



**SEVEN
THINGS
I'VE LEARNED
HAVING GONE
THROUGH
SEPARATION &
DIVORCE**

A Personal Journey

CYRIL 'CEEJAY' HORRELL



7 THINGS I'VE LEARNED HAVING GONE THROUGH SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

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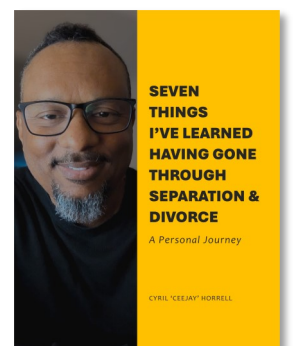
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FOREWARD

Pain. From the mundane pin-prick to the heart-stopping pangs of a break-up, pain is one of life's frontiers we must all travel. It is perhaps the least appreciated of our experiences, but an unavoidable companion in the phenomenon called "life." Pain can emerge at any time, intensity, or frequency, from anywhere, or anyone. It can suck hope out of us, and test our faith. Still, it can unveil a determined realization that pain is a dot in our journey's timeline. It is not our destination. This realization is Ceejay's story.

Bruised to the point of seeming hopelessness, Ceejay navigated his way toward healing. Authentically and vulnerably, he candidly shares the lessons he learned from his path of, and experiences through, unimaginable pain. He shares non-accusatory perspectives of his journey through hurt, to restoration, and to hope. He shares what he learned through his separation and divorce, the impact of his struggles as he emerged from the suffocating fog that ensued, and explores what he discovered that set him on a path of self-renewal, self-reconciliation, and self-love.

While he shares his journey, neither it nor his healing is complete. As he journeys, he learns. As he learns, he heals. His experience is one of resilience, recovery, and hope beyond the darkness. From his heart to yours, he offers a message of healing after hurt.

Be encouraged by Ceejay's words and assured that, indeed,

"Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps. 30:5). As his journey continues, so does yours. Your "morning"—and the possibilities it holds—can break through the clutches of a seemingly endless "night."

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CYRIL 'CEEJAY' HORRELL

Hi! I'm Ceejay. Welcome and thanks for spending some time with me as I share the 7 Things I've Learned Having Gone Through Separation and Divorce.

I wish you only the best as you journey through your season of self-discovery and healing. If you're reading this in support of a loved one journeying through a separation and divorce, know that your love, encouragement, support and presence are treasures to them.

You are NOT alone!

Some things take time and sometimes, more than anything else, the step you choose to take today will do more to get you to the goal you are working towards tomorrow.

Let me highlight two more thoughts before we dive into what I want to share with you. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all have a set of beliefs that define our religious viewpoints, political allegiances, moral practices, perception of the world around us, and our place in it. These make up our worldview.

First, my worldview is a Christocentric one; so please understand when I draw

from that well from time to time. I truly believe that the recovery and deliverance that God provides in the person of Jesus Christ is not just from the brokenness and chaos around us, but the brokenness and chaos within us.

For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11 NLT

Second, this e-booklet is comprised of excerpts from a broader body of work that I use in my one-on-one and group in-person or virtual coaching sessions. For a more in-depth personal experience, please feel free to reach out to me. I would love to hear from you.

Sincerely,
Ceejay.

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**SOMETIMES
YOU'LL FEEL
LIKE GIVING UP**

Separation and divorce can be tough on everyone: the couple, offspring if any, extended family, close friends, and others within the circle of care and influence. As a man, I believe separation and divorce can be particularly difficult, and the research (www.psychologytoday.com) supports this. Generally, women seem to find it easier to cope because speaking to their social circle, close friends, and family members about their situations comes more naturally to them. In short, women share. Men, on the other hand, tend to bottle our emotions. As a result, men suffer an identity crisis, prematurely jump into new relationships, miss their children, and face health issues such as weight fluctuations, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Adding insult to injury, the judgement, blame, ostracism, and marginalization from others and our own feelings of doubt, confusion, and loneliness make the journey towards healing feel like a suffocating labyrinth. So, we have more to lose in terms of happiness and health after a divorce.

While society may view divorce as merely a legal separation, those who journey through the experience deal with the mental scars that the process can inflict, and the paradox of the journey is that it can be both liberating and confining. The journey can also be a lonely experience. This is enough to make anyone just want to give up. Still, although you may feel lonely, you're never alone. I know. I've been there. I was the one who made the difficult decision to no longer exist in anything that would consistently and potentially cause irreparable mental, emotional, social, and spiritual damage. I made that decision for my family as much as I did for myself, not knowing if they would or could ever understand that.

Up until that decision, my mom's death was the most painful thing I ever endured. I didn't make it in time to see her before she passed, and it was a long journey back to my country of birth to bury her. This season of loss was different. It almost killed

me. I had become so isolated and overcome by limiting beliefs that, at times, it seemed almost impossible to keep my head above the raging waves of stress, anxiety, loss of self, internalised loneliness, and the guilt over being away from my boys.

I had to repeatedly remind myself that I was living through a season that forced me to make a difficult decision: to reclaim my sense of self and, at the risk of sounding melodramatic, to liberate it from certain destruction. But living in a space without my boys, not being able to walk in the room to touch or hold them at will was more painful than I could have ever imagined it would be. Often, I felt like I was falling into an abyss, alone, with no hope of ever coming out or being found. That feeling took everything from me and left me with nothing to help myself when I was at my most vulnerable, and without the security of self. If not for the mercies of God, I would not have survived the experience.

Every situation is unique, and choosing to separate or divorce can be a complex, tricky situation. One thing is clear to me: I would not wish this on my worst enemy (speaking metaphorically of course).

I find myself asking: "Can purpose truly exist in the riptide of pain?" Perhaps, but what I do know is that God and the enemy have two different purposes for the fiery darts the enemy sends into our lives. The enemy uses them to consume, but God uses them to **refine**. The salvation and deliverance that God provides in the person of Jesus Christ is not just from the brokenness and chaos around us, but the brokenness and chaos within us. He came that we may have the very Being of God within us and the abundant expression of God's character in our behaviour.

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. John 10:10 NLT

I once heard it said (and I am paraphrasing here), that the version of myself that I became in order to survive the storm is also the version of myself that I have to let go of, because that version of myself that I had to become in order to survive is not needed anymore. Dr. Dionne Felix, my life coach, said something similar. She added that since my space, time, and situation are now different, letting go of that "self" is critical to my new journey. This message was a huge lightbulb moment for me and I made two commitments to myself: first, to come out of this abyss with a higher level of functioning by nurturing the most important relationship I would ever have and, second, to do what I can to help others do the same (more on this in chapter 6 and 7 of this e-Booklet).

Second to God, the most important relationship I have is the one I have with myself, because the health of this self-relationship determines the health of all other relationships. All through my life and right up to this very moment, my body has been doing everything in its power to be faithful to me. With unwavering dedication my heart pumps blood; my lungs bring oxygen and eliminates carbon dioxide. My skin protects my internal structures and, when I'm injured, my body immediately begins to produce new cells to heal the damage. How could I neglect it now or ever?

God began to reveal to me that if I was to come out this being the man He created me to be, "temple-care" (a term I acquired from my life coach) would become my greatest priority. Key to becoming my greatest priority is recognizing my need to preserve my PIES. No, not food. I'm referring to my Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual Life. Let me explain. We function

best and create an environment for healing when our PIES (our Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual Life) are in order. I'm not talking about self-improvement, taking a break, or going on a vacation, although all those can be helpful. I'm talking about creating a lifestyle you don't need to take a break from, and immersing yourself in regularly nurturing experiences that promote and maintain your physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual life. Temple-care is a highly individual practice, so you'd need to be honest about the how and when of that care process, and identify obstacles to (and support for) this intimate and vital way of being. Importantly, it's about learning, overcoming, gaining control, becoming an expert on you, and becoming proficient in caring for your most precious asset: **you**.

If it's been a while since you've used the postal service, you may not have noticed that postage stamps are getting more expensive, but at least they have one attribute that most of us could emulate: they stick to one thing from the time they are placed on a package until that package gets to its destination. Have you ever noticed that there are some amusingly successful people with little talent, genius, or education? What they do have is a healthy dose of persistence and determination that takes them through the tough times. In other words, they possess remarkable "stick-to-itiveness."

Persistence is continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition. We all experience setbacks on the road to success, and major setbacks can be particularly difficult. Learning how to deal with and overcome obstacles is critical to success. Persistence strengthens the ability to conquer and face difficulties.

"A bend in the road is not the end of the road... unless you fail to make the turn." - Helen Keller

Here are five tips to help you develop perseverance.

01. Care for your body, mind, emotions, and spiritual self.

02. Do not be afraid to fail. Change your relationship with failure by getting back up every time.

03. Grow and persist in growing by keeping your goal in mind. There is always something to learn, and the journey gets sweeter with every little step you take.

