

Sample Full Chapter by Chapter Edit for \$1999 (up to 75,000 words)

Walking the Bridge: My Journey

by

Helen Julia

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References

~~Merriam Webster Dictionary~~

Comment [Rachel Th1]: Since you reference the dictionary in the text, there's no need to include this here :).

FOREWORD

Dedication

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

—Psalm 147:3

Comment [Rachel Th2]: You are welcome to put this back at the bottom if you like, but I think it works better here, as an epigraph (opening quote) for your whole dedication page :). See what you think!

This book is dedicated to two types of people: firstly, all of you who are honest enough to acknowledge you are on a journey of restoration, a journey with our loving Savior {CHECK this } towards the wholeness He desires for each of us. I stand with all of Hheaven to cheer you for your courage, and Don't give up, the journey is worth it, and God's best is ahead for you! Secondly, to all you amazing people who each day encourage, challenge, and believe in peopleothers as they walk their journey of restoration. You may be a friend, a family member, a neighbour, a work colleague, a pastor, or a counsellor. Who-ever you are, I want to thank you for your heart to stand along-side others, sometimes a seemingly thankless task and one that often requires waiting for a very long time before change occurs. It may be hard, it may take time, but it is truly worth it.

Comment [Rachel Th3]: Since the book is being published in the US, the spelling is being Americanized.

~~He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)~~

Eternally Grateful

My heart-felt thank-you goes to those who prayed and shared the living truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ with me while I grew from a little girl through my teenage years into young adulthood. Either directly with me or through the way you lived your life as a Christian beyond mere words, ~~it you~~ had an impact on leading me to my wonderful Lord and Savior. Each of you with a different part to play, you will never know how much the seed of a kind word, a smile, a prayer ~~even~~ unknown to me ~~or a~~ and that brief expression of God's love ~~you gave me at the brief moment of my life that you were involved~~ was going to be ~~a seed God would be able to~~ watered and grown by God as others too came along to influence the journey. All the seemingly little things accumulated to help with the growth of a broken little girl into a Godly woman of faith. ~~I am eternally grateful~~ I was introduced to my Lord and Savior by the accumulated influence of ~~an accumulation of~~ many lives over the many years it took for me to surrender fully to Him. I am eternally grateful.

I am so grateful to the three churches ~~that~~ I have had the privilege ~~to of~~ calling "home" my ~~home church~~ since I ~~have~~ found Jesus, ~~as my Lord and Savior,~~ each over a different stage of my journey, and in particular LIFE, my current home church of the last ~~15~~ fifteen years. (~~LIFE which~~ ~~Y~~ You can check out them out at www.lifenz.org.nz). Being part of a healthy church environment has had a huge impact on my continual journey to wholeness. I am biased, but I love my home church! ~~It~~ is my place of belonging, my place of contributing, and my place of continually being challenged by Godly men and women. ~~I~~ Thank you, LIFE!

To those whom I call family and friends, thank you from the bottom of my heart for showing me what love is, what kindness is, and what family can be. My eyes brim over with

Comment [Rachel Th4]: For spelling, hyphenation, and style decisions, I use the Chicago Manual of Style and Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, which are the industry standards for books. Feel free to ask if you don't understand any changes and want to know more about them!

Comment [Rachel Th5]: Throughout, I've made occasional changes like this to tighten or smooth out wording or to clarify meaning. These changes are totally up to you to accept, reject, or rewrite :).

Comment [Rachel Th6]: You've used this phrase several times already on this page, so I would just shorten it up here. See what you think!

Comment [Rachel Th7]: Sounds like it's exactly what a church home should be :).

tears as I think of how grateful I am to do life with you. To have those who call me part of their extended family means more than you will ever know. My heart is full to overflowing with the joy that I do belong and ~~that~~ I am deeply loved and cared for. ~~Thank~~ Thank you.

And to my amazing Lord and Savior, my heavenly Father who loves me unconditionally, who has shown me the greatest kindness, goodness, gentleness, and love that causes my soul to sing even in the night seasons. You have won my heart and have given me far more than words can express. ~~My~~ My best smile is always for you!

