There was nothing about this event that offered any light or sense of purpose; it was just another senseless crime. As this misery spread at the community level, people were affected in ways I could not understand. It was not a matter of celebrity crime or a particular event of keen notoriety or infamy, but it cast a pall of shared pain over the community.

My act was the impetus in furthering the death of trust, love, and hope at the community level. In its wake, people withdrew into their protective shells and guarded their homes with a restless, irritable, and distrusting view of others. This awareness spread swiftly with the speed of a terrible, unseen virus. It was a part of the process of outflowing events that had emanated from my own actions. While I was still in the midst of the community, I became witness to the tragic pall that settled over the area.

While I had not yet at that time been discovered, I could not elude the persistent cries of my conscience. My actions had brought about horrific consequences—beyond my capacity to anticipate. The underlying throb of conscious pain was intensified by my knowledge that while I had not pursued the death of another human being, my actions had wrongly brought about that reality. It is relatively easy to numb the senses and drug the brain into a static state of minimal functioning, but one never

escapes the truth. Indifference is merely a mask to hide behind, a way to shield yourself from further shame and humiliation while you sort through the millions of thoughts running through your mind.

Indifference was merely an act to cover the scale of enormity that my actions had initiated. No matter where I sought physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual refuge, there was no sanctuary to be found. My arrest brought with it a great surge of fear, but also a calming sense of relief that the future circumstances were out of my hands. With my arrest came the final collapse of my internal denial system. I may have sat silent and—to some—stony-faced, but inside I did not resist the voice of conscience. I had witnessed the devastation my actions had caused within the community, and I could not make amends to anyone. The tragedy had exceeded all bounds.

This dying process was soon followed by another death of a more personal nature. The family and friends of my victim, who loved her dearly, were soon informed of the circumstances that gave rise to her death. As I have realized over the ensuing years, it was not merely a physical or emotional loss but a series of deaths that affected these innocent people.

With the news, their lives were pitched into darkness and pain. I can only imagine the questions that flooded their minds as they sought some kind of peace and understanding. They eventually had to experience the death of her constant love and presence in their lives.

Death took place as her parents surrendered their hope for the future, releasing all claims to generational promise. Perhaps the most devastating death for her parents was the toll they exacted on themselves as they

searched their memories for evidence of how they had failed to protect her. This death also took with it any sense of comfort or personal ease to which they were entitled as her parents.

The facts of the incident added to their pain when viewed through the long lens of reality. It had been a senseless and brutal crime, a crime of passion, made worse by my years of hiding. You see, if I had been captured immediately, these people would have begun the process of healing long before my actual arrest. So my actions had the consequence of prolonging their agony and uncertainty.

In spite of my desire to inflict no further pain on others, my very presence, shielded by the anonymity of daily life, was a daunting reality. You can never run very far from yourself. No matter where you go, there you are! My arrest and conviction may eventually have brought these quiet people some closure, but it would never replace their loss.

The third death took place over a prolonged period of time. This death drew no notice or comment, and rightfully so. It was an entirely interior death, unseen and unacknowledged in traditional form. Some may argue that it was a direct consequence of my actions, a point well taken. After my arrest, my wife initiated divorce proceedings to formally sever contact between us.

I had always assumed, as though in a fantasy, that my marriage would continue onward effortlessly. But the divorce actions brought the starkness of my situation into sharp focus; my wife rightfully made provisions for herself and our son to transition through the events that were thrust upon them. Her reasoned response and graciousness are

clear indicators of the personal dignity that she had always possessed.

The coldness of my loss was discernible in the death of the marriage, though if I were truthful with myself, I had already failed my marital responsibilities long before the events that led to the divorce. Being capable and ambitious, I had always reckoned that I would be able to “fix” any situation that arose in my marriage. But now there was no way to undo the harm I had created.

Sitting in county jail awaiting trial, I had the experience of revisiting my choices on a daily basis. Perhaps it is good that this period exists, since it is useful to stop and consider reality, not just the reality one seeks to create in a time of turmoil and confusion. Another useful aspect of this time is that it allows the guilty one to realize that only personal accountability will offer any hope of closure or future healing.