04. Live in the present. Plant the seeds for the goal you are trying to achieve today.

05. Remember why. Reflecting on why you started your journey in the first place will inspire you to keep going.

And know that I'm with you 100%, and willing to help if I can.



**YOUR FRIEND
CIRCLE WILL
GET SMALLER**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the issues surrounding separation and divorce can be complex because everybody's situation is unique, and I want to be sensitive to that. So in this next chapter, remember I am only speaking about what I have discovered and learned from my lived experience having journeyed through separation and divorce. Also, in an attempt to preserve anonymity, the experiences I reference aren't necessarily personal accounts. They are drawn from a number of personal sources, including some within my circle, who have also gone through relationship challenges, separation, or divorce.

I believe nothing tests a person's character more than adversity. When a couple decides to part ways, that decision not only sends shockwaves through their family circles, but their social circles as well. Friends also go through a sense of loss and confusion as they wrestle with their own emotions, especially when the news rattles their own beliefs about your relationship and divorce, and might even highlight the challenges they may be facing in their own relationship. Some take sides; some feel guilt, anger, shame, and don't want the drama. Some shun you, and pass judgement and gossip, which can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness for those caught in the crossfire.

While I experienced the judgement, cold shoulders, and gossip, I also experienced unexpected surprises and blessings. I discovered hidden treasures in my social circle: friends who remained consistent pillars in my life, friends who stood the test of time. They **chose** not to take sides except for the side of right by always calling me out and calling me up when I needed it most.

Although my friendship circle became much smaller, the character of those in that inner circle became more apparent, leading to a more intimate, loving, and supportive experience, and teaching me that proximity does not always equal intimacy.

There are "friends" who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24 NLT

Keep yourself open and vulnerable to the right people. Sometimes, doing so might be difficult when you're already questioning your ability to make healthy relationship choices after having gone through what you've gone through. But I believe God will send the right people and, when He does, don't be afraid to test them through observation. The right people will not be negative. Rather, they will challenge you, lift you up, have your back, encourage you to seek help and self-care, check in on you, and pray with you. They won't talk about your ex, but will focus on you, your healing, and your wellbeing. They wouldn't want to be your coroner, mediator, counselor, or advisor. Instead, they will respect and maintain healthy boundaries, stand with you, and encourage you to seek professional help. Your friends are **not** your therapists. Your friends are your **friends**. Let them be such, and let them be the supports and shoulders to lean on that they're meant to be.

Friends come in and out of our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. Observing human behaviour, Aristotle distinguished three levels of friendships: utility-based, pleasure-based, and character-based. I have chosen to express these levels in the fol-

lowing ways.

The Friendship of Transaction

Where one or both parties say, "I just want to know what you can give me."

The Friendship of Beauty

Where one or both parties say, "I just want to know how you can please me."

The Friendship of Virtue

Where both parties say, "I want to know and be known." This level of friendship a bilateral experience where both parties enjoy the beauty of growing and persisting in growing with each other.

Friendship is a central part of the human experience, rich with meaning, enormous blessings, and beautiful learning experiences. Now, given the opportunity to have a reset of sorts, I embraced this new season with all that I had learned, and was still learning. As my friendship circle got smaller, I began to discover how rich I was, and the great responsibility and opportunity I had to create a life I wouldn't ever have to escape from.

We seldom get to start over in life, but the opportunity to reset is exactly what I discovered I was getting a chance to do, and one area that came into focus was my friendship circle. Starting over is not as crazy as it may seem; we simply need the courage to recognise, accept, uproot some things, and move past the limit-

ing beliefs we've allowed to take root in our minds. This, my friend, may require you to say "No" to some things.

This new season and journey, my "start over," gifted me with the opportunity to take a long, hard look at what I had allowed into my life over the years, and what I now had an opportunity to keep out of my life by establishing clear boundaries. Sometimes, establishing those boundaries begin with the word "No." Saying "No" can be extremely difficult; it can stir up intense negative emotions like fear, feelings of rejection, embarrassment, or the guilt of letting someone down.

Still, we are the ones mostly impacted by the decisions we make, and we have the responsibility of maintaining healthy relationships. We have the ability and right to say "No!" Understanding that we have autonomy is empowering. Know this: you are the only one who can really identify your priorities in life, and saying "No" enables you to demonstrate clear boundaries while outlining what others can expect from you. And those fair-weathered, negative, intrusive or toxic friends? Just say No!

Saying "no" unlocks all the things you're saying "yes" to! So how do we say "no"?

Consider these 7 tips:

01. Plan ahead; pause. Take your time to consider the request.
02. Just say it. Don't make excuses.

03. Be courteous, but assertive.

04. Be aware of people's tactics and desire to coerce.

05. Set clear boundaries.

06. Be firm. Keep in mind what you're saying "yes" to.

07. Love you. If they can't accept you, perhaps they're not for you.

Remember, saying "no" unlocks all the things you're saying "yes" to and, sometimes, saying "no" means saying "yes" to yourself.

One of the things I found most helpful on my journey of self-care was actually creating pre-written responses to various situations and familiarising myself with them. For example, I had pre-determined responses for people who would ask me about my separation and divorce, my boys and how they were doing, or my ex. I placed these responses in the notes section of my mobile device for quick and easy access.

Here are a few examples of questions and my pre-written responses.

Taking Sides:

I don't need you to take a side; I just need you to respect me, my decision, and my journey.

Is there any hope of reconciliation?

I understand that this news is perhaps a bit of a shock. However, for me, this is really the end of a very long journey, and that chapter of my life as it was then, is now over.

What happened?

I understand that one may have questions but, in the best interest of my family, I have chosen to remain silent on this subject. I also do not want in any way to have friends or well-wishers inadvertently caught in the middle. Know, however, that God has been good to me and continues to be my Ever-Present Comforter and Help.

Why are you doing this?

I am aware that people have very strong opinions about separation, divorce, and marriage and often feel compelled to share them. If you're so inclined, please be reminded of my decision to remain silent on this deeply personal experience.

One other point before I press forward into the next chapter:

Abuse, in whatever form (and yes, even emotional abuse) must never be silenced.

If you are in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, please call 911.



**Forgiveness
Is Not
Reconciliation**

I remember looking into the mirror one morning and realising that there was something eerily different about the person staring back at me. In one of the darkest and lowest seasons of my life, to my horror and shame, I woke up to find myself filled with resentment so strong that it forced me to my knees. I may not have participated in some of the things I endured, but I surely did react to them. Now, I was becoming a bitter person. Fearing for the health of my soul, my faith brought me to the only One who could take the sting away and, with tears in my eyes, I cried to God for help and forgiveness. I needed Him to take away the bitterness that was crushing my chest.

Hurt people hurt people, and the world is full of heartbroken people. They have been victimised, mistreated, alienated, and neglected. The world is swamped by people who are angry, resentful, bitter, lonely, depressed, fearful, guilt-ridden, and consumed by hatred and self-pity. They have been wronged by others and have wronged others. On my journey to healing and in my commitment to emerge with a higher level of functioning, I had to face the truth that I had only two options: to live **bitter**, or to live **better**.

Painful experiences create painful memories, and a painful memory is a mental wound that must be healed. Forgiveness is a huge step in that healing process. I am confident that you would agree that life is too fleeting to be imprisoned by an emotional scrapbook of painful memories. We must forgive, and today you might need to forgive someone. You might need to forgive yourself. While grappling with forgiveness and coming face-to-

face with the resentment I was harbouring, just in time, I stumbled onto a YouTube video in which Ty Gibson defined forgiveness. He said,

“Forgiveness is the decision to cease holding a person's offense against them to their hurt, but rather to act in their best interest by turning them over to God, which may involve receiving them back into trust, or cutting them off from trust as the nature of the offense dictates.” - Ty Gibson

This definition stuck with me.

Let's focus on the first part of this Ty's definition of forgiveness.

First, Ty talks about releasing a person from our perpetual contempt of his or her wrongdoing. Essentially, living better means we have to accept the fact that there is nothing those who have wronged us can do to repay their debt, and forgiveness allows us both to be set free. They are freed from the burden of fruitlessly trying to repay a debt they cannot, and we are freed from the burden of hopelessly expecting them to do so. Forgiveness becomes a gift we give to ourselves when we turn the one who has wronged us over to the care and responsibility of God. The act of forgiveness is refusing to be imprisoned by the toxic emotions that often fester in our hearts because we're dragging past offenses around like a sack of dirty laundry everywhere we go. Forgiveness is a decision to forbid what happened in our past to sabotage our future, and to refuse to allow painful events to

have an oppressive grasp on our minds and bodies.

Second, Ty talks about turning them over to God. But why? Well, ultimately, I believe He (God) takes responsibility for the injustices that occur and rightly so. But let me not get ahead of myself.