Love,

Helen

Introduction

This book is far more than simply a personal testimony focusing on one person's life. It is the story~~but about of~~ an incredibly loving God who desires to draw us close to Himself so that each of us can be set free and live a life that is fully restored. Thousands of people around the world can testify of God's healing power to bring restoration and freedom ~~to their life~~. No one is excluded from this amazing opportunity to live life restored; ~~as~~ the invitation is extended to us all by a loving and kind God. He desires the best for each of us and longs for us to experience a life that is truly free. I have written this book for every person ~~who finds them self~~ working through heart issues and desiring inges to take up the invitation to be not just ~~be an over-comer~~, but a ~~restored~~er over-comer. This book is an expression of our loving Lord and Savior's heart to bring everyone to a place of being able to declare, "†The truth has set me free!"; He wants us to face the truth of our livesfe, the good, bad, and ugly, so that we can ~~then~~ be healed and restored with His †truth.

The amazing thing about God is that He doesn't just offer us salvation and then relegate us to living~~we have to live~~ out our time on earth continuing to carry our brokenness. Salvation was always designed to be followed by restoration so that our broken lives could be healed and we could live free. As much as some people may struggle to hear this; ~~the~~ the only thing standing in ~~our~~the way of our restoration is really only ever us. We are responsible for what we do with our brokenness and with our lives~~and life~~. We can-not continue to hold other people responsible for how we chose ~~now~~ to live and deal with the pain ~~that has happened in~~of the past or the pain that will happen in the future. God invites us on a journey, a journey of restoration with Him right beside us; His longing is for each of us to say yes. My prayer is that this book will inspire and

Comment [Rachel Th8]: As a friend says, "I don't just want to survive, I want to really live!" :)

Comment [Rachel Th9]: Amen!

encourage you that, no matter what the journey looks like, God is lovingly with you every step of the way and desires to bring healing and wholeness into your world.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

—Psalm 34:18

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Comment [Rachel Th10]: I've changed hyphens to em-dashes or en-dashes when appropriate. I haven't marked these changes since they're kind of a pain to deal with on your end!

Section Part One: Rescued and Restored For His Glory

God has an incredible desire to work within our lives to bring healing and wholeness. He is always kind, loving, and merciful, and He longs to draw us close to Himself beyond what we can even comprehend. But our brokenness so often ~~can~~ holds us away from Him, not through any of His actions or desires, but simply because of our own beliefs and therefore our actions. We often hide, run, or stubbornly refuse to allow Him into our hearts out of fear and misunderstanding of how great His love for us is.

Comment [Rachel Th11]: I've added this because it's often God's heart that we misunderstand—thinking that he doesn't really want broken people near him. See what you think :).

The history of the Israelites ~~recorded~~ in biblical times clearly demonstrates ~~clearly~~ God's heart to reach out to humanity, to those ~~that~~ who belonged to Him, yet He repeatedly met with a response that the response He was repeatedly meet with often blocked His love and restoration. Their stubborn, hard, sinful, and broken hearts ~~were what~~ stopped them from receiving all God had for them on so many occasions! Yet we are exactly the same as they were all those years ago. Our human response ~~today~~ is still what drives us away from Him. How this must break His heart as He reaches out in compassion to help us! His desire, just as it was in the Old Testament era, is to work within our lives to bring healing. ~~†~~ This has and never will change or go away.

They refused to obey, nor were they mindful of Your wonders and miracles which You did among them; but they stiffened their necks and in their rebellion appointed a captain, that they might return to their bondage [in Egypt]. But You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great steadfast love; and You did not forsake them. (Nehemiah 9:17, AMP)

Part One of this book, “Rescued and Restored for His Glory,” is all about a loving God reaching down into a broken young girl’s life to draw her to Himself. The same God who was reaching out to the Israelites in biblical times is at work today. He has never stopped reaching out to humanity. His desire has always been to rescue and restore. I want to share with you some of the journey of the first seventeen years of my life, ~~as this young girl~~ followed by the journey of restoration ~~God invited me on~~ that continues now in my adult years. This extends this same invitation ~~He extends~~ across the world every day to hungry, broken hearts looking to be rescued. And He is faithful in answering our hearts’ cry for help. He is the restorer, the healer and lover of our souls.

