

# RISING FROM THE STORM



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Censored Ed.

## Getting Started

Books that say they can help you are often just paper with writing on them. Pretty much useless except if you want to rip them apart to start a fire or make a paper airplane. But maybe, just maybe, a book comes along every now and then that actually means something to you. It speaks your language. It understands where you're coming from. Hopefully this is one of those books. We'll see?

The writers of this workbook may or may not have felt your specific brand of pain. But they do know pain ... and they know it well. They have been on their own recovery adventures for years. They don't know all the answers, but they do know a lot of the questions.

This book is an invitation to join in a conversation. At first, you'll probably just want to listen (hell, you may not even want to do that). But maybe, just maybe what you read and hear will push your buttons enough to get you to say a few words every now and then. Even a grunt or a dirty look is a start.

The people leading these sessions are on your side. Those who worked on this book are on your side. Those with you in these group sessions are on your side. Most will probably be survivors.

We dare you not to read the first session. Don't do it. Put down this book right now, or you might discover you can rise from your stormy life!

I can't handle the thunderstorm in my head!

## Session One

### The Voices in Your Head

Why the hell would you want to even read this stupid book? Nothing you've ever read before has silenced the voices in your head. You've had foster parents, social workers, police officers, little church ladies and long lost relatives who claimed they could fix you. But look in the mirror ... you're still bleeding out. Nothing has changed. The cut is deep and it's still there. You wake up to agonizing pain every time you open your eyes.

Survival ... that's what life is; all it will ever be. At least that's what you tell yourself. 'Cause that's the only thing that helps you get by. And getting by is the best you'll allow yourself to expect. Really, what's the use? Yesterday was a nightmare. Today is a living hell. How are you supposed to believe tomorrow will be any different?

You may have escaped or been rescued from actual physical danger, but you don't feel safe. Wherever you go, you look for the exits or places to hide. Everyone is a potential threat. The voices in your head tell you so. They won't be silenced. They are loud. They are relentless. They scream, begging to be heard. They taunt and torment to no end.

And ... the voices say you have no options, that you live in a world of shrinking possibilities. Soccer moms shield their kids from you. Church people avoid you. The system just shoves you into one more room in front of one more paper pusher. Your birth family ... hmm ... don't even want to go there. Really, if anybody is going to help you, it will have to be you. You are your only hope ... which at this point feels pretty hopeless.

What does your mental thunderstorm look like? Are you tired? Are you angry? Are you depressed? Are you so beat down, you've just stopped caring? Do you feel less than human? Are you mentally and emotionally numb? Do you want to harm yourself? Do you want to harm someone else? Can you even put your finger on one thing ... one word that describes the chaos in your brain? Do you even give a rip?

If you haven't put this booklet down yet ... if you're still reading, then there is at least a whisper of hope in you. Whether you want to admit it or not, you do care. If you didn't, this book would be torched or in the trash by now. If you've invested the energy to get this far, why not take a few more steps.



I can't handle the thunderstorm in my head!

## Session Two

Face it, you suck at self-doctoring!

What have you done over the years to silence the voices in your head? What measures have you taken to medicate your discomfort; drinking, drugging, eating, cutting? Have any of them worked? Have they made your life any better, your pain any less, your sleep more restful? (Do you even sleep at all?) Has any of your self-doctoring supplied even the faintest whisper of hope?

Darkness has not idly sat by and watched your story. No ... it slips out of its blind alley, opens its baggy, bulging over-coat and flashes you with an infinite array of medications that promise to make it all better ... or at least worth your while. But Darkness never makes good on its promises.

Dark voices told you to fight back ... be hard ... never let them see you flinch. So you spit and throw and kick and verbally flex to make yourself look bigger than you are. Or maybe you just don't want anyone coming close enough to see you bleeding out, so you become the snarling dog who keeps them out of your yard. People have always hurt you. You got no more time for that. But this medication isn't working. Isolation is killing you ... draining the life out of you.

Or ... you may have reached for the medication labeled "hurt yourself." This one goes down as naturally as swallowing your own snot. This world has done nothing but hurt you. You're nothing but a piece of crap anyway. Why not just validate that ... cut yourself, deprive yourself, push yourself over the edge? Hell, you've even tried to end it all. And for a second, it takes the control out of their hands and puts it back in yours. You feel empowered. But you can't even do this right. You chicken out or some jerk calls 911 and you're right back where you started.

Maybe from out of the smog you were warned to hide. Melt into the floor. Find a crawl space, dark corner or stuffy closet. Run. Escape. Isolate. They can't hurt you if they can't find you. And they won't find you, if they can't see you. And if they do see you, how about let your body stay, but leave in your mind. They may beat the crap out of your body, but in your head, you've gone to Disney World. But these days ... the escaping is killing you.

Then there is food. (Wow ... really, you wanna go there writer people?) It's the fuel that keeps your body running. And as long as you have a body, you're going to keep getting raped and beaten. Hell, they may have used food to control you; a little

starvation here, forced garbage eating there. So why not take control of that body? Make it bigger ... like waaaay bigger. Maybe they'll think twice before they pick you. Or maybe you make it smaller, so small you can turn sideways and disappear. The control almost feels good, but then, either extreme will kill you. No future in that!

But in that bulging, baggy overcoat that Darkness wears there is one trick that outshines them all: drugs and alcohol. Fast. Euphoric. Disneyland in capsule form. Can't beat it. No waiting. No wondering. It's the friend who shows up every time you text them. It takes you where you need to go; either makes you feel strong, or helps you disappear. Problem is, then it starts showing up even when you don't text it. It dogs you. It becomes just one more rock you drag around in the bag you call life.

So here you sit in a room listening to people whining about your safety. Where were they when you were praying for help all those years? But at this point, what else do you have? You suck at self-doctoring. It doesn't matter what you try, you can't silence the thunderstorm in your head. Like we said last time, the only hope you have is to admit you are hopeless. This is the crossroads you face right now. But you can do it.

Others have been where you are and got out alive.

Things to consider:

1. What's your escape of choice? Describe your perfect cocktail for pain relief.

2. Are you ready to talk about your hopelessness?

3. What's your gut telling you to do right now?

You have to trust somebody.

### Session Three

Reach out ... are you crazy!

If they wear a badge, they can do whatever they want to you. They're untouchable. If they wear a courtroom robe, they'll throw you in jail if you tell what they did. If they carry a bible ... well nobody's going to take your word over theirs. These people are what they call "upstanding pillars of the community." Who is going to listen when you tell what they did?

You can't trust anybody. The people who should have protected you and provided for your most basic needs, raped and beat you or handed you over for something worse. Teachers, police officers, ministers, judges, best friends, siblings, grandparents, uncles, cousins, parents, boyfriends, girlfriends and neighbors ... they all used and abused you. And now you're supposed to reach out and trust somebody? Talk about a messed-up idea!

To rise up out of the thunderstorm of your mind, reach out and take the hand of another human being in hopes they can help you walk to a better place ... why in the hell would you do that?

Why would anyone care about you anyway? You are damaged goods, secondhand trash, used up ... only a shell of the person you used to be. No way do they really want to help you. They're probably playing some sort of game. Maybe they work for the government and you're just another statistic on their yearly report. Maybe helping you earns them extra credit in their sociology class. Maybe they've been feeling guilty, and helping you will make them feel better about themselves. You can be their next fix-it project. Someone giving a crap about you ... impossible!