It's normal to question: *Is God doing anything about the offenses that occur?* I pondered this question many times and came to the realisation that, ultimately, He is. He is the one offended and He **will** deal with those who reject His forgiveness. I once came across an illustration of the pole, police officer, monarch, and God and discovered that although the illustration has been widely used it has not been credited to anyone one person; so my apologies for not being able to point you to a source. Here is the illustration.

Suppose as you took a stroll down the street. You angrily decided to slap a pole. What do you think would happen? How would those around you respond to your violent outburst? I'm sure you would agree that offending a pole would generally be considered trivial, as a pole is an inanimate object without feelings or social significance. The consequences of offending a pole are non-existent, except for your bruised hand, of course.

Now suppose, as you walked further down the street, you chose to angrily slap a police officer. What do you think would happen then? How would those around you respond to your violent outburst? Offending a police officer might have more serious implications. Police officers uphold law and order, and showing disre-

spect could lead to legal consequences or escalation in the situation, especially if it involves obstructing justice or disobeying lawful commands.

Feeling rather generous, the officer decides to let you go with a stern warning, and you continue your stroll. Further down the street, you come across a large crowd. Pushing your way through the excitement buzzing around you, you stumble across the reigning monarch leaving a popular hotel, entourage in tow. You defiantly push forward and get close enough to strike the monarch in the face. What do you think would happen then? How would those around you respond to your threatening outburst? I'm sure you would agree that, due to the high level of respect and formality associated with royalty, offending any reigning monarch is a serious matter. The consequences could range from social ostracism to legal repercussions and, depending on the country's laws and customs, serious jail time.

My point is this: the illustration of offense scales from non-consequential (a pole) to potentially serious, depending on the social or personal significance of the figure involved (police officer, monarch). What if the one you violently slapped, the one you were offending, was the Creator God?

All people are created in the image of God, which means that humans possess intrinsic value. Put another way, human beings have objective value because that value comes from someone who exists outside of the human race: the Creator God. So regardless of one's situation, condition, social or economic status,

skin colour, sex, location, beliefs, or any hosts of other characteristics that people use to judge others' value, the Creator's word (not our own) is final. This means there is an objective authority to which everyone is accountable, including man-made authorities, be they political, religious or otherwise. What's more, God not only loves His creation, but He also laid down His very life for it and He takes great offence to how those who are His own are treated. When we show contempt for others, we not only put ourselves above God, but we dishonour Him. He is the one who is ultimately offended, and that is why it's always better to hand them over to Him.

In His hands and not our own, forgiveness also offers the offenders an opportunity to respond to their conscience (God speaking) to live better lives themselves, because forgiveness is not a license to live as you wish. Rather, it is a gift that sets you free to live the way you should. Some never seek forgiveness. Some do only because they were caught. Others do because they have come face-to-face with their wrong, are truly remorseful, and desire to turn away from that wrong forever. Either way, consequences are bound to choice, which leads me to my third and final point based on Ty's definition of forgiveness.

Ty said "...[forgiveness] may involve receiving them back into trust or cutting them off from trust as the nature of the offense dictates." You are the one who needs to wrestle with this; so be kind to and gentle with yourself as you do.

An important truth is this: forgiveness is **not** restoration; it lays

the foundation for restoration. This means that although one is forgiven, one may still have to suffer the harsh consequences of his or her actions. I can forgive you and still call the police on you. You can forgive and still say, "Now, here are the new parameters for this relationship." Consequences are bound to the choices we make, good or bad.

One of Jesus' disciples, Peter, questioned Him, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Examining this account in its context, Peter was trying to sound extremely generous and loving, but Jesus' unexpected answer sought to illustrate the principle that we are to forgive the repentant offender an unlimited number of times. I believe this is also important for our healing journey. In other words, there may be times when the memories or the emotions associated with a past offense that you have forgiven, threaten to consume you again. That's normal, and you can forgive again, and again, and again. This world is a university of hard knocks, and we owe it to life, our life, not to get bitter. Bitterness shrivels the spirit and hardens our attitudes, but choosing to live better and learn from our troubles, difficulties, and disappointments, helps us grow and gives us insight, understanding, and new direction for our lives.

Living better and not bitter also includes forgiving yourself.

This is also true for yourself. I remember there were times I had to forgive myself for entering or lodging in spaces that were harming me. Every time I felt the regret, guilt, and shame creep in, I had to forgive myself again. As long as it takes, do it. Forgive yourself. It's okay to forgive repeatedly, 70 x 7. Well-meaning folks often tell us to "forgive and forget." Typically, their admonition is intended to caution us against harbouring resentment. However, there is nothing wrong with being able to recall an offense. The question is, are you holding it against the offender or yourself? Part of your healing includes learning how not to harbour grudges against others, and how not to loathe yourself. Doing so requires repeatedly forgiving others and yourself. I know it can be difficult, but learning to forgive yourself means you will have less anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem, and a clearer picture and understanding of how God sees you, as one with intrinsic value who is precious in His sight. Forgiveness opens the heart and helps us grow mentally, spiritually, and socially. No more logging the dirty, smelly, laundry of offenses around everywhere we go.

01. Forgiveness is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength.
02. Forgiveness is not a feeling, but an act of the will.
03. Forgiveness is not an excuse for the bad behaviour. It is a decision to not be emotionally controlled or affected by the behaviour.
04. Forgiveness is not trust; forgiveness is a grace gift you give

to yourself. Trust is earned by those who are trustworthy.

Remember, today is a good day to live **better** and not **bitter**.



**Grief Is A
Journey, Not
A Destination**

In 2005, just three months after the birth of my first son, the unthinkable happened: I lost my mom to a rare and rapidly progressive heart condition. She was just fifty-five years old. Up until that point, my mom's death was the most painful loss I had ever endured. But I understood that journeying through the grief of my mother's death meant there was still love and hope on the other side of my anguish. My grief was all the love I still had bottled up inside for her but couldn't give to her. Still, as a Christian, my faith gave me the hope of one day being reunited with her.

Although no family is perfect, mine included, I came from what many would consider a stable home. But coming from a stable home doesn't mean one would be shielded from life happening and people "peopling." It didn't shelter me from life's growing pains, nor did it protect me from divorce and the ensuing guilt of forcing my boys to grow up way too fast or having to divide their time between their mother and father. I was the one who decided to no longer exist in anything that would consistently and potentially cause me irreparable mental, emotional, social, and spiritual damage. I made that decision for them as much as I did for myself, not knowing if they would or could ever understand that.

This loss was different. It almost killed me. I was journeying through a cold and dark season, one that forced me to make a difficult decision: to reclaim my sense of self and, at the risk of sounding melodramatic, to liberate it from certain destruction. Nonetheless, living in a space without my boys, not being able to walk in the room to touch or hold them at will was more pain-

ful than I could have ever imagined it would be. I was falling into an abyss alone, with no hope of ever coming out or being found. This cold, dark season took everything from me, and left me with nothing to help myself. Without the security of self, I was at my most vulnerable. I grieved the loss of some of the earliest hopes and dreams I had of family and aspirations, hopes and dreams created long before I said "I do." I was also grieving stolen, future hopes and dreams that now felt like they would never materialise for me.

Grief is a natural response to loss. It is the emotional suffering we feel when someone we love, or something we care deeply about, is taken away. Any loss, including divorce or relationship breakup, loss of health, loss of a job, loss of a pet, or selling the family home, can cause grief. Even a career change, graduating from college or moving away from home can trigger a sense of grief. Grieving is a highly individual experience, and there is no right or wrong way to journey through grief. There are, however, healthy ways to deal with the grieving process. Grief can leave us feeling overwhelmed, shocked, angry, guilty, in disbelief, and in a state of deep sadness. It can even disrupt our physical health, making it difficult to eat, sleep, or even think straight. All these are normal reactions to loss and, the greater the loss the more intense the grief will be. If you are grieving any loss, there is nothing to be ashamed about. Healing takes time. Whatever your journey is like, be patient with yourself, and give yourself time. The pain will not go away faster if you ignore it. I've learned that grief waits patiently to sit beside us again when we least expect it.

The grief of a loved one means that there is love and hope on the other side of your anguish.

Grief is a journey, not a destination. There is no predetermined time for its end, and crying does not mean you are weak, nor do you have to be strong. You just have to **be**, to breathe, to take one intentional step at a time—slowly, steadily. Often, that is all you will be able to manage. Trying to move forward with your daily tasks or routine is not about forgetting about your loss. For some, the structure and routine are what they need to process the grief, because it is different for everyone. Structure and routine can help you survive **through** the loss, and strive and thrive **despite** the loss.

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what became known as the “Five Stages of Grief.”

Denial: “This can’t be happening to me.”

Anger: “Why is this happening? Who is to blame?”

Bargaining: “Make this not happen, and in return I will ____.”

Depression: “I’m too sad to do anything.”

Acceptance: “I’m at peace with what happened.”

Note that you may not go through these five stages, and some may never experience any of these, and that is ok. Grieving is as individual as our lives are, and there is no typical response to loss.