Letting go of the marriage was a death of its own, as I recognized the irreversible nature of this loss. I had wrought this through my own actions, and there was no neutral ground to which I might flee. The burden was mine, and I had to bear it alone. The death of the marriage gave way to another death that would be revealed over time. The hope of the marriage union was born out in the birth of a son, a child whom I loved to the best of my limited abilities.

As time slowly crept by, I harbored and nurtured the hope of a continued loving relationship with my son. The earthquake of criminality that had shattered my marriage might mercifully have left me with a son. This was a promise for the future and a hope with which to sustain myself day-by-day. But over time, the walls of relationship proved themselves no match

for the weathering winds of pain, uncertainty, shame, and fear brought on by my actions.

That relationship eventually succumbed to the brutal reality that marred our kinship. In time, my only recourse was to let go of this dream and watch the next death play out its macabre scene before my eyes. My son's choice was to sever contact with me, given my prior actions. The view from a prison cell is clear and direct as one looks out into the world. It extends unfettered by time, space, or distance. That view is always a painful reminder of what I have left behind because of my choices. And so another death brought with it a veil of sorrow and regret to color my days in darkness.

Even as I recognized the inevitable justice in these actions, I found myself reeling from the effects of these blows. I found limited comfort on the yard, doing what I could to maintain my body with weight training. It offered a momentary distraction and a purpose upon which I might maintain a steady focus. It also became a mechanism through which I could meet the challenges of prison life. Without that sense of direction, life itself would have spun down to nothingness.

As I refocused my view of life, shifting from the hopefulness of past joys to the starkness of my inner reality, the prison environment hastened the most personal of deaths. Losing the connections to life were deaths in their own right, but the most painful of deaths would occur just beyond my field of vision. This was the most painful of deaths, as if a spark of life was withdrawn, leaving behind an animated corpse.

Slowly, I was overtaken by the loss of self, the hope of being a productive

citizen, a member of society with the rights and responsibilities such a position entails. I was reduced interiorly to the status of a shadow, an unheard whisper, an unseen wisp of nothingness, a bloom that never blossomed. There was no appeal from this life sentence because it happened inside of me. It was a purely interior reality that was beyond description or interpersonal comprehension. It was my burden and mine alone to shoulder. It was the ultimate punishment, truly a living death.

As the reality of these deaths permeated both my consciousness and subconsciousness, I became engaged in an extended period of mourning that transcended any element of selfishness or self-interest. These deaths brought the full meaning of my actions into stark relief when set in contrast with my understanding of the meaning of life. They hastened my engagement with truth and provided me with a slowly emerging sense of direction. Truly, this was my lot.

I have heard that it is the purpose of a seed to fall into the soil and die, thereby producing more seed. This was my time of dying, following the long fall from grace and purpose. Dying is a quiet time, a time when the commotion of life fades into the unseen background. The life behind and the life pending, both come into view, and we become witnesses to the sacredness of life itself. For just a moment in time, we stand suspended in the quietude of eternity before we surrender ourselves to history.

These deaths of which I have written are nothing more than spiritual rehearsals for the pending future. Out of the mulch of my past life, I was slowly starting to experience a budding of hopefulness. This transformation was fueled by sources far beyond my sphere of influence or immediate concern. I returned to my bed each evening, waiting for

the approach of physical death, whose appearance I would gladly have welcomed. In spite of my personal darkness and despair, in spite of my willingness to peacefully blend into quiet nothingness of physical death, my body carried me forward with its basic demands for nourishment and rest. Thus, my days alternated between meals and sleep and a quiet, waiting spirit, subdued by my shrouded consciousness. I waited for the ultimate relief that physical death would finally bring.

Life then made one of its unique demands upon my person. While I was surrendered to a non-future, life-giving awareness started to permeate my very being. This occurred in the form of an infusion of love from my family members, whose affections and concerns allowed me no place to withdraw from their attention. This transfusing of love was at the core of my spirit, and while I had not sought this comfort, it became life-sustaining. It was the source of a new vitality and awareness regarding the meaning of life.

And even while I tried to grasp this concept, there was another reality emerging just beyond my awareness. Out of the destruction that I had wrought, the parents of my victim extended a hand—a helping hand. While I was waiting to fade away and die, fading into nothingness, they forged a link that became life-giving. Their spirit of love and concern became a driving force that ultimately led them into a prison chapel for a day of reconciliation and forgiveness.