There was that one person years ago who you trusted. They did care. They hung out with you even when you were at your worst. They never pushed you. No matter what you said to them, no matter how much grief you gave them, they kept coming to see you. It felt good. It gave you a slight glimmer of hope. For a while you allowed yourself to imagine what real love (not dark love) could feel like. But that all got shot to hell at some point. It felt like a kick in the teeth or God playing some cruel trick on you.

But, you've run out of options. On your own, you CANNOT silence the voices in your head. Your mental thunderstorm won't go away on its own. Time won't heal these wounds. Down deep, you know this is true.

You've self-medicated. You've run. You've fought. You've hurt yourself. You've tried ending it all. You've screamed. You've hid. You've hated. You've threatened. And now, here you sit in a mud puddle of denial and self-pity. How's that working?

Whether it makes sense or not, it's time to reach out for help. You may, or may not physically be out of harm's way. But, on your own, you can't do anything about the pain that rips at your soul. Whether you like it or not, you need someone else on this journey with you.

It may start with just a whispering whimper ... a glance ... a nod of the head. But whatever small gesture you can come up with, reach out. Literally, if there is a hand reaching out in your direction, take it. If there is kindness in the room, sit next to it. If there are ears ready to listen, start talking.

Things to consider:

1. Through all this, who was that one person who seemed to care about you? How could you tell they gave a crap?
2. What would a person have to do to prove they cared for you?
3. What is there about you that would give others reason to trust you with their junk? If they can trust you ... can you trust them?

You have to trust somebody.

## Session Four

### Triggers

Look at your life ... what you'd call a normal day. It's threatening every step you take. Imaginary predators, users and abusers are around every corner: every old man with a beard or young woman in a flowery dress. Smells, sights, sounds, even the taste of certain foods remind you. Dark buildings. White vans. Street signs. Overhead lighting. Songs on the radio. Shows on the TV. Red roses. You live in a world full of triggers.

Just take a long deep breath and tell yourself, "This is my world for a while. It's not going to change any time soon. This is gonna take time."

It might help to do the whole Charles Dickens Christmas Carole thing. Remember how Scrooge was forced to watch himself three different times: Christmas past, present and future. Well, try that with yourself. Step outside your body and watch yourself react to triggers: "Yup ... that's me freak'n out over the smell of a certain cologne. That's me getting all bent every time I walk down into a dark basement. That's me wanting to run and hide when I hear that song."

One minute you're fine and the next your world is coming to an end. And ... sometimes it's the very people who are trying to help that trip your triggers. Their gesture of help looks exactly like your old abuser's gesture to hurt. The tone of their voice makes your stomach turn ... sounds too much like that guy who used to sweet talk you right before he raped you.

Recovery is NOT for cowards. You are one of the bravest people on the planet to be sitting where you are right now. The abuse you endured was hell on earth. And walking out of that hell-storm and into the light can feel just as hellish.

When you start trusting someone besides yourself, you'll need to take some time to educate them. Help them learn to help you. Sounds bass-ackwards doesn't it? If they trigger you in any way at any time, tell them. Raise your hand, clench your fist, yell "stop" if you have to. But get their attention immediately. Then educate them about your trigger.

You can use this as a test. If they listen and respect you enough to change their behavior and choice of words, they're probably someone you can trust. If they ignore you, run. But, give people a chance to get it right. Don't just assume they'll mess up.



I'm walking into trust.

## Session Five

Not everybody is evil.

Hurt people, hurt people. Duh! You know that better than most people on the planet. If you're going to trust someone, make sure you find somebody who can help you and actually gives a crap.

If hurt people, hurt people, then helped people help people. Healthy people, heal people. Graced people, grace people. Chances are, the person who will help you rise from your storm is one who knows about pain first hand. They didn't read it in a book or learn it in a classroom. They lived it. They've been violated. They've been left for dead. They know what it feels like to have their soul invaded against their will.

There are good people in the world. You may not believe it. But there are. Let's go down a philosophical trail (yeah, we just said that). Evil cannot exist on its own. It has to have good to prey upon. If all the world was evil, it would consume itself and cease to exist. 'Cause evil can never give life. It can only consume life.

Disgusting example: Ticks ... nothing good to say about these parasites ... put a pile of these nasty insects in a bucket. Come back later and they're all dead – sucked the life right out of each other. But put a cute little innocent puppy in there with them. A week later the puppy may be in really bad shape, but the ticks are all smiles. This picture may trip huge triggers, but you get the point.

You are the puppy. You are not evil. You are a victim of the vile ticks of this world. If this is true, it would also be true that the person inviting you to trust them right now is not evil. They're most likely a recovering puppy just like you ... only they've been out of the bucket a little longer; a week, a month, a year, maybe longer. Think about it. They've been in the bucket and got out, so you can too.

So how can you tell if a person is a tick or a puppy? Trust your instincts here ... they've kept you alive so far.

1. Do they listen in order to feel your pain, or do they listen so they can come up with something clever to say in response?
2. Do they try to force you to take their advice, or do they give you adequate time and space to move at your own pace?



I'm walking into trust.

## Session Six

### Crawl. Walk. Run.

You've got some slow driving to do in your recovery before you jump over in the fast lane. It only took half a second for your abuser to plunge their knife into your soul. The wound may take years to heal. You can't rush this. Crawl. Walk. Run.

Most people recover from severe trauma like yo-yo's, jerking up and down, flying through the air in all different directions. Just when you think you're headed up, you come to a neck-breaking stop only to spiral straight down toward the floor. But just before you crash, boom ... you're headed back up again. Whiplash!

Take one of those breaths we talked about back in session one. Settle into this up-down-up-down. You won't spin around like this the rest of your life, but you will for a while. Just don't let go of the string ... a yo-yo's worse nightmare.

All this jerking around, up/down, stop/start, right/left spinning is going somewhere. It's not wasted motion ... or wasted pain. Lord knows you've had enough of that. This is a pain that leads to life. You started moving away from dark, cold, deadly isolation when you grabbed the outreached hand of a person who refuses to un-love you. For a while, they will be your guardian angel. They might even become your God-rep. (We'll talk about God stuff later. Yep, we will go there eventually.)

Instead of making your knees buckle or your skin crawl, your guardian angel's voice will come to make you feel protected and validated. You will begin to share your story with them, starting with single words, then a couple of sentences, then whole paragraphs and chapters. See where we're going with this? Crawl. Walk. Run.

You've heard the term "build trust." That's what we're talking about here. You trust enough to crawl toward the light. Then you trust enough to stand up and walk toward it. By the time you've done this for a while, you're ready to break out in a full run toward a better life. And all because you decided to stop trying to fix yourself and started trusting someone else to help you. And they aren't trying to fix you either!

Remember those periods in your life when each violent encounter convinced you that life couldn't get any worse. Yet it got darker and more deadly with each new day. You're now on a path that is headed in the exact opposite direction. It's getting better with each day. But instead of saying, "Life can't get any worse." you say "Wow, how



I'm ready to write my story

## Session Seven

The voices in my head ... in print!