Still, as you think about your own grief and how you are navi-

gating through it, consider these seven key recommendations.

01. Acknowledge your pain.

02. Accept and understand that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions.

03. Know that your grieving process will be unique to you.

04. Seek out face-to-face support from the people who care about you. Don't be averse to seeking professional help as well.

05. Intentionally treat yourself to self-care by engaging in activities that support your emotional health and your physical well-being.

06. Recognise the difference between grief and depression¹.

07. Draw comfort from your faith.

¹Grief versus depression:

"In grief you may have a bad day or bad moment but it eventually passes. Clinical depression, on the other hand, is not intermittent. It is persistent, ongoing, never changing. Depression is accompanied by a feeling of hopelessness and apathy." - Patti Anewalt, PhD, LPC, FT, Director of the Pathways Center for Grief & Loss with Hospice & Community Care.
www.hospicefoundation.org



**Destructive
Patterns
Are A No-No**

I can't begin to tell you how many times I've repeated and reinstated injurious behaviours, habits, and thought processes that have caused me harm, hindered my personal growth, and led to unhealthy outcomes—all tragic by-products of some form of trauma, abuse, or neglect. Everyday our thoughts give way to actions. Actions, if done repeatedly, become habits and a catalogue of predetermined actions. We almost don't have to think about them anymore; we just do them. Whether good or bad, this catalogue, this collection of habits, become or can be described as our "lifestyle." Two words, **life** and **style**, or the style of our lives. In essence, our lifestyle forms our character, and our character determines our destiny. What's the style of your life? Is it destructive or constructive?

***"Everything we say is descriptive and prophetic."* - Taylor Welch**

We are constantly breathing life into the things we are experiencing in the way we depict and express them. Consciously and unconsciously, we're making choices, and our choices are making us. You and I are essentially the sum of our choices, and our characters are the sum of our habits. So destructive patterns are a no-no. Some of these patterns can manifest in various areas of life, such as emotional well-being, work, or relationships, and may include behaviours like:

Self-sabotage: Undermining your own success or happiness

Procrastination: Avoiding tasks, which leads to stress and failure

to achieve goals

Negative Self-Talk: Consistently thinking and speaking poorly of yourself, leading to low self-esteem

Toxic Relationship Habits: Engaging in controlling, manipulative, or unhealthy relationship dynamics

Addiction: Relying on substances or behaviours (like alcohol, drugs, or gambling) that cause harm, and

Perfectionism: Setting unrealistic standards that lead to burnout or frustration.

The destructive patterns are steeped in negative beliefs, and addressing these beliefs often requires self-awareness and reflection. Sometimes addressing them requires external support, such as therapy, counseling, or lifestyle coaching to break the cycle. What you believe and what you choose to believe has the power to shape your future more than any other single factor. The power of belief shapes our life, circumstances, character, behaviour, and destiny. We become what we believe, for we are a collection of empowering and disempowering beliefs. It's important to note that all empowering beliefs are based on truth. Conversely all disempowering beliefs are based on lies. Be careful what you believe!

***"Self becomes sidelined and sidestepped."* - Dr. Dionne Felix**

Looking back, I had set up camp in toxic spaces so often that I began to believe the lies these spaces produced. Once these lies took root, they became beliefs. But where do our beliefs come from? Consider these five factors.

01. Our Environment - Life circumstances, habitat, or surroundings

02. Life Events - Positive and negative

03. Past Results - Good and bad

04. Knowledge - What we feed our minds on, and

05. Destiny - That sense of Divine purpose in all of us.

On my journey of healing and self-discovery, I had to take inventory of my beliefs and the places where they were sown. This action enabled me to determine not only who I had set boundaries for, but the spaces and places I would have to uproot myself from as well. In doing so, I discovered how many of my beliefs were based on the opinions of others, and how those beliefs were impacting my ability to achieve or not achieve my goals. I had put "others" and their opinions first in unhealthy ways. When we do that, we "other" ourselves and our deepest longings, desires, needs, and wants. We become invisible, unrecognisable, and unseen, even to ourselves. But **no** more! I had to relearn how to exercise my power to believe and my power to choose what to believe. Remember, all empowering beliefs are

based on truth and conversely all disempowering beliefs are based on lies.

For some, reclaiming and exercising the power to believe and choose what to believe might be particularly difficult at first. However, it is important to address the root of the anxiety and despair you may feel at times, and to uproot the lies that you are telling yourself. So don't give up. Keep reclaiming and exercising the power to believe and choose what to believe. Practice, practice, practice. The more you practice, the easier it gets to eliminate distorted thinking. Know that every positive thought creates a new neural pathway, and that is a step in the right direction.

“Your life will always move in the direction of your strongest thoughts. So arm your mind and thoughts with life-giving truth!” - Roxanne Parks

Destructive patterns are a no-no, and you can break them. When things happen, listen to your internal dialogue—what you're thinking—because when events happen, they lead to automatic thoughts. Interestingly, the event does **not** determine the automatic thought, but our perception of the event does. An emotion follows this automatic thought, which then leads to a behavioural response. For example, Alex shows up at work and thinks, *“I will never get anything done today; what's the use?”* He feels hopeless and his automatic thought leads to a behavioral response which makes him put very little effort into his work that day. Recognizing how your thoughts impact your well-being is

important to stopping negative thought patterns.

Now that you are aware of what you are thinking, you need to determine if your thought is indeed true. Remember, all empowering thoughts are based on truth; all disempowering thoughts are based on lies. Make a list and reconstruct your thinking by writing truth statements to replace and uproot distorted thoughts. Consider this: every time you think a thought, your brain creates a new neural pathway, and this is great news for “truth thinkers.” Feelings are not evidence of what will take place in the future. Plus, we cannot predict the future. For example, in our earlier illustration, I am sure Alex had faced difficult situations at work before and was able to overcome it. So, he could tell himself. *“Although it feels impossible, I don’t have sufficient evidence to believe it is impossible because I made progress before when I was in a similar position.”*

Your value is not a reality created by others nor can it be altered by others.

I do not have to meet you or see you to know your worth. You are priceless because you were conceived in the heart of your Creator. By design, you are a part of the human family. Your value is not based on your contributions to the world, your circle of care, or your support system. You are above and greater than all those things. You are valued, loved, necessary to this life, and of incomprehensible worth. Some people choose ugliness, and they hurt others by violating them with their ugliness, but it is **their** ugliness not yours. Remember, just because others try to

put their ugly, their shame, and their lies on you, does not mean you become that yourself. Importantly, their vitriolic actions do not change or alter the truth of how worthwhile, valuable (inside and out), essential, or necessary you are and will always be. It most definitely does not mean you have to carry or wear their ugly, shame, and lies. If you find yourself questioning your self-worth, now is the time to shift your way of seeing yourself by practising consistent, supportive, self-talk that is based on who you're created to be. Be kind to yourself. Say and do kind things to yourself, the same way you would to a good friend. Even if you are guilty of choosing ugliness from time to time, you can embrace change and a new vision of who you were created to be.

I close with these words from Walter D. Wintle:

"If you think you are beaten, you are. If you think you dare not, you don't. If you'd like to win but think you can't, it's almost certain you won't. Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or faster man, but sooner or later, the man who wins is the man who thinks he can."

Are your thoughts life-giving and positive?

Are your thoughts negative?

What are you feeding your mind that establishes your thoughts each day?

What new belief should you be considering today?

Remember, *"Your life will always move in the direction of your strongest thoughts. So, arm your mind and thoughts with life-giving truth, today!"* - Roxanne Parks



**Embrace Genuine
Self-Acceptance
And Self-Love**

Sometimes, this life asks us to endure the unimaginable. Often, before we can respond to the “ask,” life hands the unimaginable to us, leaving devastation in its wake, the impact of which can be felt for generations. The lack of genuine self-acceptance and self-love always leads to the degradation of our emotional well-being and mental health. In a word, hurt. The result? As hurt people, we begin hurting people. There needs to be a new ideal, one that exists outside of the brokenness of this world upon which we can hang our hopes, dreams, deliverance, and healing. I believe there is. I believe that we are spiritual beings because we are all searching, consciously and unconsciously, for meaning, purpose, and connection to something greater than ourselves.

Our constant search is an attempt to gain inner peace, connectedness, and a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. This inner longing is, in fact, our soul’s cry to be connected to this ideal, the idea that our value comes from someone who exists outside of the human race: the Creator. Furthermore, this objective authority defines for us how we should see ourselves, and how to embrace self-acceptance and self-love. In the absence of a strong spiritual identity, there is a tug of war between who we are based on our experiences and who God says we are as His image bearers. It is true that self-acceptance and self-love are about embracing ourselves fully, acknowledging our strengths and imperfections, and cultivating a compassionate relationship with who we are. But I believe there is more! After all, this e-booklet is about what I have learned, so I may throw what might appear to be a curve ball or two; bear with me. In chapter one, I

mentioned the most important relationship we will ever have is the one we have with ourselves. In the previous chapter, I spoke about destructive patterns, how our beliefs and self-talk shape and influence our reality and the world around us. Well, I want to explore those two concepts a bit more.