These two life-giving transfusions disturbed my prison stupor and unsettled my resignation to seek death as an escape from life. Instead, my days became purposeful as I lifted my head off the bed each day to confront a new awareness. This was a slowly emerging reality not

yielding itself to quick exposure. It started with the germ of hope. That seed of hope eventually became a visible thread upon which I have been able to build purpose. The thread eventually became a fibrous branch upon which I have been able to build a meaningful life. I know that it is sufficient to sustain me through all future challenges.

While it took time, purpose, meaning, and personal peace have become my legacy. No longer is my life plagued by the surges of politics, economics, or the response of the populace to perceived criminal activity and the endless cries to “lock ‘em up and throw away the key.” That reality has arrived, and it has not diminished the rampant fears of the public. Sitting inside of a prison, one develops a keen insight into the endless cycle of whipping the public into a frenzy by continually igniting battles better suited to the land of Don Quixote and his endless charging at windmills. Well-stoked fears always yield economic windfalls for those who seek power and control.

As I enter my fortieth year of imprisonment, the end of my life is no longer a source of concern. You see, whether I continue into eternity haunting the cells of my incarceration or leave my bones to rest in some shady place, I know that there has been a remarkable purpose to my life. Perhaps I would never have risen to a place of meaningful consequence in my prior life. But my actions have given way to reflection, and reflection has paved the path of purposeful living.

The purpose of which I speak is solely contained in these pages. You see, my senseless past actions have given rise to the awareness that nothing we do during the course of life is wasted time or energy. Rather, even the most wicked behaviors eventually mold away to produce a

rich soil of hope and promise. The most diseased portions of our lives yield themselves to a quiet process of awareness and transformation. It happens if we let it happen.

For those who will follow me behind these walls into the darkened place of grief, sorrow, and regret, I am hoping my words can yield a little light to illuminate their paths. For those who breathe the air of freedom on a daily basis, my hope is that they glimpse the fiber of meaning and consequences rather than give their passions and pursuits free rein. They may yet turn aside, even now, and grasp a new life.

Inside or out, we all have been created for some purpose. The adventure of living is a solely individual experience. If your ability to discern your purpose has been colored by want, greed, lust, revenge, or just plain anger, then those choices will play themselves out on the field of life that you create for yourselves and your loved ones. Even now, it is not too late to turn from the arrogance of ignorance or stench of misguided pride and fear.

Unfortunately, many will ride their choices into eventual oblivion, while others will suffer the distasteful and painful consequences of their actions. My words cannot suffice to create a new spirit within you. I am not capable of that undertaking. But there is One who is willing to shoulder any burden or offense you bring to Him. I can assure you that it will be the welcome of a prodigal son or daughter, never the cold shoulder of contempt and judgment.

This reality seems to exist beyond the vision of most of us. It seems that only crises and tragedies bring this into sharp and immediate focus. Before the disaster or after the storm, each position offers its own

unique system of relief from ongoing painful encounters with ourselves. The restlessness of profound regret and shameful behaviors will give way to peace and personal acceptance—if you are prepared to make the journey.

Within the United States, I am one of two million individuals who are incarcerated because of their crimes. Who I am, my identity, and my prison number are unimportant. At the deepest level, I can relate to your pain and regrets. But even now, in the stench of despair, a new paradigm is unfolding before us. Please join me in living out the remainder of your lives in a fellowship of men and women committed to renewal and hope. We can do this one day at a time as brothers and sisters living each day to the fullest.

This story ends on a positive note. Not as the result of lengthy incarceration or any judicial process. Falling well outside of the magical influences of a pardon or parole, events have brought together forces that have changed my life in the midst of prison life. Redemption and reconciliation have forged a powerful confluence of events and realizations that have given me new life, a meaningful life, a life worth living. This has fueled my life over the last 40+ years.

This process was forged in my soul, far from the view of the public or prison officials. My story is only one of two million stories waiting to be shared. These are the stories that will bring new life to communities, families, and individuals. My seed will die and fall into the fallow ground, but my hope is that, while I am a single tree in a dense forest of prisoners, my seed will produce seedlings that will grow into a small patch of hope for the future. Be blessed.