Darkness cannot stand to be exposed. That's why darkness lurks around in your head, doing its best to keep you confused. On the pain meter, confusion is just a few clicks away from hopeless. Suffocating, blistering, drowning, bleeding, writhing; all these come with the inner voices that ruin your life.

It's pretty sick how your own mind can intimidate you. Everywhere you go, it rides around inside your skull up there between your shoulders, mocking you. For the life of you, you can't make a wise decision on your own. You crave things that will hurt you. You'd like to move forward, but don't know which direction that is. Your brain keeps betraying you.

It's time to get a handle on this. The healthy part of your brain (and, yes there is a healthy part) needs to start managing the wounded part. And it starts when you discover the awesome power of words.

Way back at the beginning there was confusion (chaos). But with a word, God brought order, created an entire universe. (You may hate God right now, but don't shove him out the window just yet.) Whether you like God or not, it's true, words have tremendous power over chaos and confusion, especially when you write them down. This is where we are in this session.

It's fine if you don't believe in God. Can you at least entertain the idea that we were made by “something” bigger than us? Just for fun, give the idea a try.

Warning: putting your story in print may be one of the hardest things you do in all these sessions. But then again, it will be one of the most helpful things as well. Don't let it paralyze you. Just take a breath and get started one word at a time.

Have you ever played Pick-Up-Stix? It's a silly antique game for little kids, consisting of a bunch of different colored sticks in a tube-shaped can. You shake the can and dump them out on the table in a messy tangled pile. The object is to remove the sticks one at a time without disrupting the rest of the pile. If you successfully complete the game, you end up with a neatly organized row of sticks on the table next to where the original mess once was.

Your mind is that messy tangled pile of sticks. At a glance, you can't tell one stick from another. It's a blurry impossibility. It makes no sense. It has no shape. There is no order. But what if you took one event (one stick) from your past, pulled it out and wrote it down on paper? There it is! It's no longer part of the mess. It's a single event you can process, by remembering details, recalling emotions and survival techniques. That single event can no longer mock you from out of the tangled shadows of your mind. If it was a poisonous snake, you just de-fanged it. It may hiss and coil as if to strike, but somehow there in written form it's lost its venom.

If you don't have one, buy a notebook and several good pens. Or find a computer with a good write program. It's time to play Pick-Up-Stix.

Things to consider:

1. How are you feeling about writing your story?
2. Take time to write about one single memory. You are the one in control. You write only what you want. This is your life, your story. No one can take away that power.
3. How do you feel about God? Be honest. Bullcrap is a waste of good ink.

I'm ready to write my story.

## Session Eight

### Getting Started

Some people are talkers. Some are singers. Some like to paint, draw or sculpt. Some like motion, so dance, yoga or exercise express their thoughts and feelings. Some would rather sit and think with a cup of coffee and a smoke.

But, it's time to write. No, you don't have to be a freak'n author or poet. You just need to know how to work a keyboard or a pen. Nobody is going to check your grammar or spelling. You don't even need to use complete sentences. But, there is no getting around it ... it's time to write.

Remember Pick-up-stix? Don't be intimidated by the pile of tangled sticks (your entire life story). Just focus on one stick. What's your favorite color? Hell, start with that one.

Let's do this one step at a time:

1. Details: Think of ONE event you remember from your past that doesn't melt you into the floor. (Getting started with lesser memories will help you work up courage to tackle more painful ones.) Write down whatever details seem important to you: where, when, how old were you etc. Write down any smells, sounds or sights that cross your radar. Names. Faces. Buildings. Rooms. Furniture. Decorations. Hair color. Tattoos. Jewelry. If it comes to your mind, it's asking to be put down on paper. So, write it out. This is between you and the paper.
2. Feelings: What did you feel during this event? It doesn't matter if your feeling combo doesn't make sense. I liked it ... and I hated it. I was afraid ... and I was excited. I was euphoric ... and I was terrified. Write it. Ticked off. Jealous. Fearful. Confused. Curious. Claustrophobic. Whatever you felt at that moment needs to be down on that paper.
3. Short term survival plan: Now, write about the immediate aftermath. When you had the first chance to process what just happened. Did you want to tell someone? Did you want to run and hide? Did you want to hurt someone? Did you want to sleep? Did you want to take a shower? Did you blame yourself? Did you blame someone else? This was your short-term survival plan.
4. Long term change: How has this event changed you long term? What have you done to medicate the pain? What measures have you taken to shield yourself from

ever being that vulnerable again? How have you changed your treatment of others because of this event? How has this event shaped the way you see yourself? How has it affected your feelings toward God? In a word, how has this molded you as a person? The steps you just read are NOT rules. They are designed to be helpful suggestions. Follow them only as they help you. You may follow some and ignore others. Pick and choose. This is your story. There is no other like it.

You CANNOT possibly write your whole story in one sitting. Take your time ... one stick at a time. Take breaks. It's not unusual for a person to take months to get the bulk of their story on paper. BUT IT IS WORTH IT!

Things to consider:

1. Having had a while to think about it, now how do you feel about writing your story?
2. Can you share with the group just one event you're going to write about?
3. How might YOU writing YOUR story actually empower YOU?

I'm ready to tell my story.

## Session Nine

### Recovering Your Voice That Was Stolen

Thinking your story only stirs up the thunderstorm in your head. When you write it out, one event at a time, you begin to discover yourself and where you came from in a way you've never seen before. Painful, for sure. But enlightening. Telling your story empowers you. It's your story. You tell it to who you want. You tell it the way you want.

When you find a person you trust and start to tell your story, it's as if you're calling into account all the toxic voices in your head. One at a time, you grab those jerks by their tails so they can no longer elude your grasp. You write them down on paper so they no longer rent space in your head. And then you expose their sorry butts to another person when you tell your story.

No more secrets. No more lies. No more intimidation. No more mental rape. No more being held hostage by your past. You are rising from the storm. It's about to get real.

This will take time and it will scare the crap out of you. It's not that hard to hide your written story under the mattress or behind a picture frame. It may be in writing, but it's still your private business. But to tell another human being your story ... hell, that means you're exposed and vulnerable just like back in your victimized days.

But vulnerability today is NOTHING like vulnerability back then. You are strong. You are beautiful. You have survived what would kill most people. You have a wisdom that only comes to those with stories like yours. You are not a helpless child. You are a strong survivor.

Countless others who have written and told their stories are by your side. Telling their stories has liberated and empowered them. And they want the same for you.

When you verbally expose that which has shamed you, shame slithers away. When you tell what has terrified you, the snarl gets reduced to a pathetic whimper. Talk about your rage, your depression, your self-harm, your doubts, your loneliness. Share details. Take your listener on a tour of your life. Every place you show them liberates a part of your heart and mind where your abusers used to hide ... and dominate.

You may not like Jesus, but he was actually a pretty cool guy. At one point, he said "the truth will set you free." He got that one right. The deeper you dig into your junk and the more you haul it out into the light, the freer you are to become your true self.

Every word you share that opens your story to another person empowers you with hope and a much healthier picture of yourself. Telling your story helps you distinguish between what happened to you and the true nature of your heart. They treated you like a dog, and for a while you bought it. You now know the truth. You are a beautiful strong human being made in the image of your Creator. And he DOES NOT MAKE JUNK.