Comment [Rachel Th12]: Can you just give a brief, one-or-two-sentence summary of your background and what God rescued you from? You just want to give enough specific information here that readers are interested to keep reading. That’s the power of specifics :).

He drew me up out of a horrible pit [a pit of tumult and of destruction], out of the miry clay (froth and slime), and set my feet upon a rock, steadying my steps and establishing my goings. And He has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many shall see and fear (revere and worship) and put their trust and confident reliance in the Lord. (Psalm 40:2–3, AMP)

As a young girl I needed to not only be rescued by a Savior and Lord but be restored so I could live in all God intended. The following chapters ~~within this section~~ share some of this journey, ~~my journey~~ of being rescued and restored for His Glory. My prayer is that as you read this, you will allow God to touch the depths of your soul and spirit to remind you that where ever you are in your journey of life, ~~that~~ He loves you completely and wants the best for you. Amen.

Chapter One: In Need of a Savior and Lord

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

—Romans 8:38–39

As a young girl, I would lie in bed at night and think about the God whom, deep down inside, I desired to know. ~~I didn't really know how to have a relationship with Him but deep within me was a desire to know Him.~~ Whether I was scared or happy, I felt like somehow the God of the universe was looking down on me. That surely He was more real than Santa Claus and had created me for something big in life. I don't really know where I got that from, as no one told me HeGod had created me for a purpose. ~~but s~~Some-how I just knew He had, despite what was spoken over my life during those years.

No one in my family had a personal relationship with Jesus, but when I was a young girl we did go along to a local church. It wasn't all the time, but we went fairly regularly for a number of years. ~~which I believe~~That time must have had a positive impact on my life beyond what anyone would have recogniszed at that time. Yet, Ddespite attending church, I had no real idea about how to have a relationship with God.

My Sunday school experience was like being behind a ~~glass two-way~~ mirror, looking into what was going on but not fully being part of it. I used d to feel like there was some secret everyone else at Sunday school ~~seemed to know~~knew that-but was beyond my grasp. ~~It wasn't~~

Comment [Rachel Th13]: I've just altered the wording a bit here so that the last sentence of the second paragraph doesn't sound repetitive. See what you think of the change!

~~something~~ I ~~didn't~~ enjoy ~~going;ed and~~ if anything, I felt like I didn't belong. ~~as~~ I didn't know the stories, couldn't quote the ~~s~~Scriptures, and found ~~it~~the whole experience quite boring.

I am convinced that the heart and prayer of the church leaders was to be welcoming and to want me to ~~be able to~~ enjoy my time there. ~~though~~ Many would have. But it was different for me. ~~For many it would have been a great experience but i~~In my brokenness, I sat hidden, unable to share what my life was really like. Looking good in my Sunday best was a far cry from the heart-ache in my young, confused heart, born of rejection and turmoil at home. ~~Despite this,~~ in my childlike thinking I knew that even though humans were not safe, God was. in my child's like thinking remained safe as humans were not but He was much bigger and better than they were. It was simple thinking that, looking back, must have helped me through some of those dark days.

I remember one night when I was very young wrapping up one of my favourite things—an elderly ~~G~~great-~~A~~aunt's precious brooch which she had given me—and leaving it on my window-sill as an offering to God to tell Him I loved Him. It was a gift to this God I didn't know but knew must exist. I can so clearly remember telling Him I was leaving him something as I loved Him, and that, even if it was there still in the morning, I would still believe He was real. I hoped in excitement as I lay down to sleep that it would not be there in the morning. Yet, when I woke up and it was still there, I felt an incredible joy that God had indeed visited me in the night and told myself He had left it for me to enjoy asbecause He loved me. Now ~~looking back~~ I recognize that morning aswas my first tangible experience of the Holy Spirit's presence. ~~a~~As I knelt on my bed to take the brooch back from the windowsill, I felt loved and wanted. I can't explain exactly what happened, but it was ~~a~~something significant, something beyond just the fleeting day-dreams and imaginations of a little girl.