CONCLUSION

Truth and reconciliation: I want my children to have a father they can be proud of and my grandchildren to understand that the only thing that counts in life is what we have done to act with love toward others. It is not important that others love you back; all that matters is that you did your best to live for love.

Because we are sinners living in a fallen world, there will be some system of justice to address the offensive behaviors of others. The words of this book have been written in acknowledgment of the suffering my children endured because of my offensive behaviors. Perhaps in the future, wiser men and women will make choices that are less harmful and abrasive. For now, it is sufficient that their story has been told.

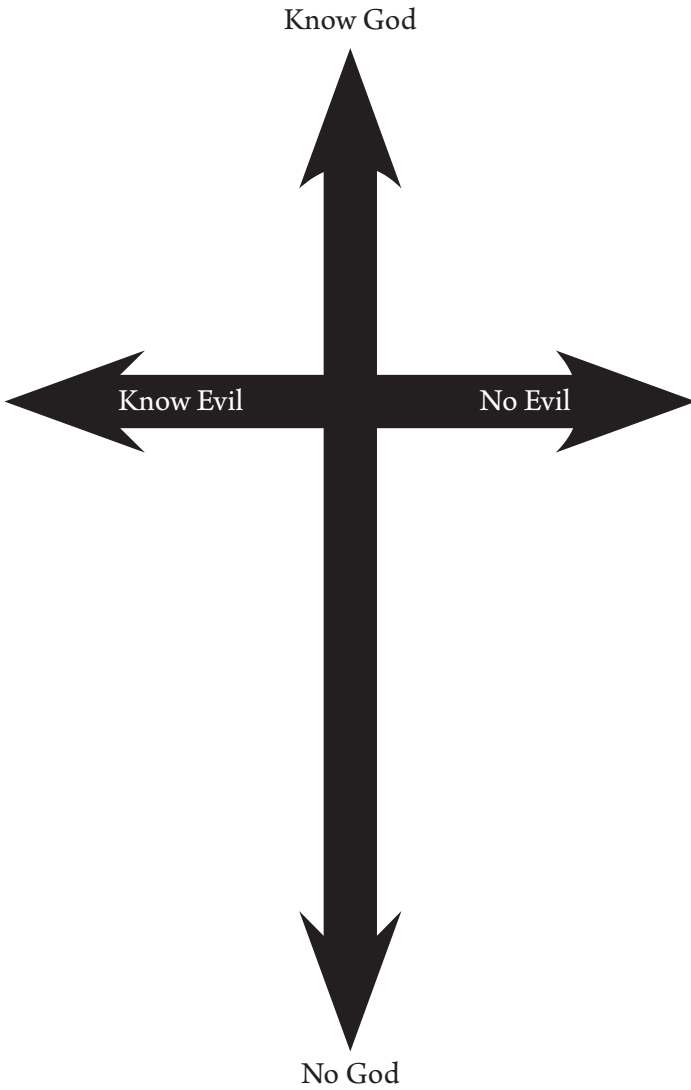
SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

Parts 1 and 2 of this book contain broad references to the potential of God's work in our lives as evidenced by His work in the lives of others.

Parts 3 and 4 contain applications of God's work in the lives of His children.

Parts 5 and 6 contain scriptural references to further your understanding of God's remarkable ability to transform trash into treasure in your own life.