Things to consider:

1. How are you feeling about sharing your story with another person?
2. Do you think telling your story will be a sign of strength or weakness?
3. Who are you trusting with your story? How's that going? (Name them only if it feels safe for both of you.)

I'm ready to tell my story.

## Session Ten

### Recovery Partner

Chances are by now you're seeing a different person in the mirror than back in the day. You are recovering from your former nightmare. Like we said earlier, you're not ALL better. But you ARE better.

Look around you. You are not alone. You have recovery siblings who are rising from their own storms. They are your posse, your peeps, your family. You now belong to the society of the wounded. Misery loves company ... but, so does recovery.

Look around your recovery community. Are there people who just feel right to you? When you talk, they listen. And when they talk you listen. You could call it kindred spirits. Pick someone like that with whom to share your story.

They don't have to be educated or certified. They don't need to be the most popular person in your community. They may be older than you. They may be younger. If they're your age or younger, it's best if they're the same gender. Make sure they're real. And make sure they have battle scars from back in the day.

Once you find someone you can trust, clear out time and space for them to listen to your story. Allow the conversation to happen naturally. It is best if there are no interruptions. Make sure you have enough time to say what you want to say.

Emotions can get pretty intense. If you've learned to cry, bring plenty of snot rags. If you need to scream, make sure you're somewhere where you won't attract unwanted attention. You won't think of everything, but try to be prepared for whatever may transpire once you begin opening up.

This is your new day. You are no longer alone. Your recovery partner will help you bear up under the heavy emotions and dark memories. You may push them away, to test and see how loyal they really are. Give yourself time. Your story has caused you to see everyone as a betrayer until proven otherwise. In the end, if they're going to be a good recovery partner, you won't be able to run them off with a stick.

Give them credit for trying. They may suck at being a partner. They may get it wrong. Give them space to learn. They are human. Crap happens.

You may be reading this right now and saying to yourself, “Writing my story ... telling my story ... I just can't do it right now.” At least talk about that. Share it with your group or someone in the group. If you have a roommate or recovery veteran close by, tell them you're not ready. They won't condemn you. They'll understand.

No two people find healing in the same way or at the same pace. You have to just keep coming back. Breathe in. Breathe out. Live one moment at a time. But just know that hardship is the pathway to peace. You ain't getting no better without some pain. Sorry. But you're not.

Things to consider:

1. How do you feel about these past few sessions? What's triggered you, ticked you off, given you hope?
2. Talk about what a hopeful, brighter version of you might look like.
3. If you're about to tell your story, what are some of the details you're ready to share?

## What about God?

### Session Eleven

#### Where was God when I needed him most?

If you're like most, you've wondered why God didn't step in and do something when you were being abused, especially when you were an innocent little child. Really ... he's supposed to be all powerful and all loving. If he gave a crap, how could he just sit there and watch them hurt you? Doesn't he have angels or some kind of super powers that could have protected you?

And now you're being asked to talk about God!

What if God prefers you cussing him out instead of ignoring him? What if he's not the absent do-nothing God you think he is? What if a conversation with God (happy or mad) will produce more good than holding a silent grudge? If nothing changes, nothing changes. At the very least, think about giving a God-conversation a chance.

Can we do some deep thinking for a few paragraphs?

In order for God to have a healthy give-and-take friendship with us, he has to give us freewill. If he FORCES us to love him, it's not love. It's warped and perverted, like the love your abusers said they had toward you. For love to be the real thing, all parties must always have the option to un-love.

Those who choose to un-love God put themselves in a desperate spot. Like all humans, they're lost and lonely without him. So, if they don't let God love them, they fill the void with something less than God; human love. When normal give-and-take love with other humans stops working, they turn to toxic-love which is exactly what your abusers did to you. And you know first-hand, toxic-love is even darker than hate.

Still, this doesn't explain why God didn't protect you against your abuser. Consider this. What if God stepped in every time, everywhere, with everybody to stop all rape, trafficking, child abduction, childhood leukemia, third world starvation and social injustice? And if we're going to open this door, why doesn't God stop arguments, angry outbursts, lying, cheating and discomfort. And while he's at it, couldn't he block bad attitudes, bad moods and poor choices? This would completely eliminate human freedom, which would make love impossible as we've pictured it in this session. Plus ... we would become entitled, spoiled brats if God gave us everything we wanted?

This may not make you feel better toward God, but it makes sense if you give it a chance.

But here's the thing ... and it hits close to home. Actually, God did NOT just stand by and watch while you were abused. He took the blows with you. He cried real tears when you weren't allowed to show them. He felt the pain. He did not turn his head away. He did not run away. He was raped, kicked, hit, stabbed, beaten, filmed, tortured, tattooed, branded and shot right along with you.

How do we know this? Look at the cross where they murdered Jesus. When God became one of us, he didn't grow up in wealth or power. He came up poor, worked hard with his hands and hung out with hookers, drunks and tax collectors. In the end, he didn't make his exit in a stretch limo. No, he stepped up and signed his name at the window marked "Execution." Just like you, he was violated, falsely accused, spit at, whipped, penetrated with spikes, slashed with a sword and mocked 'til he took his last breath. Your agony is his. His agony is yours.

He's been where you are. If you decide to talk with him, he'll understand you better than you do yourself. He didn't read about your pain in a book. He lived and died it.

Things to consider:

1. If there is a higher power, do you feel like God could be that?
2. Were you ever able to disappear into yourself or numb or find focus in the chaos? Who do you think helped you at that moment ... how did that happen?
3. If you think God has blown it, share how he should get his act together.

## What about God?

### Session Twelve

#### Who is God?

God can be whoever he wants to be. You get to do that when you're God. He could be hateful if he wanted. He could be dishonest, abusive or moody. He could stay far, far away from us up in the clouds of heaven. He could ignore us. He could steal from us, enslave us, manipulate or dominate us any time he wanted. He's freak'n God.

The earliest stories of God are found in the bible. Can we talk about it for a second?

Before time, God was chill'n, having a great time for all eternity. And one day he up and decided to create a human race he knew was going to screw him over before they barely got started: rebelling, lying, posing, refusing to take responsibility. Hell, the first family in the bible had one brother murder the other over petty jealousy.

So there you have it. We disrespected God and started ambushing each other with deadly force. What's a God supposed to do? He could have wiped us out. But instead he sewed us some decent clothes and sent us out of the perfect garden he'd made for us ... and spent the rest of human history trying to win us back to himself. He gave us laws to keep us from hurting each other. He gave us a chance to live under kings, some of whom were pretty good guys. He sent us prophets to woo us and warn us. (In spite of the bad things you've heard about God, this is the way it really went down.)

And then he became one of us when Jesus was born.

When Jesus showed up, he made it clear he didn't come to shame us. He came to save us. He told us he was truth that would set us free. He offered us peace and joy that we could never find on our own. He loved people he knew would deny and betray him ... even got down on the floor and washed their feet. He promised he would never leave us. As he was dying, he forgave the ones who were killing him.