Comment [Rachel Th14]: I've just written in a bit of a transition here. See what you think.

Comment [Rachel Th15]: I've added this because we need some concept of what made you different—of where your brokenness was coming from.

As children, we see life very simply and respond eagerly out of our heart towards God. — I believe God delights in this and wants it to be nurtured and protected so that we will mature into adults who trust and respond to Him with faith. Satan, on the other hand, hates the way children are open and so easily responded to God. One of Satan's mandates is to attempt to destroy the very core of a child. He knows that if he can do that, he can then paralyze that child's future. I believe his mandate over my life as a child was clearly this.

One of the things I love about God is that He isn't hiding from people who don't know Him. He is always searching us out, giving us opportunity to come to know Him years before many of us finally say yes. It may at times look like Satan has the victory, not God but there is more going on within our spirits than can be seen by the human eye. God is constant in His pursuit of us even when we don't even know Him. I love that about God. His longing for me was far greater than I knew, and He never gave up on reaching out to me during those years. It was not something I was aware of, but looking back, I can see how much He was reaching out, longing to rescue and restore me. He had plans and dreams for my life that He was never going to give up on.

Comment [Rachel Th16]: Just cutting down a little bit on repetition here!

I am the youngest of four siblings. When I was seven years old, during a time when my parents were having significant marriage issues, all of us were sent off to various places for a week. I went with one of my sisters to a Baptist children's camp; to give my parents "a break from us." There was no hiding from the understanding that our parents believed it was our fault it was believed to be our fault our parents they were having problems. Along with this understanding, I carried the knowledge that I was seen as the biggest problem to our family dynamics, with I had no reason to think otherwise when I was constantly told so by both of my parents and my siblings, that I was.

I remember how scared I was about going away to camp yet having no one to share that with. I had been given the strictest instructions ~~to not to~~ let anyone at camp know my mum had lied about my age so she could send me ~~to the camp~~. The fear that I might be found out just added to my anxiety as I imagined how my parents would react towards me if this happened.

~~These feelings weren't new. I always had this~~ An underlying scared and lonely feeling ~~which~~ went with me wherever I went. Any new environment would escalate the turmoil I carried ~~hidden~~ deep within ~~the~~my heart. Going to a camp that wasn't even for ~~kids~~ my age created significant anxiety and fear for me as a timid little seven-year-old. I knew ~~that~~ to even dare ~~to~~ try to talk about my feelings at home would result in pain that wasn't worth opening up my young heart up for. Nothing would change for the better by sharing my feelings.

I was used to being told I wasn't wanted and that my family ~~were~~was going to give me away. My mother would tell me when she had me alone that she ranked her children and ~~that~~ I was the bottom of ~~the rank of~~ being wanted and loved. She also would tell me certain things I ~~would~~needed to do to move up in the ranks, none of which ~~were~~was achievable for a little girl. She would laugh at me and tell me ~~how~~that I was the black sheep of the family, the outcast, and ~~that I ew~~ould never fit into any family because I wasn't good enough. Words like this were a common and normal part of my childhood and into my teenage years. I don't remember the exact age I ~~would have been~~was when I first heard these words of rejection from my mother and family, but I ~~cannot~~never remember ~~ever~~ not carrying the dark cloud of overwhelming ~~feelings of~~ abandonment and rejection as a little girl. ~~So, i~~n my child-like thinking, I believed I could end up left at camp forever once everyone ~~else~~ went home. That maybe my parents wouldn't come to collect me when it ended.