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

PROCESS

SUSPICION

INTERNAL PROCESS

SPIRITUALITY

INTERNAL PROCESS

SEVERCIDE

EXTERNAL PROCESS

SCIENCE

EXTERNAL PROCESS

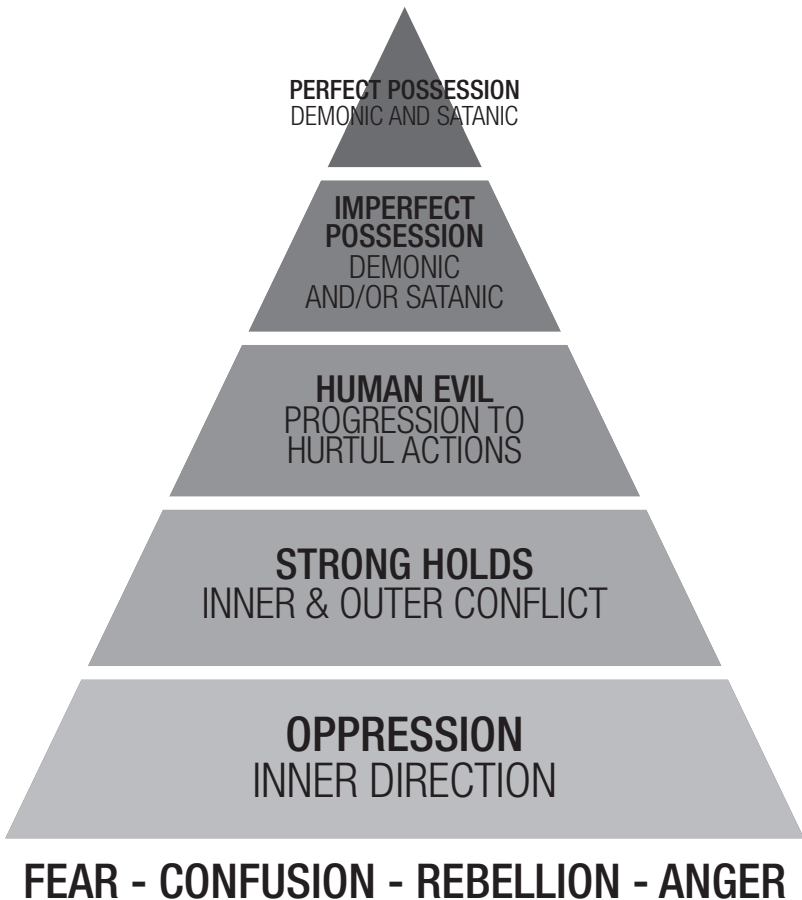
APPENDIX C

RESPONSES



APPENDIX D

HIERARCHY OF EVIL



APPENDIX E



SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV)*. 1994.

Archbold, Patrick. *Creative Minority Report*. Blog. <http://www.creativeminorityreport.com>.

Bernstein, Albert, J. *Emotional Vampires, Dealing with People Who Drain You Dry*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001.

Carlin, Sr. Paul W. *Spirit, Soul and Body*. Counselor Certification Program.

Erickson, Eric. *The Eight Stages of Man*. Theory of Personality.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2000.

Gleick, James. *Chaos: Making a New Science*. London: Vintage, 1998.

Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. G. Bles: the Centenary Press, 1943.

Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperOne, 2001.

Martin, Malachi. *Hostage to the Devil*. New York: Reader's Digest, 1976.

Martin, Malachi. *Windswept House: A Vatican Novel*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

McCarthy, Kevin. *Knowetics: A Journey of Hope*. (coming soon)

McCarthy, Kevin. *Knowetics for Offenders: A Guide to Personal Transformation Skills*. (coming soon)

Peck, M. Scott. *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983.

Peck, M. Scott. *Glimpses of the Devil*. New York: Free Press, 2005.

U.S. Constitution. Fourteenth Amendment.

Wheat, Ed, MD. *Love Life for Every Married Couple*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1980.

“Take Courage... Do Not Be Afraid”

Families facing the scepter of a criminal justice encounter are often isolated within their own communities. They suffer from unseen shame and pain as they try to walkout this challenging journey. In their workplace, churches, schools, social environments and community life they meet with a presumption of guilt by association. Jesus Christ came for the lost, wounded and alienated and He spoke about the reality of reconciliation and restoration. Surviving the Justice Experience isa tool which has been created to help families walk through the long nightmare of arrest, conviction and imprisonment using a Christian framework for recovery based on the message of the Gospel.



DR. KEVIN J MCCARTHY is a retired clinical psychologist, speaks about the impact of his own incarceration upon his family members and provides a spiritual pathway through the turmoil and chaos engendered by a criminal justice experience. Families can survive the emotional scarring process and find strength to face the challenges of community reintegration in the post-prison world. This book provide practical steps to manage living separate lives, working with the children and other family members to achieve strength and stability in the midst of the storm.



LONE VOICE
PUBLISHING

www.lonevoicepublishing.com

978-0-9906451-0-8