He said he was the Good Shepherd who laid his life down for you (his sheep) to protect you against thieves and wolves who would destroy you. Of all people, you know about predators (thieves and wolves) first hand. And though Jesus didn't physically protect you from your predator(s), he can certainly restore and protect your mind and soul from them if you'll let him.

Go back to the beginning one more time. God fixed up the best home possible (Garden of Eden), created two brand new humans and brought them to a place he called very

good. They felt so safe, they ran around free and unashamed, excited about when he'd show up in the cool of the day just to hang out. God is inviting you back to that place. Jesus said in this world you will have trouble. (You know about that.) But then he said to be calm in your spirit because he had overcome the world. Because of Jesus, you can live with peace of mind and soul (free and unashamed) in a very messed up world. And it gets better and better as you allow God to restore your insides back to what you would have had back in that garden.

Whether you believe in him or not ... God believes in you and wants you healthy more than you do.

Things to consider:

1. Who is God to you?
2. Do you believe God wants to heal you more than you want healing? Why?
3. What would it be like to be healed of the wounds caused by the predators from your past?

## Will I let God heal me?

### Session Thirteen

#### Creator Healer

This little workbook was NOT written to push or press you in any way. It's just an aid to help you share your story and discover more clearly who you are. You may still not feel safe talking with God or even talking about him. That's okay. That doesn't make you bad or odd or inferior. The people who care about you simply want to help you see where you are right now so you can take the next healthy step.

But what if after sitting through the last several sessions you've changed? You're willing to at least give God a chance ... a second look. Maybe he's not the jerk you thought he was. Maybe he is the reason you survived and stayed alive. Maybe he does actually care about you. And if he does, are you ready to entertain the possibility that he might be interested in helping you get to a better place?

You the reader: “So how's this supposed to happen book-writer-people? I ain't never seen God. I've never heard his voice or seen his hair color. I don't even know what he likes on his hamburger.”

What if you opened the dance with a letter? Sit down and write God a personal letter. Don't write about him. Write to him ... whatever comes to your mind. If you think he's just a myth, tell him. If you think he's screwed you over, tell him. If you have questions, ask them. If you think he owes you an apology, say so. If you'd like him to feel your pain, give him the details. If you want him to kiss off – go for it. Hell, scream it at him!

Then, to the best of your ability, sit and listen ... not with your ears, but with your heart. When a guy in the ancient bible named Elijah was talking suicide, God didn't show up with fire or wind or earthquakes. He gave him a sandwich and a diet beverage and then whispered in his ear. Once the conversation got started, Elijah realized God had been at work all along behind the scenes in ways his depression hadn't allowed him to see. That's when things started turning around for Elijah.

Let's get real here. Whether you like him or not, God made you. And it makes sense that the God who made you (mind, body and spirit), might just know how to heal you.

You've spent your life trying to survive. These days you're trying to fix the damage that was done to you. In spite of your best efforts and intentions, you've not done the best job at surviving or fixing or overcoming or healing. You're tired and discouraged. Maybe it's time to ask the God to step in and do what he does best.

Let's pretend; because pretending often uncovers the true desires of your heart. Let's pretend that God is there. Let's pretend he has the wisdom and power to get you to a better place. And let's pretend he actually wants to help you ... no, that he's actually eager to help you. Let that stir around in your brain for a minute or two. Almost sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?

But that last paragraph is vintage God. He's always been too good to be true. It's just that we're so caught up in either hurting or being hurt, we don't see it. This septic tank we call life is so full of crappy stank, we've gone nose-blind to God.

But if the last part of the Jesus story is true (the busting out of the grave part), we see that God always gets the last word. There is no life buried so deep he can't resurrect it. There is no crap he can't transform. And he can do it every time.

Things to consider:

1. Do you think God wants to hurt or heal you? Why?
2. If God was in this room right now, what would you say to him?
3. Is there anything you want to try letting God heal?

## Will I let God heal me?

### Session Fourteen

#### Self-discovery

Ninety-three percent of recovery is self-discovery. Thing is, God doesn't have to discover anything about you. He already knows.

He was there every time you were hurt and he suffered right along with you. He was there every time you tried to medicate your pain. He didn't bale on you. He's been with you during every session of this book. He enjoyed the tacos you ate the other day along with you. He's in the conversations you have with your recovery family. He's there when you wait in the checkout line at the corner quick mart.

So God knows. He doesn't have to discover. But you do. You can't tell the difference between what your abusers told you about yourself and your true self. You can't distinguish between your healthy self and your wounded self. God will need to help you with this.

God was there when you were conceived. Out of the millions of sperm that could have made it happen, he singled out one. Out of the hundreds of potential eggs, he picked the one with your name on it. And he cheered as the two came together, because he knew that with you he could have a relationship that would never be replicated ... EVER! And when he is with you, you're his absolute favorite human being. (Of course, that applies to everyone else in the room too, but that's for another session.)

All the crap that's happened to you up until now has tainted and warped God's original design of you. He's ticked that your abusers completely screwed over what he had in mind back when you were conceived. He wants to make things right again inside you. Only he knows what that looks like. Only he knows how to get there.

At this point, you need to take a breath, sit back and learn to let God do his thing. He's never stopped working behind the scenes on your behalf to make you healthy. You've just not been able to see it.

Start looking for it:

1. Listen to the people in your recovery family, especially those who have been at it for a while. Talk to those working with you through these sessions. God is speaking wisdom and grace through them to you.

2. Take time to smell the roses. Literally, step outside. Breathe fresh air. Listen to the birds. Watch the sun come up ... or go down. Find your place in the universe. At first you might feel small. But in time you'll realize you are deeply loved. You matter. Remember that.

3. Read and/or watch stories about recovery. Hear God's voice to you in the stories. We live in a world full of pain. Pain understands pain, no matter what form it takes. We also live in a world full of grace. Grace understands grace, no matter what form it takes. Watch. Listen. Be aware. Discover.

There was a guy named Balaam in the bible who got so caught up in his own crap, he wasn't able to hear God. So God finally spoke to him through the jackass he was riding. Yup, it happened. God will always find a way to talk with you. And we all know there ain't no shortage of jackasses in this world!

Things to consider:

1. Talk about the contrast between what you were told about yourself and who you're discovering you really are.

2. If you were God, how would you speak to you?

3. Talk about one person who seems to speak into your life on God's behalf.

## My Side of the Street

### Session Fifteen

#### Who have I hurt?

If you're in this group, you are a survivor. Wow ... that is huge. They tried, but they couldn't destroy you. Here you are, still alive and breathing. And in this group, you're finding hope and healing. That's almost grounds to throw a party!

You learned some life-lessons as a victim. Lessons you can't learn in a classroom or a book. One of these lessons is that hurt people hurt people. Misery loves company is more than a cliché to you. You've lived it. Hell, you've almost died because of it.

And if hurt people hurt people was true out on the street, it's also true in your life. You've been hurt ... and in your pain, you've hurt other people (probably a few who actually cared about you). So what are you going to do about this?