What I didn't know—what No one knew—was how life-changing that camp would be for me, that it would sow seeds deep ~~in~~ my heart that would many years later grow into something very significant. I loved ~~Ev~~everything about the camp; ~~I loved~~— sharing a dormitory with all these other kids, going to bed late, toasting marshmallows, sleeping out under the stars, swimming in the river, the singing, the ~~b~~Bbible stories, and the leaders were all on my list as top favorites. Words of life and love were spoken over my hungry young heart. For whatever reason, the main leader made a big effort of looking out for me, which resulted in me I felt ~~feeling very~~ special, I felt loved, I felt wanted and free. It was one of the best weeks ~~in~~of my life at that time.

Comment [Rachel Th17]: Can you use a more specific term here? Was this a camp director? A head counselor?

During the week, I was introduced to Jesus; I knew my heart wanted a Savior. I will never forget what seemed like a long walk up to the front of the hall on my own near the end of the camp week when an altar call was given. I was seven years old and had met my Savior, and I was ~~so excited~~SO-EXCITED about this! The joy and delight ~~in~~of being introduced to someone ~~that~~ the leaders said loved ~~me~~ and cared for me like a shepherd ~~did for~~with his lambs was bubbling over inside me as I jumped in the car to go home at the end of camp. But ~~W~~within minutes of being in the car, I felt the familiar cloud of fear and confusion ~~cloud~~ come over me as I listened to my parents and knew nothing had changed in their week away. I felt alone, afraid, and confused. That week of camp and the trip home are some of the clearest memories of that year of my life.

After my initial experience of accepting Jesus ~~to be my~~as Savior, I continued to believe in God but grew more and more unsure that He was in fact the loving God I thought He ~~was~~might have been. My biggest question while lying in bed at night, scared and feeling so alone, was, “God, ~~y~~You can't be real, can You, or this wouldn't be happening to me?” I felt such heartache that at

times I just wanted to die. I felt abandoned and betrayed by my family and was beginning to think maybe God was ~~the~~ exactly the same. I had translated the disapproval I experienced at home to ~~being representative of~~ how God must surely think of me. I didn't have answers, just questions, and lots of them. Eventually I stopped asking questions and shut God out as cold and uncaring. I wanted to protect myself from everyone and everything by placing a barrier in my heart that no one would be able to enter. I couldn't wait to leave home to get away from my family life and therefore away from pain, or so I thought.

My parents eventually stopped going to the church they had taken us to, but often we were made to ~~still~~ attend Sunday school on our own. I saw it as irrelevant, cold, ~~and~~ a place where others belonged but not me. I felt embarrassed to tell others I went and can even remember lying to ~~this~~ a poor little kid trying to make friend^s with me at school when he said he knew me from Sunday school! This feeling about church continued through-out my teenage years. ~~In~~ fact, I became quietly very anti-church, anti-Christians, and anti anything related. Christians were weird and ~~very~~ strange people, in my narrow view. Yet, ~~still~~ deep within me was a longing to know about God and a hunger for Him. That had never really faded away.

God never gives up on anyone despite the hardening of our hearts. I will be forever grateful that He kept drawing my attention back to Him. My heart was always being reminded about God even if I was desperately trying to shut Him out. God used a number of specific things, from having a teacher ~~at~~ secondary school ~~that~~ who openly spoke about being a Christian, to going on the *Spirit of New Zealand*, (a two-week sailing programme aimed at teaching life skills to teenagers,) where the captain talked about Jesus. God even arranged for me to make Christian friends when I left home and went to university. ~~God~~ He never gave up on me ~~and~~ but was always pursuing my heart and attention.

Comment [Rachel Th18]: About how old were you at this time?

I chose to leave home when I was seventeen years old, ~~and~~ I couldn't wait to get out ~~leave~~. My siblings were already gone, having left home ~~family members had already left before me—my siblings had left home~~ a number of years previous. My parents had been spending time living in Australia for some of my last school year, so home was lonely, and if they were there, full of tension. ~~Now looking back~~ I realize now how much hate had grown in my heart, especially towards my mother, by this stage. By the time I left home I was full of pain ~~and~~ anger and ~~was very~~ unsure about God. But I did not know why or ever allow myself to think much more than the day-to-day getting through life. ~~But~~ ~~At~~ this stage I had very few dreams, I wasn't ~~very particularly~~ future focused and didn't know who I was or wasn't.