We all want security: job security, financial security, relational security, and so on. But what about security of self? What about being secure in who we are, our values, and our abilities regardless of external influences and circumstances? Without security of self, we struggle to stay in neutral: the place where we can maintain a solid belief in ourselves, our abilities, and decisions. We battle to maintain emotional resilience in the face of setbacks, criticism, and distress, and wrestle to be authentic and express our thoughts, feelings, and values without fear of judgment or rejection. We struggle to find our grounding, that neutral space, where we aren't excessively reliant on others' approval or validation for our sense of worth, and where we are able to establish healthy boundaries and confidently communicate our needs and limits.

Allow me to unpack the concept of "neutral" from a practical application. When a car is in the neutral gear, the engine's automatic transmission system is separated from the wheels. Unlike the drive and reverse gears, neutral is not intended for use when driving. Neither is it like park, which is designed to keep the vehicle stationary. The neutral function in a car may not be as clear to some of us but it has some amazing functions, evident when you are getting your car towed, pushing it physically out of a

snow pile, or letting it be guided through an automatic car wash. Interestingly, the neutral gear also helps the automatic transmission gears transition more smoothly from being in the drive position to the opposite reverse position. In the dire situation where your car's brakes aren't working, putting your car in neutral can help it gradually slow down (unless you're on a hill).

Staying grounded and centred in the face of life's challenges is like being in "neutral" because this position allows us to transition more intentionally through our challenges. Neutral is our ability to slow down, stay calm and confident, trust in our abilities and intuition, and practice responsible self-governance even in the face of great difficulties. That neutral place, that space where we are grounded, is where we have a clear understanding of our values, beliefs, and goals. It's where we can handle criticism without feeling personally attacked, and where the fear of rejection or failure is reduced because we don't hang outcomes on our sense of personal worth. Neutral is that place where we can engage in healthier relationships because we aren't seeking constant reassurance or approval from others. It's the place where we treat ourselves with kindness, especially in the times of failure or struggle. Neutral transitions us from worriers to a **warriors**. The Creator is our ultimate neutral place, and a healthy spiritual self keeps us in neutral and in oneness with the Divine. Ultimately, our destiny is to live, resemble, reflect, and reveal His character in all things—His image-bearers!

Without security of self, I've come to realize that I'm like a ship without a sail, tossed and turned wherever the wind wills, no

longer able to handle the challenges life throws, much less my overall well-being.

I was just a boy when I first heard this heartwarming story of trust. One evening, a ship got caught in a terrible storm. As the ship began to be thrown from side to side with massive waves beating against it, and as the wind began to howl fiercely, those on board became terribly worried and frightened. In the midst of the confusion, however, a passenger noticed a little boy quietly playing by himself as if the sea was calm. "My dear child," he said, "you don't seem to be afraid. Don't you know that there is an awful storm raging, and we are all in danger of drowning? How can you be playing, and singing, when everyone else is weeping and crying in despair?" The young boy looked up with cheerful simplicity. "Why should I be afraid?" he answered. "Don't you know that my father is the captain? He knows how to guide it in a storm as well as in calm weather. So there's no reason to be afraid, and that's why I'm not." Neutral! I've discovered that the place of neutrality isn't actually a place at all. It is a person.

He doesn't always say "peace be still" to the storms surrounding us. But He guarantees peace and deliverance from the storms within us.

Genesis 1 and 2 tells of how the Creator spoke into existence time, space, and matter. Then, He stepped into it and lovingly created a universe for His image-bearers to inhabit with Him. He spoke to the sea and called forth fish and other sea dwelling cre-

ators. He spoke to the earth and the trees and animals came forth, and when it came time to create man, He spoke to Himself (“Let us make human beings in our image”). Then, He formed human beings with His hands and breathed into them His breath of life. Hold on! Don’t miss it—the often overlooked gem. The Creator spoke to the sea and the earth, and called their elements into being. In creating human beings, however, He took a focused, physical approach. Combining His hands (to form) and breath (to usher in life), in spectacular fashion, He completed His creative work, with mankind standing as the pinnacle of it.

Take the fish out of the sea and it dies. Take the tree out of the soil and the land creatures out of their terrain, and they also die. Separate human beings from God and what happens? We die! He is our habitat, our natural environment. We were created to exist in the very presence and center of His love: Eden. It’s only in Him life can exist. God’s love is like a circle, the centre of which is everywhere and the circumference of which is nowhere. We were created to occupy God’s centre of focus and, because God is omniscient and omnipresent, His love is centred on you while it’s also centred on me. In this moment and every moment, you exist in His love as if you were the only person in the universe. And because God is love (1 John 4:8), He’s conscious, sensitive, and responsive to you. He knows and He cares.

Never let the reality of God’s love for all diminish the personal reality of God’s love for you. He is our natural environment.

For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Acts 17:28 NLT

I once had a recurring issue with my vehicle; despite my mechanic's best efforts, my engine light kept coming on. He was confident that he had addressed the issue, and the engine light would indeed come off every time he worked on it. Still, for some reason, after a while, it would come back on again. Not wanting to speculate further or have me spend more money addressing what we thought was the problem, he advised me to take the car to the Toyota dealership. The Toyota technician took one diagnostic dive into the car's computer and immediately resolved the issue. What's the point? Simply this: a proper understanding of self begins with a proper understanding of who you are. The only way that's achieved is by looking at yourself, not through the eyes, understanding, or perspectives of someone who might (or claims to) be familiar with you, but through the eyes of the One in whose image you were created: **the Manufacturer**. Embracing self by acknowledging your strengths and imperfections, cultivating a compassionate relationship with who you are, and developing a habit of growing and persisting in growing can only be achieved through unbiased lens: the One who first put it all into motion, the One who sees you for you are, and who He created you to be. You see, the Manufacturer, the Creator, exists outside of all that He's created, outside of space, time and matter. He is not governed or controlled by it, quite the opposite. Rather, all He has created is dependent on and sustained by Him. Without Him, it cannot exist nor does it have value.

Ever since we became separated from the Divine, that separation has led to the perceptual, relational, and moral decay for all of us on this world. But you already knew this. No doubt, you can see that there is something terribly wrong with the world around us, and indeed there is. Psalms 14:1 says, *"A fools says in his heart there is no God."* God is not name-calling here but simply saying, "How can you deny me in the very places I have revealed myself: in your heart and spirit?" There is a God-sized hole, a longing in everyone, a thirst only He can quench. That which your soul longs for, the way your heart wishes it could be loved, is real and exists in Him. He is our habitat, our natural environment. Your existence is proof that you are meant to be here. You were thought of long before you were conceived in your mother's womb, and your arrival was anticipated. Too often, we rely on outside sources like friends, family, society, media, etc., to determine or measure our value, but you were fearfully and wonderfully made. You were conceived in the mind of God with great reverence, heart-felt interest, and respect. You are unique, set apart, and priceless. This world was made with you in mind and for your very existence. Not the other way around. The breathtaking sights, sounds, and amazing wildlife in the air, land, and sea were all made with you in mind. The earth is just the right distance from the sun for warmth. If it were positioned any closer, we would turn into liquid lava. The moon's stabilizing effect on our orbit makes our climate steady and it regulates our tides. Our planets magnetic field protects us from harmful solar radiation, and we are kept warm by an insulating atmosphere with the right chemical ingredients for life, including water and carbon.

“We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito.” - C. S. Lewis

Sadly, the chasm between us and Him has thrown not just us but nature itself into chaos. Still, like a skilled physician, the Master Designer is surgically restoring and mending stolen and broken things, starting with our hearts, our spiritual selves. Occupying a realm beyond time, space, and matter, His vantage point is like no other. It far surpasses what we can perceive or comprehend. He masterfully uses life's challenges to transform our thinking and beliefs by the renewing of our minds. If our values aren't defined by an objective truth that exists outside of the world, they would be tossed and thrown around by every voice that exists in this world that seeks to define them. The most priceless things on this earth are not money, gold, diamonds, or pearls. The most precious and priceless things on this planet aren't things at all; they're people. If only we would live to passionately preserve and protect the lives of others, starting with our own.

Achieving success in our relationships, a rewarding career, or true peace of mind and contentment, is only realised by living a life of truthfulness. The source of true success is not in earthly realities, but in the spiritual ones. In other words, it's soul-deep and value-based. Your core values and beliefs are woven into the fabric of your soul, personality, and character, and your values are a reflection of the health of your soul. Genuine self-acceptance and self-love are experienced when we embrace Him, for He is truth. As our objective truth, He is the vine and we

are the branches, and when the chaos of this life seeks to uproot us with distractions (some painful), we must stay the course, and stay planted and at rest in our Natural Environment, spiritually replanted. The winds and storms may blow, trying to shake us loose, but nothing firmly planted in Him can be uprooted.