Options:

1. You could get mad. How dare anyone accuse you. You are the victim. Really? The fact you've been hurt, doesn't mean you're not responsible for the pain you've caused. If that's the case, nobody in this world would be responsible ... ever.
2. You could shame yourself. And how's that going to help? Let's load you down with more pain. God has never been the author of condemnation. Don't even go there. You didn't hurt people because you're evil. You hurt them out of desperation.
3. You could just laugh it off. They'll get over it. That's life. They need to put their big girl/boy pants on. But karma's a witch. Sure, they may get over it. But you won't. Just like you'll never forget how others hurt you, you'll never forget how you've hurt others.
4. Or ... you could sit down and make a list of the people you've hurt. You can't do it all at once. But you can do it. Just start writing them down on a sheet of paper or in a computer write program or in your cell phone. This process alone will begin a whole new line of healing in you that you didn't see coming. Ask long term survivors. They'll confirm this.

Once your list starts to accumulate a few names (use fake names if you need to), start imagining conversations with these individuals. What would you say? How would you say it ... even if you never see the person again?

But, do not try and imagine their reaction. You are not responsible for that. You are only responsible for cleaning up your side of the street. What they do with their side is their business.

Many people get hung up at this stage in their healing. What if when you were being abused, you hurt the people who tried to help you? What if you intentionally hurt your abuser? What if you blame yourself, when you were forced you to hurt other victims? What if you feel you didn't do enough to help those weaker than you?

This is about cleaning up, not self-blame. Take your time. Listen to your heart. Learn to distinguish between hurting someone so you could survive and hurting them because you enjoyed causing them pain. There is a huge difference between the two.

Things to consider:

1. How do you feel about taking personal responsibility for damage you've done?
2. Talk about shame. Does this session make it less or more?
3. Can you talk about a person or two who might show up on your list?

## My Side of the Street

### Session Sixteen

#### How have I hurt myself?

Our last session introduced the idea that hurt people hurt people. You've been hurt. In your pain, you've hurt other people, some who actually loved you. Have you started your list yet ... of the people you've hurt? If you have, the person at the very top of that list should be you. Yes, you.

If you're going to clean up your side of the street, you need to begin with yourself.

Shame has whispered that you're not good enough to forgive yourself. Anger has screamed that the only way you can keep others from hurting you is to hurt yourself even more. Fear has whimpered that any move you make will only make matters worse. Loneliness asks what's the use ... if nobody else cares about me, why should I? Raw pain has demanded more medication and more and more.

Enough of this junk. Stop. The hurt cycle has to be disconnected from its power source, which is you. There is no future in self-hate, self-doubt or self-shame.

Wherever you go, there you are. You can't run away from yourself or your memories. Stop and face the truth. You hurt yourself because you hated the person you became in order to survive this cruel world. But that's not the real you.

Let's talk details.

You may have violated your own conscience when you stole from people you loved. You may have abandoned part of yourself when you walked away from your best friend. You may have cut your own heart out when you threw one of your crew under the bus to save your own skin. Or maybe none of this was part of your story.

You severely damaged your body with substance abuse. You'll carry your cutting scars for the rest of your life. Your body may never get back to normal after your food abuse (binging and/or purging). You carry the scars they gave you as well as the ones you gave yourself.

You've robbed yourself of meaningful relationships. You've isolated from people who wanted to help you. You've lived in fear and mistrust of yourself. You've disrespected



## Making Things Right with the People from My Past

### Session Seventeen

#### How's this going to happen?

This part of your healing has to go beyond just thinking. You can sit and ponder in your head all you want over the harm you've done, but it will only send you back to the thunderstorm you started with. To clear your mind of all this, you have to get it out, either by speaking or writing.

This session hopefully will help you discover ways to externalize that which is tearing you up inside. You need to find some way to go beyond just feeling sorry and actually speak it to the people you've harmed.

Think about those you've hurt. Some are incarcerated. Some have moved away and you don't know how to contact them. Some have told you never to talk with them again. Some are too fragile and might hurt themselves if you try to make things right. Some might use your apology as leverage against you or a third party. Some may have actually died. Some may try to recapture you. Some may try to kill you. How can you contact these people?

You know you can't talk face to face to almost all the people on your list. You can't even email them. No way. You don't want to re-enter that life in any way. You can't endanger yourself or others who are still in that life. But you need to have the conversation.

Here are some creative ways to make that happen:

1. Draw your own pencil sketch of the person or find a magazine pic that looks like them, go to a private place and have a conversation, using the picture as a substitute for their actual presence.
2. Ask someone you trust to be a stand-in and tell them what you would say to the person you've harmed.
3. Write a letter to the person you've harmed and read it to the picture or a stand-in person you trust.
4. If there is a place or item or time that makes you feel connected to the person you've harmed, use that opportunity to speak to them.

If you do write down your apology, some have found final closure by either burning or shredding the hard copy after they've read it. (just an option)

Remember, you are in these sessions to find healing ... to get to a better place. Some of what you've read in this workbook makes sense. These last few sessions may not. They may make you angry, anxious or depressed. But really, what do you have to lose? At least give it a try. Great freedom happens when you say you're sorry.

Apologizing is not a sign of weakness. It actually empowers you to become the person you've always wanted to be. You, not them, are now in control of the conversation. You, not them, are the one who sets the ground rules and decides the future. You are the one who is scraping the junk from your past off your shoes. You are the one who is moving on. You are the one deciding what kind of person you are going to be from now on. NOT THEM!

Things to Consider:

1. How do you feel about apologizing in general?
2. Being empowered by saying you're sorry ... does this make any sense to you?
3. Do you feel responsible for not stopping abusers who harmed other victims?

## Making Things Right with the People from My Past

### Session Eighteen

#### What about the good ones?

Life would be a lot easier without people. Duh! People hurt you. You hurt people. But, people are helping you get to a better place, and you are helping other people get healthy. People. People. People. Like it or not, we would be lost without people.

We've been driving the apology car for the past few sessions. What if we turned this around and headed a different direction? What if we made a list of and, then when possible, contacted people who have been good to us? Remember, never make contact if it will harm anyone involved ... even if it is for good reasons.

Part of cleaning up your side of the street involves sharing some gratitude. There were people in your past who actually gave a crap about you. Back then, you didn't have energy to thank them. Hell, you didn't thank anybody. You were just trying to catch your next breath. There was no time or space for being polite.

But you might not be sitting in this session right now if it weren't for the people who showed you some love. They may have taken the punch that was intended for you. They may have volunteered for the abuse that was headed in your direction. They may have shared a cup of water, a piece of bread, a warm blanket. They may have offered nothing but a smile. But it was them trying to make your life a notch or two up from hell.

Maybe you were the person we just described in the last paragraph. You found bits and pieces of compassion inside yourself to share with others, even when you feared for your own life. Maybe you need to thank yourself for some of the good you've done, but forgotten about.

And since we're talking about it, maybe we need to ask where this goodness came from? A single light in a very dark room is brighter than bright. Those acts of kindness you're remembering may have been small by most standards, but they shine like beacons. They were God. He was in you. He was in those around you. He wasn't a bolt of lightning. Just a small flicker. But he was there ... and now you know it.

So for this session, what if you make contact (whatever way feels safe to you) with those who have been light in your life: fellow victims, anonymous kind people, yourself.

What do you want to say to this lineup of people? Will you allow yourself to say “thank you?” Will you thank yourself? Will you thank God for keeping you alive? Will you respect those who showed you little glimpses of respect in your past?