Comment [Rachel Th19]: Just avoiding the repetition of "very" here ...

Whenever I was around my family, I felt emotions I didn't understand and couldn't process, ~~whenever I was around my family~~. I used to feel like I wanted something bad to happen to them—the feelings were so strong they scared me. I wanted to see them hurt and would argue about anything I could with them. ~~I use to feel like m~~ My anger was felt so large I could never express it all. It is an understatement to say I am sure that I was not pleasant to live with during that time!;

I went to university to be as far away from my pain as possible. I wanted to ~~and~~ be free to have fun. I didn't know ~~not knowing that~~ the pain would go wherever I went. I would be lying if I didn't say some sin can actually be enjoyable, even if it is detrimental to you long term, ~~detrimental to you~~, so for a while drinking was a fun activity for me. Like so many others, I enjoyed the feeling of artificial light-heartedness, the false feeling of not being able to get hurt. ~~U~~ until I woke in the morning and the same dark ness ~~cloud hung~~ was knocking at my heart, the same feeling of loneliness, heartache, and fear that I couldn't explain.

Comment [Rachel Th20]: Where? And taking what? Just throwing a few specific details in here will help make this feel more real and anchored in the real world :).

Somehow, by God's grace I did not go down the dark road that potentially I could have ~~taken~~ with alcohol or drugs or promiscuity. A major reason would be ~~themy~~ fear of people and not being comfortable in large groups—a sure way to limit my going out to parties! I didn't trust people or believe that they really wanted to be my friend, so while I had friends and was involved in university life, I tried to hold them at a distance from my real heart.

During my first year at the University of Waikato (New Zealand), I was invited to the Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship, where for the first time I heard someone giving a testimony about the reality of God in their life. I was gripped by what was said about God and that ~~they~~~~these people~~ seemed to really know God personally. Not long after this, ~~time~~ several of the students were door-knocking around the student hostel I lived at, inviting people to be part of a Bible study for non-Christians, where we could ask all the questions we wanted. My response was one of rudeness, ~~where~~ I made sure they knew I definitely would not be coming.

But sure enough, the following week I turned up to the meeting. I can still remember looking behind me as I walked to the meeting to check ~~that~~ no one was following me—I didn't want anyone to know I was interested in God. I saw this as admitting I was in need of help, ~~which~~~~and~~ at that stage, I was nowhere near ready to be honest to myself or others about ~~that~~.

At first there were a few of us each week, but soon it became only me ~~every-week~~ ~~with~~~~and~~ the two leaders. I asked every question I could think of and then more. They let me into their world, ~~†~~They would invite ~~me~~ to church (not that I ever went), and ~~they~~ invited me to a Christian concert with Ian Grant, ~~a significant preacher in New Zealand at the time~~, speaking. ~~(a significant preacher in New Zealand at that time) which~~ I finally said yes to ~~that one~~. I knew as the altar call was ~~been~~ given that they were praying and hoping I would respond, but I just couldn't do it. My heart was so rebellious and used to fighting that ~~I~~ wouldn't respond just

Comment [Rachel Th21]: Was this a he or she? "His" or "her" would be a better pronoun here.

because I knew they wanted me to ~~!-respond I wouldn't-~~ I didn't want to show my vulnerability. Yet my heart was softening, and I so desperately wanted to believe and to trust God was real. I wanted what they had but was ~~so~~-bound up by my fear.

In the end, after a couple of months of me coming along to the weekly meeting with my questions, one of the leaders turned to me and said, "Helen, you either believe or you don't. We have shared everything you need to know in order to make a decision. Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again so you could have eternal life or not? Go home and decide."

Comment [Rachel Th22]: Wow, that's pretty bold! But very cool.