Let me conclude with the following thought. For centuries, human beings have used tools such as knives, spears, bows, and arrows to help them accomplish tasks that human bodies could not. Successfully running the gauntlet of life, however, requires tools far superior than knives, spears, bows, or arrows. Our toolbox requires devices or instruments that support the complexities of our physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual journeys, and we must plan ahead for each facet of our journey. Importantly, we must pack our spiritual toolbox with the following.

5 In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. 8 The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8 NLT

Faith (Belief)

Implanted in all of us is the power to believe and to choose what to believe. We were created for faith, to rest in neutral and trust in His plan, despite not seeing or fully understanding it.

Moral Excellence (Virtue)

As His image bearers, we were created with the ability to exercise truthfulness, compassion, empathy, fairness, self-control, wise judgment, and courage. We were created for virtue.

Knowledge (Wisdom)

We must be passionate about growing, persisting in growing, and applying the information, skills, and facts acquired over time. We were created with the capacity for knowledge and wisdom.

Self-Control

We do not have to give into destructive habits; instead, we have the power and ability to regulate and manage our emotions, behaviours, impulses, and desires. We were created for strength and self-control.

Patient Endurance (Perseverance)

Boy, am I learning that challenges and setbacks are a natural part of any worthwhile pursuit. Patient endurance is our ability to persist with resilience, determination, and grit, regardless of how long it takes. We were created for patient endurance, perseverance, and purpose.

Godliness (Sacredness)

Your life and mine are sacred and that should give us pause as to how we see and treat each other. Truth, friendship, marriage, nature, the freedom of choice, the Divine One, just to name a few, are all sacred. Each of these should stir within us profound reverence, and respect. A spirit of sacredness for beautiful and noble things creates meaning, gratitude, respect, healing, transformation, and connectedness.

Brotherly Affection (kindness)

This is at the heart of genuine self-acceptance, self-love, and our ability to be friendly, generous, compassionate, and considerate to ourselves and others. Whether these attributes are expressed in small or large amounts, they have the power to transform relationships, communities, and even societies. We were created for kindness.

Love

Love is an unbroken pattern of other-centredness. We often think of love as an emotion. Although love is most definitely experienced emotionally, it is not an emotion, because it is not dependent on feelings and emotions. Rather, love functions despite feelings and emotions, because love is the moral rule that governs actions, thoughts, and behaviour. One thing is certain: no matter how it is expressed, love enriches life by providing meaning, purpose, and deep emotional connection. (But more on this in my bonus chapter.) We were created for love.

"As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in be-

ing able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves.” - Mahatma Gandhi

This world is a treasure chest of priceless gems, and you are one of them.



**Healing Means
Committing To A Higher
Level Of Functioning**

The moment I realised that it was up to me to take responsibility for my healing journey, I made a commitment to myself to come out of this with a higher level of functioning, and I discovered something interesting. You see, it wasn't until I went through this deeply painful event that I began to see that there was a stark connection between emotional healing and physical healing. I began to discover that both healing emotionally and healing physically involved stages of recovery, required time, attentive care, and self-compassion to ensure the best outcome. Now this might not be news to you, but it was to me. When we are physically injured, we don't waste any time seeking medical treatment, and our bodies also spring into action to repair the damaged area. But what about emotional pain? To our detriment, some of us have been taught to ignore our heartbreaks. If we sprain an ankle, we get compassion and consideration, but if our hearts are broken, sometimes we get neither. I must emphasize that we cannot afford to disregard our emotional pain. When our hearts are broken, when our minds are flooded with painful memories, we must take our feelings seriously and get the help that's needed.

To this day, I remember my first breakup and the very silly way it happened. I was in elementary school (I know, right?) and summer vacation was finally here. For this little Caribbean boy, summer vacation meant endless kite-flying, cricket in the savannah, long days on the beach, and cooling down in the arms of a mango tree while sucking on a juicy, ripe mango. It also meant not seeing my schoolmates because I lived far away from the private school I attended. That also meant I only saw and spoke to my

“crush” if and when our respective families attended the same weekend events, or if I mustered up the courage to call her on the phone. Too young to understand the mysteries of love and the secret to balancing summer play and young love, to my shame, I called her maybe once for the entire summer. Needless to say, this young romance didn't end well and her cousin didn't mix words when she called me to tell me how much I hurt her baby cousin and broke her little heart. I didn't help much when I tried defending myself by exclaiming that I thought because school was out that meant we broke up. Boys! (SMH.) Honestly though, I didn't sleep well that night because the thought that I had hurt her feelings made me sick. I came down with a fever and tummy ache and, as young as I was, this experience taught me how intimately woven our emotional health and physical health are.

To this day, and for as long as I can remember, because of this and similar experiences, I've become a very self-reflective person, intentionally examining my thoughts, emotions, and experiences in an attempt to always understand and be aware of how I'm feeling and doing. Over the years, I had become very good at this. However, I eventually had to confess that some heartaches require more care and support than we can actually give ourselves. In our pursuit of and commitment to healing and coming out of our hurts with a higher level of functioning, education is key; support is critical, and embracing positivity is a must! Emotions are useful. We cannot control, stop, or get rid of them. And why should we? They are our warning signals, and they can blow up when we ignore them, push them away, or use

unhealthy coping strategies that set them aside only temporarily. There is nothing wrong with seeking help; so do not be afraid to ask for help from a trusted friend or mentor. Sometimes, a therapist may be needed when the emotional pain is just too much for you to grasp, and there is nothing wrong with that. In this season, it's helpful to surround yourself with loved ones who listen, offer empathy, and provide companionship and support.

I need to pause here to thank someone dear to me: my therapist Dr. Curtis Fox. My commitment to emerging from my season of pain with a Higher Level of Functioning was largely due to the therapy and personal support of Dr. Fox. Choosing to seek therapy didn't come easy for me. I was resistant at first and didn't think I needed it, but because of the encouragement and support of some close friends, thankfully, I did.

Seeking therapy when needed is a sign of strength, not weakness. It demonstrates a commitment to your well-being and a willingness to invest in personal growth. Therapy provides emotional support and understanding, mental health maintenance, the development of coping strategies, and improvement of relationships. It encourages introspection and greater self-awareness, prevents further deterioration, provides tools for personal growth, is essential for healing, and is integral to one's overall well-being. By seeking therapy, you also contribute to the de-stigmatization of mental health care, and the normalization of help-seeking.

"It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from.

The ability to triumph begins with you.” - Oprah Winfrey

Congenital Analgesia is a rare condition in which a person cannot feel physical pain. People have died due to injuries and illnesses gone unnoticed because they could not feel pain. Our ability to experience pain is vital for survival. Pain is that uncomfortable sensation that signals that something isn't right. It's the body's way of making us uncomfortable so that we know we need to do something or stop doing something. But what about emotional pain? I was in such intense, emotional pain it started to have a debilitating, physical effect on me. I would get up each morning feeling like I was living in a fog, and there were times I literally couldn't see. Some in the medical and scientific world still question the direct link between emotional pain and disease. Essentially, they cannot conclusively prove that one is linked to the other. What is becoming clear, however, is that science can measure the body's immune response to specific stressors. Did you know that depression, along with lingering negative emotional states, makes one especially vulnerable to diseases such as asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, and cancer that affect the immune system?

Our minds and our hearts have a much better chance of healing when our bodies have restorative sleep, proper nutrition, and exercise. That's because a healthy diet, physical fitness, and positive emotional states can stimulate and strengthen the body's immune system. When you're depleted, you don't have the energy to enjoy even the best things in life much less the energy to endure the burdens of life. You can't function on zero. Remem-

ber, we function best when our PIES are in order: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual Life. I'm not talking about self-improvement, or taking a break, or going on a vacation, although all these can be helpful. I'm talking about creating a lifestyle you don't need to take a break from, immersing yourself in regularly nurturing experiences that promote and maintain your physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life. Self-care is a highly individual practice, so you'd need to be honest about the how, and when. For example, you may decide to join the gym, have personal quiet time first thing in the morning, or commit to taking a walk around the block during your office lunch breaks.

Today, we hear a lot about exercise and nutrition, and it's true they are both essential to our well-being. Action is a law of life, and we should let nutrition be our medicine. I've seen how being more active and fueling my body with the right things have worked wonders in my healing journey. Water, sunlight, air, or just being out in nature regularly did wonders for me physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. But one area that I ignored for far too long (and that was and continues to be immensely meaningful for me in this season) is restorative rest. Have you ever noticed that some of the sweetest rest follows labour and the most productive labour follows rest?

On the other hand, lack of restorative rest, also known as sleep deprivation, can cause major health-related conditions. According to MedicalNewsToday.com, sleep deprivation is a serious issue that can affect various aspects of your health including:

The immune system: Sleep deprivation renders you more prone to infections and respiratory diseases, which may take longer to resolve.