And what about the other people who are in these sessions with you? What if you thanked them? What if you gave them reason to thank you? What if you told them how much it means for them to listen to you ... or sit by quietly when you don't feel like saying anything?

Nothing but garbage has been spoken into your life. Nobody is going to argue with you about that. But, you have a choice. Do you want to just keep re-cycling the crap or do you want to break the cycle and replace it with kindness, gratitude and generosity?

Something to consider:

1. How do you feel about “people” in general?

2. Who is first on your gratitude list?

3. Write a short letter of gratitude to yourself.

How am I doing today?

## Session Nineteen

### Who am I?

Are you beginning to discover the real you? Hurtful things have happened to you ... very hurtful things. You have done hurtful things. But, you are not a hurtful person. You didn't wake up one morning and decide to live a life filled with pain. Who does that? Even during all the pain, there has been a healthy you inside wanting to be heard. Here lately, you're learning how to give that healthy you a voice and a hopeful future.

What are you discovering about yourself? Are you generous? Are you a good listener? Are you artistic? Are you good at getting others to express themselves? Are you gifted at fixing things? Are you a singer? Can you write poetry? Are you willing to tackle jobs that intimidate other people? Do you want to help those less fortunate? Can you dance? Are you athletic? Do you have a special place in your heart for senior citizens ... children ... injured animals? If you haven't found something you connect with yet, that's okay. Give yourself time. You'll find something.

What do you feel strongly about? Homeless people? Trafficked people? Abused children? Immigrants? Racial prejudice? Homophobia? Gender inequality? Social injustice? Pollution? Corruption? Animal cruelty? Poverty? Hunger?

Are you discovering your triggers? Noises? Smells? Certain topics? Certain words or phrases? Certain kinds of people? Dark places? Cramped places? Churches? Courtrooms? Locked doors? Cemeteries? Dark alleys? Big crowds? Pieces of jewelry? Tattoos? Men with course voices? Women who laugh too much? Children crying? Theaters? Cameras? Video cameras? Flash photography? Money?

Are you able to distinguish between the old injured you and the real healthy you? Can you tell the difference between a bad mood and a genuinely bad situation? Do you know when you need help to make a good decision? Can you distinguish between your real voice and the toxic voices from your past?

You are who you want to be, because you want to be who you are. That person God had in mind back at your conception now has a chance to grow and speak and sing and dance. So who do you want to be? And who do you think put that want in you? With all HIS might, God wants to help you become the person you want to be!

Lean into this. Don't be shy. It's actually okay to be you. You have God's permission. You have the permission of every person sitting close to you right now. This is one thing you can throw yourself into ... with all YOUR might.

If you like to write, try ending each day by answering on paper just a few simple questions:

1. How did I show myself love today?
2. Did I learn something new about myself today?
3. Did I let God and at least one other person show me love today?
4. Did I value/respect at least one other person today?
5. Did I let God know how I feel about him today?

Things to Consider:

1. If you're still struggling with all this, share your struggles.
2. What have you discovered about yourself in the past few days/weeks?
3. What's going on with you and God? Keep it real!

How am I doing today?

## Session Twenty

### Learning New Dance Moves

Our last session looked at self-discovery. What new and fresh insights are you having about the real version of yourself? This session we're going to dig into how this real and healthy version can function in a dysfunctional world. We live in a world that wants to pull us back into its poison. It wants us to be as addicted, beat up and miserable as it is. How do we live a healthy life in an unhealthy world?

Let's talk about the “don'ts” first.

1. Avoid people with all the money, all the power, all the answers. Look instead to people who know they're broken and are honestly seeking recovery.
2. Stay away from dangerous places: places that trigger, places that tempt, places where dangerous people hang out.
3. Avoid negativity: news stories that focus on the bad, arguments and feuds, people who are all the time whining and moaning, gossipers, haters, people who won't let you forget your past.

Now for “do's”:

1. Find good people to trust. There are still good people in this world who have a tremendous capacity to care and give and listen. You need these people in your life. Refuse to isolate. Get over yourself and admit it ... you need people, whether you like it or not.
2. Always, ALWAYS, A L W A Y S tell the truth. Step back into denial and you're stepping into a bottomless pit. Keep it real at all cost, even if it hurts.
3. Stay with it. Moods come and go. Life happens in seasons: summer, fall, winter and spring. You'll go through phases. But stay with it. You've come too far to turn back.
4. Find someone you can help. Look for ways to get outside yourself and make the world a better place. You need people, but people also need you.

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It takes a while to learn how to function as the real you. Don't look at it as a test or a contest. It's an adventure. Imagine waking up one morning with wings. You wouldn't run to the tallest building and jump off. You would learn to fly a little bit at a time. And each time would be more fun ... and each time you would rise higher above the storm.

You don't have to make a lot of money, or build something huge, or start some great project, or save the world to prove you're healthy. Just be you with all your might. The greatest gift you can give to the world is a healthy version of yourself. You can do that.

Things to consider:

1. Talk about the negative forces that might still be trying to pull you back down.
2. How are you doing at keeping it real? No BS allowed!
3. Talk about the last time you wanted to give up ... how'd you make it through?

God, we need to talk.

Session Twenty One

Up Close and Personal

This may creep you out, but God actually already lives inside you. Yeah, he does. He's big enough to hold the universe together, but he's also small enough to hold together each atom that goes into making you who you are. If he wasn't, you wouldn't exist.

God gives you each breath you take. He gives you a brain to think. He gives you a heart to feel. He gives you a mouth to speak. He's given you people who love you right now. He's all up in your business, whether you like it or not.

Now this might really creep you out. There was a good doctor named Luke who wrote about Jesus a long time ago. At the front end of his story, he wrote about two women having babies. One was Elizabeth who had already gone through menopause. No baby's gonna happen there. The other woman was a teenager named Mary who had never had sex. No baby there. Seriously, she'd never had sex.

God touched both of them so they birthed baby boys who literally saved the world. Elizabeth's boy was named John who prepared his community for the arrival of Jesus. Mary's boy was Jesus who came to rescue all of us.

To bring these two into the world, God's Spirit touched the reproductive organs of both women. Elizabeth's womb was revitalized so she and her husband could make a baby. Mary's womb was miraculously tweaked so she had a baby minus a man. NO, GOD DID NOT HAVE SEX WITH HER! He's not into that. Who knows how it happened? We do know Jesus was born, and God got really close to make it happen.

This is how involved God wants to be with you; not by making babies, but creating new life in you every day. He's not up there far away preoccupied with heaven stuff. He's inside your mind and soul working with you to find the real you.

You don't have to go to church to find God. You don't have to become a bible expert. You don't have to learn some beautiful poetic prayer. You don't have to act like all the church people. Jesus didn't. You don't have to get your crap together first. He's already in your mind and soul ... just a whisper away.

We've already talked about how the first humans screwed God over in the Garden of Eden. Do you think this shocked or blind-sided God? Like, he didn't see that one

coming. No, he knew they'd turn against him. And he created them anyway. Your junk doesn't run God off. It doesn't turn him off. It doesn't tick him off ... well, maybe a little, 'cause it's hard for him to watch you hurt yourself and others.