I went home that night still unsure, still full of fear and struggling to make a decision ~~on~~about what I believed. I remember sitting on my bed with the ~~b~~Bible they had given me months previously, feeling a bit desperate and asking God for help. I flicked it open, not really knowing what I was looking for, and I came to [Deuteronomy 4:29](#):

But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deep in my heart, I knew I had found God. He was there, and it was up to me what happened next. ~~#~~This was my choice.

I had no doubt God was speaking to me as I read and reread that ~~s~~Scripture. I went to bed ~~and~~ not really knowing how to ask Jesus back into my life, but knowing I wanted to. The next morning I simply prayed a prayer while I was in the shower. It wasn't flashy or lengthy, but it was genuine. The ~~s~~Scripture in Deuteronomy was true. God was encouraging me that I had sought Him and had found Him as I had looked for Him with all that was within me. I did

believe, I had become a Christian. I remember going around telling everyone and anyone who would listen. Something significant took place in my heart that day that all the months previous had been leading up to.

When I prayed in the shower, I immediately experienced a sense of love and reassurance like I had longed for all my life. One of the leaders began to meet with me weekly for a bBible study; it was amazing, as everything in the bBible took on more meaning to me. I didn't doubt for one moment that I had been saved. And, I thought, ~~now~~ this meant God would rescue me from all pain. Surely there would be nothing hard in my life from now on. I was free.

It wasn't long before God within His love began to try to open my heart up so He could begin to bring healing and the freedom I longed for. But I wanted a Savior, not a Lord, which ~~resulted in a~~ significant amount of anger and frustration ~~coming~~ came to the surface as God, in my opinion, ~~was not~~ did not love ing me the right way. He wasn't letting me stay with my heart closed but wanted to do heart surgery. He wanted to be my Lord, and I was not impressed. I had thought becoming a Christian meant that somehow I would live happily ever after. I was “saved” from any further hardship.

I couldn't believe what was happening; this was not what I thought God should be doing! A Savior is kind and full of mercy; they he does n't make you face your past. I thought God was mean, so I simply closed my heart. For a miserable eight-ten month period, I ran from God and anything Christian. I felt suicidal and, confused, and anger raged inside me. I really struggled with my thinking and thoughts around death and even murder during this time. Despite being a bubbly person by nature, within me ~~I was tormented with~~ were dark feelings that tormented me and came were close to overwhelming me completely. I lived my life fairly normally, but not far beneath the surface was raw pain waiting to take control. How I got through

Comment [Rachel Th23]: Can you give a specific example or two of HOW God worked on opening up your heart? Show this in concrete terms. Doing that will help bring your next paragraph to life with greater force.

my university studies I don't know, but somehow I kept up with my assignments and continued with good grades.

One night when I was alone in the very early hours of the morning, standing in the dark on the main bridge of the City of Hamilton (Waikato, New Zealand), I was contemplating suicide (yet again) when something inside me rose up and said that there was a better life than the one I had, that I needed to stop running and start to let God and others in to help me. I had a choice of either life or death, but God was inviting me to choose life.

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:15–20)

Committing suicide was not the answer, drink was not the answer, and depression wasn't the answer. ~~Nothing~~ Nothing the world offered as options for retreating from pain were the answer. Yet I still didn't want or know how to let God into my heart.

Around this time, ~~period~~ I was invited to the University of Waikato Christian Camp. How grateful I am today that they kept inviting me to things! I was nervous and didn't really want to be there but so desperately wanted what they had. I wanted peace, I wanted love, and I wanted a better life. No one knew what was really going on inside me. ~~I'd had~~ I'd had years of keeping my heart hidden in fear of what would happen if people knew me ~~and/or~~ heard about my life. I was good at hiding my heart from others and pretending I was fine. I grew up in a family where we were experts at pretending everything was okay to keep people at a distance so that no probing questions ~~were~~would be asked that ~~w~~could reveal otherwise.