Weight: Unhealthy changes to sleep can cause increased fat storage, changes in body weight, and a higher risk of type 2 diabetes.

The cardiovascular system: Sleep helps the heart vessels heal and rebuild, and affects processes that maintain blood pressure, sugar levels, and inflammation control. Too little sleep may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Hormone levels: Insufficient sleep can affect hormone production, including the production of growth hormones and testosterone. Insufficient sleep also causes the body to release additional stress hormones.

The brain: Sleep deprivation affects the prefrontal cortex, which handles reasoning, and the amygdala, which deals with emotion. A lack of sleep may also make it harder for a person to form new memories, which can affect learning.

Fertility: Poor sleep may affect the production of hormones that boost fertility.

(Source: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/307334#effects-on-the-body>.)

Restoration requires adequate rest because sleep allows the body to renew itself.

Proper sleep:

Repairs your body

Restores your energy

Improves your focus

Improves your mood, and

Increases your creativity.

We were designed for pleasure; we were not designed to run on a high level without a period of rest and relaxation. We need to pause, cease, and make time for renewal and relaxation that rejuvenates the body and mind. An active mind gets tired just like an active body does. In addition to rest through sleep, we need time to quiet our thoughts, daydream, and enjoy time away from our work or school space.

Make time to:

Soak in a warm bath.

Listen to some soothing music.

Read a good book.

Get into the outdoors.

Have some laughs with great company.

Take time to self-care and create a lifestyle you don't need to take a break from.

Another key to coming out of this season with a higher level of functioning, which was huge for me, was learning to trust myself all over again. During the height of the COVID lockdowns in Ontario Canada, I remember getting up early one morning to head

into my basement office. It had become my hiding place. That morning, I was working on coursework for my Healthy Lifestyle Coaching certification. I was struggling to complete the program. As a matter of fact, that morning was particularly difficult, and I had to ask for an extension. As I sat behind my desk, I felt an overwhelming rush of emotion come over me and, without warning or any power to control the swell, I burst into tears. My weeping didn't stop. There was so much that needed to come out and, undisturbed, I cried for the entire day. Despite having the courage, strength, and wisdom to walk away, I had suffered in silence for so long that I was only now beginning to break through my silence so I could cry over myself. Without asking for my permission, my body finally decided it was time for me to feel everything. Without knowing it, I had become my biggest blind spot. Martyred into silence, I was sacrificing something of great value: myself. Unknowingly, I had lived in dysfunction for so long. I carried the lies I had been told about myself like carry-on baggage tucked in the top compartment of my brain, out of sight for part of the journey, but present, nonetheless. I had arrived at my security "checkpoint," and it was time to go through the baggage—knowing that concealed in them were things that could not go any further. They did not belong.

When we think about trust, we often think about it in the third person: those who we can rely on or those who have betrayed us. But what about that one person that you should always be able to count on? Yourself! Being able to trust others and being able to discern who is worthy of trust often starts with having a healthy relationship with yourself. Self-trust means that you can

take care of your needs and wellbeing. Self-trust means you can be kind to yourself, which increases your self-confidence, helps you make good decisions, and leads to deeper connections with others. The good news is that even if you are struggling with self-trust in this very moment, with some effort, you can build up that trust over time. We can be extremely hard on ourselves when we experience disappointment, make mistakes, fail, and when others fail us. At times, we lose trust in ourselves. However, building (and re-building) trust in yourself can help boost your decision-making skills and self-confidence.

“Think for yourself. Trust your own intuition. Another’s mind isn’t walking your journey, you are.” - Scottie Waves.

As you continue to navigate your journey, consider the following actionable steps toward igniting your self-trust, self-confidence, and self-care.

01 Spend time with yourself. - We can get very distracted “doing life,” building and supporting the dreams and goals of others, and never really look inward to discover what our own dreams and goals are. Get to know yourself, who you truly are, not who you want to be. When you know who you are, you have a good understanding of your gifts and your natural talents. When you learn to trust, rely on, and commit to your natural gifts and talents, the outcomes are incredible. You discover that when you engage in an activity in which you are naturally talented, you feel energized, excited, and optimistic. Get to know yourself!

02 Keep promises to yourself. - Make commitments to yourself and keep them. Committing to the promises you make to yourself builds trust. You might make a commitment to get up at a certain time each day. You might make a commitment to change your diet, join a gym, take a walk, or create or sustain a boundary. Be a good friend to yourself by keeping the promises you make to yourself!

03 Speak kindly to and about yourself. - We all make mistakes and when we do, we can have a difficult time quieting the negative, abusive voices in our heads. We echo the unkind words of a teacher, co-worker, or family member who was less than supportive and encouraging when we made a mistake. Don't! The next time you are tempted to put yourself down with an unkind word or thought, catch yourself and speak kind words to yourself. Be compassionate and understanding to yourself when you make a mistake. Doing so will also make you more understanding towards others when they do the same.

04 Avoid people who undermine your self-trust. - No... I don't want to hear it! You might be tempted to make an excuse right now, but please listen to me; don't. People who work to undermine your self-trust do not have your best interest at heart. They do not want you to succeed, but it is your responsibility to protect and take care of yourself. Avoid people who undermine your self-trust.

Questions for Reflection

What is the first thing you are going to do today to develop self-trust?

What gift and talents do you possess that you are most proud of?

What promise are you going to make to yourself today?

In Case You Missed It. This book is titled *“7 Things I Learned After Separation and Divorce”* and, in each chapter, I have attempted to clearly articulate each of these points of learning. However, just in case you missed them, here are the seven things I learned.

01. Sometimes You'll Feel Like Giving Up

02. Your Friend Circle Will Get Smaller

03. Forgiveness Is Not Reconciliation

04. Grief Is a Journey, Not a Destination

05. Destructive Patterns Are a No-No

06. Embrace Genuine Self-Acceptance and Self-love

07. Healing Means Committing to a Higher Level of Functioning

Make a promise to yourself to come out of your labyrinth of trauma.

ma with a higher level of functioning. Remember, it's not about how big a step you take. It's about taking the small ones, one step at a time.



Happily Ever After Now - The Secret To Happiness

Bonus Chapter

As we come to the final chapter of this eBooklet, I have a question or two. Do you want to be happy? Is being happy important to you? Strange questions. I know. I've never met anyone who didn't want to be happy, but I have met a lot of unhappy people. I believe that one thing we all have in common is our desire to be happy. But what if I told you happiness is not what we should be pursuing at all? I know it might sound a bit crazy, but if we were to take a moment to explore what happiness is, I'm sure you'd be better able to follow my thinking here. Happiness is the state we find ourselves in, in response to something that happens. For example, we buy a new shoe, we're happy. We buy a new car, we're happy. We just got back from that perfect vacation; you guessed it, we're happy. But what happens when those things lose their influence or become a distant memory?

“Ever notice that when your cup of happiness is full, somebody always jogs your elbow?” - Source Unknown.

I've met so many people driven by the pursuit, but rewarded with only fleeting moments of happiness. What if that thing we're looking for is joy? Trust me; I'm not playing with words here. What I'm saying is that happiness comes from outside realities, but joy comes from within. Now, just to be clear, in no way am I saying happiness is a bad thing. Happiness is a critical part of a healthy life, and it has its place. What I am trying to say is that inner joy or peace of mind makes happy moments more meaningful. You know what? It always seems easier to describe where joy cannot be found. For example, it's not in pleasure, money, position, glory, or the dream relationship you're waiting

for. Those moments in time can be described as happy ones, because that's what they are: moments in time. They don't define us, and they don't bring lasting contentment or pleasure. Where then is real joy found?

For me, I'd have to say my joy is found in my faith and how my faith defines my outlook—my view of life! In chapter 6, I mentioned that we were created to occupy God's centre of focus and, because God is omniscient and omnipresent, His love is centred on you while it's also centred on me. In this moment and every moment, you exist in His love as if you were the only person in the universe. Now, that is a joyous thought! Isn't it? Joy is one of the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and a by-product of one's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual health being rooted in the Divine. Joy is an attitude of the heart, infused with God's comfort and wrapped in His peace. Joy makes happy moments more meaningful, and joy is what we experience through personal sacrifice, and by making time for our spiritual as well as our physical well-being. Ultimately, the secret to real joy is a quality of life one experiences as a result of having one's heart grafted into God's.

God is our habitat. We were meant to be filled with His Spirit, and vacancy is not an option.