Nothing you can do or say or think or feel or desire can make God un-love you. So, if God is so close, you might as well start talking with him. Really ... you don't want to be rude. He knows all your stuff anyway, why not talk with him about it? What do you have to lose? What's it going to hurt? Scream at him. Whisper to him. Sing to him. Rage at him. Cry with him. Just don't ignore him.

Things to consider:

1. God believes in you, even if you don't believe in him. How do you feel about this statement?
2. How do you feel about God being in your heart working with you to find the real you?
3. What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail in God's eye's?

God, we need to talk.

Session Twenty Two

Hearing God's Voice

Last session we talked about God being close, even inside your mind and soul. This sounds kinda weird. But okay, let's suppose he's there, how do we hear him if he wants to tell us something? How do we tell the difference between acid indigestion and the voice of the Almighty?

It would be cool if there was an easy answer to this. But it also doesn't have to be rocket science. This really isn't something we can practice and get better at. Mostly we just need to show up and let God take it from there.

There was a gentle white-haired grandfather whose grandson would visit from time to time. This grandson wasn't used to feeling loved, 'cause his parents couldn't show it in a healthy way. So every time his grandfather saw him coming, he would figure out really cool ways to let this little boy know he was loved. It might be a special homecooked meal or a ride in the countryside. It might be inviting the grandson to join him in a project. The old grandfather was pretty creative in his love-language.

Every time the grandson left to go back home, he left feeling loved and respected. And it wasn't because he'd behaved perfectly, made good grades or stayed out of trouble. He'd done nothing more than be in the presence of his grandfather. All he had to do was show up and his grandfather would take it from there.

What language would God have to use to convince you he loves you. Your history with the word love is not good. People who hurt you told you they loved you. How's this supposed to work?

If you want to help someone with no strings attached, how do you show it? They don't earn it or pay it back. You just want them to feel safe, valued and respected. Well, that's probably the language God will use to let you know he loves you. (Remind yourself that just because you've worked out a love-language with God, doesn't mean everybody else will understand or use the same language with you.)

Most of us complicate the whole talking to God thing. We think we have to say the perfect prayer ... or come up with enough faith ... or go on and on and on to prove we really mean it. Like prayer is something to get just right or it doesn't count. Or we expect God to give us what we want every time we ask. Or if we feel happy, then God

must hear us. If we feel bad, he no longer cares. None of this works. What if prayer is more like showing up at Grandpa's house and letting him take it from there?

Prayer is a running conversation with God? He's inside your heart. Why not?

“God, I'm scared to death to enter that room full of people. You know how I am about crowds blocking the exits. But, if you live inside me, that means it's two, not one, of us who is going through that door.”

“God, I'm really ticked at you for what happened. Show me how you were there or show me you never left me even when I thought you were gone.”

“God, I'm feeling so down right now. Back in the day, I would have blamed you for this. But now, I think I'll just sit here with you and both of us can be depressed together.”

“God, that jerk did it again. I can't take much more. I'm fix'n to rain down some pain. I have every right. Well, darn! You're in me and you're in them. I've kinda lost my edge. I guess I'll have a glass of cool water.”

If God is going to be real with you, you need to get real with him. Drop the expectations. Stop trying to get it just right. Just talk with him. Then shut up and listen. You'd be surprised what God might say if you give him a chance.

Things to consider:

1. Where did you get the idea you can't cuss when you pray?
2. Before you started these sessions, did you even care about talking with God?
3. Looking back, are there times God was talking to you, but you didn't know it?

How can I help?

## Session Twenty Three

### From Victim to Thriving Survivor

If you're like most who are finding healing, you won't be happy sitting in the corner looking pretty. There is a growing restlessness in you to help the people you left back in your former life. And if it's too soon to go back to the same people in the same place, at the very least you want to help people with stories similar to yours.

Love and kindness wither and die if they're not shared. They thrive when given away. You've been rescued. Go and rescue. You've been loved. Go and love. You've been fed and clothed. Go feed and clothe. You've been comforted. Go and comfort. You've been given a new lease on life. Go and find others who deserve a new life.

Your best guide in this will be you. Remember your story. Remember the strange combination of emotions back then: hard yet desperate, hopeless yet hoping, hateful yet longing for love. The people you want to help won't always want your help. Be patient. Do a lot of listening. Share food. Share the essentials of life. Make sure they're warm. Keep going back to them.

Not everybody's recovery will happen the same way yours has. Relax. Drop your expectations. Go slow. We'll say it again; listen, listen, listen. You're not there to fix anyone. You're there to love and accept them right where they are. Let them know you respect and value them. Speak hope into their lives. Compliment them. Validate them as treasured children of God.

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So far, this session has talked about the victims. What about the villains? Can the new you do anything about them?

First off, if you're barely into recovery, focus on the victims for a while. You need to get a little more time and experience under your belt before you tackle the villains.

Second, once you are ready, there is nobody in the world more qualified to recognize and expose the villains than you. You know their body language, their subtleties, their methods, their hiding places, their legal loopholes etc. You are far more qualified than law enforcement, the legal system and any social service. So do your thing. Look and report. Look and report. And make sure you know who you can trust and have their numbers waiting on speed dial.

Third, you, more than anyone else, know how to help guard potential victims against villains. Do everything you can to educate children, parents of young children, caretakers of children etc. Be clear about what to look for. It's antique, but the cliché is still true: an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.

Look at yourself. You've gone from "I can't handle the thunderstorm in my head." to becoming a force to be reckoned with. Watch out darkness, 'cause light has a new soldier and they're coming after you.

Things to consider:

1. How does it feel to be a thriving survivor instead of victim?
2. Talk about some people you'd like to help survive and thrive.
3. Talk about some villains you'd like to expose (except if sharing would endanger you or someone else).

How can I help?

## Session Twenty Four

Be you with all you're might!

You now have a license to hope. Yes, you do.

As we've said before, the greatest gift you can offer the world is a healthy version of yourself. It's been hiding inside you all these years. You've finally found a way to call it out. God's got you right where he wants you: honest, hopeful and ready for the next adventure.

So what will it be?

If you're like most who grew up tortured by abuse, you've rarely allowed yourself to dream. Your goal each day was just to survive any way you could. What if you had a chance to actually live, to plan for the future, to make a positive difference in this world?

Look, the road ahead is open. Sure, there are some potholes, hair-pin curves and steep, steep mountains. But you are no longer chained to your past. You can move forward.

You have a license to hope. Yes, you do.

Given no restraints (all the resources you need, all the time you need, all the strength you need, all the training you need) what do you want to do with your life? Wildest dreams welcome!

(If you want to build a monument to yourself ... well, come back in twenty years and tell us how that worked out for you. You'd be going right back into slavery, only you'd be serving a different master.)

But if you want to make the world a better place for those less fortunate, what would that look like? Does it involve feeding the hungry? Does it involve the arts? Does it involve building something? Does it involve transforming something or someone? Is it aimed at the very young or the very old? Is it gender specific? Is it urban or rural?

And if you were to get started on your dream, what would be the first step? Are there people you'd need to talk with? Is there additional education you'd need? Would it involve you moving geographically? Would you partner with a larger organization?



4. Write a letter to the person you were before you started this workbook. Share with them about your journey and what to expect.

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