Ever heard someone say, "I can't help it, I was born this way!"? The truth is the person you are is a composite of your choices—good or bad. Our brains are designed for moral growth. However, it can be steeped in and trained into immoral decay. Our

habits are shaped and formed by the contexts in which our brains are trained. Consider that we were created for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Hardwired into all of us are complex biological systems designed to help us experience and pursue pleasure. Dopamine, one of the body's intricate hormones and neurotransmitters, is part of our complex biological system that plays a crucial role in reinforcing behaviour that leads to pleasure and satisfaction. Endorphins, the "feel-good" chemical, is released during activities like exercise, laughter, or social bonding. Oxytocin, the "love hormone," is released during social bonding activities like hugging, touching, or spending time with loved ones, promoting feelings of trust and connection, which are essential for forming relationships and community ties. Neuroplasticity is the brain's magnificent ability to change and adapt. It allows us to rewire our thinking patterns and behaviours, which means by the renewing of our minds we can cultivate habits that enhance our emotional well-being.

The systems I mentioned above represent the genius of a Creator who designed humankind with the innate ability and desire to experience the "feel good" of connections, relationships, and community. He, the Creator, is the vine, and we are the branches (John 15:1-8), inextricably bonded to Him. In other words, abiding in and being connected to Him means we receive nourishment, and we bear fruit, His fruits: the fruits of the Spirit. Remember, He is our habitat, and the richness of life comes through being a branch connected to the Vine.

We experience our happily ever after now as the Holy Spirit joins with our own spirit to produce:

Love (Agape) - Selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love

Joy - A deep and abiding happiness or gladness, regardless of circumstances

Peace - Inner tranquility and calmness, even in difficult situations

Patience (Longsuffering) - The ability to endure hardship and suffering with perseverance

Kindness - Being compassionate, considerate, and gentle to others

Goodness - Moral integrity; doing what is right

Faithfulness - Being reliable, loyal, and trustworthy

Gentleness - Meekness and humility; handling things with care

Self-control - Mastery over one's emotions, desires, and behaviors

As I write this eBook, I'm facing another round of life's challenges. I keep being reminded that I won't grow by becoming stronger and stronger, because I will never be strong enough to handle what this broken world dishes out. Instead, every day, I

grow by realising anew how fragile I am, and how dependent I am upon our Creator. I grow by realising how much I need to be planted, rooted, and established in Him and by Him as my habitat.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Therefore, when life is “lifing” and people are “peopling,” even when we are the ones caught peopling, we don’t need to wait for God to “cool off,” or try to make things right on our own before coming to Him. No! We run to Him immediately, confessing our weaknesses, our heartaches, and our need of Him. If needs be, we allow Him to tend to our roots because sometimes things uproot us a bit, and we become bruised. Occasionally, we ourselves engage in uprooting habits. I’m also learning that I don’t physically grow by focusing on growth; I grow by focusing on what I eat. In the same way I don’t experience spiritual growth by checking myself for fruit; I grow by nourishing myself with the Bread of Life.

“Your life is a symphony of communion with God, punctuated by distractions. When the distraction is over, you must go back to the communion.” - Wintley Phipps

You may be wondering, “But what if I never had this planting or nourishing experience? How do I get to know Him?” Honestly, just get to know Him as you would anyone else. The R.A.M. model (The Relationship Attachment Model) was created by Dr. John Van Epp in his research regarding relationship progression and how successful relationships are built. He discovered that all

successful relationships, brother, sister, father, friend, husband, wife, etc., were built on these experiential blocks and experienced in this order: **Know -> Trust -> Rely -> Commit -> Touch/Intimacy**. How many relationships do we have that have not been built on this experiential progression? Often times, we give family members or other people influence and authority in our lives based strictly on their title as uncle, aunt, brother, or sister, instead of having it built on those relational blocks first to determine the health of the person and relationship. For example, it's difficult to trust or rely on people **before** you get to know them. In fact, if you trust them before you really know them, you can end up in unbalanced or unhealthy relationships. Therefore, each experiential block should follow the other from left to right. In my next eBooklet, my primary focus will be these experiential blocks. Be sure to join my email list or WhatsApp channel to be kept in the know for when that will be released. Now let's take a closer look at Dr. John Van Epp's experiential model.

The first experiential block is **"Know."** This refers to bonding with someone and getting to know that person. Knowing may have to occur all over again after relational unfaithfulness or brokenness has occurred, or when people change.

The second experiential block is **"Trust."** As you get to know someone, you put together your pieces of knowledge to make a dynamic picture of that person, and the more you know, the better you can begin to trust. The "knowing" comes first and, from that, trust develops.

The third experiential block is **"Rely."** This refers to the action that follows from trust. Reliance grows from the ways you meet another person's needs as well as how that person meets your needs.

The fourth experiential block is **"Commit."** This refers to the definition of ownership or belonging in a relationship. The extent to which you feel like you belong to someone, and that someone belongs to you, is a measure of the degree of commitment in your relationship.

And the fifth experiential block is **"Touch/Intimacy."** This block reflects the kind of relationship and the depth of the relationship.

This model underscores that the positions of influence we give people in our lives, or the intimate relational investments we make, must be clearly defined by the health of the experiential block or blocks of that relationship. These blocks are our indicators, and we must never ignore the signposts. The experience of knowing and being known is not a destination. It is a journey that deepens over time and through different experiences and interactions. The more shared the history and intimacy, the deeper the knowing becomes. The same is true for our relationship with the Divine, our Creator, which is the most important virtual relationship we will ever have, and the most important estranged relationship we would ever restore. To restore that estranged relationship, we need to make time to talk with Him, listen to Him, and do life with Him. Also key to that restoration is

faith. Hebrews 11:6 NLT says, *“and it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.”* Even if your faith is the size of a mustard seed, you are well on your way to being in (or restoring) the God-and-you relationship, and the growth potential of that faith is unimaginable. Luke 17:5-6 NLT says, *“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Show us how to increase our faith.’ The Lord answered, ‘If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May you be uprooted and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you!’”*

Without faith, confidence, trust, and a willingness to come to Him confessing that we don't know everything, we can't have a personal encounter with this deeply personal God. You see, God is not a concept. God is not an idea. God is not a philosophy. God is a person. If you want to get to know God, you have to “want to come to him” and “sincerely seek Him.” You have got to get close to Him. You would have to surrender your skepticism (at least provisionally), and come up to Him and say, “Hi, I'm (your name here). It's not that He does not know you or your name. It's that by going to Him you are offering Him the permission to come into relationship with you. You are surrendering your name, your hopes, and dreams (whether fulfilled, unfulfilled, stolen, or forgotten), fears, inadequacies—your everything—and extending to Him an invitation into your intimate, vulnerable, space. You are taking a step of faith to trust Him.

Faith is not measured by how much we have, but by how genu-

ine it is. The best definition of faith is trust; it is dependence upon Him.

“Spirituality is not a piece of information for the mind. It is a way of life, which includes all that we are, all that we do, all our hopes and aspirations, all the moments of our lives.” - Mario Veloso

The secret to happiness isn't a secret after all; it's in knowing Him, being known by Him, and being kept securely rooted in His love. God is highly communicative, and He promises to guide us in our faith journey. Here are three ways through which He often reveals Himself and way to us.

01. Through His word - YouVersion has an excellent Bible app with amazing resources to help you on your spiritual journey. Check out this link. <https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>

02. Through providence or circumstances - He would often allow circumstances into our lives to reveal Himself to us. I believe, for example, that right now you are not reading this by chance.

03. Direct communication to the heart - Sometimes, He will impress upon your heart His desire for you, and you never have to be afraid to simply open your mouth and ask Him.

Ultimately, spiritual Health is a lifestyle of spiritual growth that will supply the missing pieces and fill the empty spaces. Every breath you take is a miracle, and every morning is a new start.

How important is spirituality to your life right now?

How often do you make time for spiritual growth?

What are you waiting for?

Remember, I believe in you, and you have my full support.

WHAT'S NEXT?

I'm blessed to have had this experience with you, and I hope something I've shared has been an encouragement to you.

As I said in the beginning of our journey together, some things take time and sometimes, more than anything else, the little step you choose to take today will do more to get you to the goal you are working towards tomorrow. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all driven by something. Understanding what drives or motivates us is critically important, for it can be the difference between success and failure.

Consider what is motivating or driving you right now?

I thought I was driven by fear for such a long time, until I understood that fear is an unpleasant emotional response to a clear and present danger. Anxiety, on the other hand, is an unpleasant emotional response to a perceived danger. Once I understood this, I realized that I was suffering from anxiety, not fear. I was being held hostage by a perceived danger, giving into dread and uneasiness over outcomes that hadn't even yet occurred. Anxiety was in the driver's seat until I introduced a strategy to remove it.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 NLT

If your desire is to be better, to reach your potential, to have a

sense of fulfilment and completeness, to give and receive joy, and reinforce your ability and opportunity to love and be loved, you are rightly driven and focused.

When you are rightly focused, you are rightly motivated!

I invite you to live the life you were created to live and overcome the obstacles that prohibit you.

Who are you going to invite to share in this experience with you?

What are you looking forward to discovering the most?

What is driving or motivating you right now?

What will your next step be?

Until the next time, hopefully soon, keep taking those micro steps and, remember, you're not alone.



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