Throughout the camp my heart stayed scared and closed, but the Sunday night as camp finished, we all went to a local church. I don't remember now what was preached, but it was about God's heart, and finally, after all the years of running, I was able to surrender and say yes to Jesus not being just my Savior but also my Lord. I had thought I only needed a Savior to save me from those things I wanted salvation from. ~~How~~ How wrong I had been! I hadn't realized I also needed a Lord to direct and guide me. I was one of the first down to the altar that night, on my knees crying and repenting for being blind to God as both Savior and Lord. I will never forget ~~it~~ ~~as I knelt kneeling~~ there before God, ~~asking Him to be my Savior and Lord~~. By asking Jesus to be not only ~~be~~ my Savior but also my Lord, I was asking Him to have authority over my life, stating that I would submit to Him and His ways and would follow and obey Him. That night I surrendered my whole life—my pain, my fears, my dreams, my hopes, my desire to control my

life. I surrendered everything to Him. I knew I had truly given it all to Jesus for Him to do His will within my life.

When I was seven and again when I was eighteen, just ten months earlier, I had ~~The decision I had made when I was 7 yrs old and then when I was 18 yrs (ten months earlier) had been made~~ decisions ~~that I to~~ believed in Jesus and ~~wanted ask~~ Him to save me. ~~(be my Savior).~~ But that night at the front of the church, I knew without a doubt I was giving my whole life to Him. ~~to not only be my Savior but also my Lord—to have authority over my life and how I lived.~~ I wanted to obey Him; I wanted my life to bring glory to Him. I gave Him everything that night, ~~which~~ It was the beginning of never looking back. It was the start of the transformation process of my heart and the ~~start beginning~~ of a life I'd never ~~knew known~~ I could have. I was letting God rescue and restore me for His ~~G~~glory and ~~to~~ do it His way, not mine.

Comment [Rachel Th24]: I'm just cutting down on repetition a bit here.

I love to meditate on Deuteronomy 30:15–20, as it sums up everything for me about God and His promises to me. Maybe you ~~have~~ just glimpsed over that ~~s~~Scripture a few ~~par~~agraphs back. I encourage you to go back and read it several times, ~~letting~~ the power of its words sink into your heart and life situation. My struggle to choose life was painful and hard, but by turning from death to life, I have found the greatest gift of all—a life free and fulfilled.

Choosing life meant two major things have had to change in my life:

- Firstly, I had to allow ~~ing~~ God in to bring His truth into the depths of my heart to set me free.
- Secondly, I had to surrender ~~ing~~ to God and His ways above my own desires, ~~thoughts, inking~~ and plans ~~—to learn—learning~~ to live in obedience to Him.

~~Living these things out has not been easy. This wasn't easy~~ but it has been worth every struggle ~~I have had~~ to get ~~here, there~~. I love how in Deuteronomy 30:20 it says, “For the LORD is your ~~life, LIFE~~ and he will give you many years in the land.” My life today is a testimony of a life transformed by the power of God at work.

When it came to repentance, up until that night I had fluctuated between thinking I didn't really ~~think I had~~ have much to repent from ~~—, as after all I~~ according to my standards I hadn't been that bad in my life ~~—~~ and thinking I was such a horrible person I was beyond redemption. Little did I know ~~about~~ what sin really was and what it wasn't. My whole focus had been on needing love, needing a Savior to save me from my pain, without knowing that part of this was acknowledging I didn't know how to live my life to please God or that I was a sinner. Nor did I know that being a sinner wasn't about what others had said about me or spoken over me or done to me. From that night onward, s I got an increasing revelation and understanding of what sin was and how much I did need forgiveness, not just those who had sinned against me. My eyes were finally opened to what sin was (and what it wasn't) and how desperately I needed God not just to make a way for me to spend eternity with Him but how to live on earth in obedience to Him. I began a journey of being honest ~~with~~ about the state of my heart and therefore my actions both past and present.

As soon as I allowed Jesus to be Lord, ~~and Savior~~ my world began to change significantly, and slowly restoration began to take place. I began to discover what it meant to live as a s Spirit-filled, b Bible-believing Christian. ~~Once again~~ At times I encountered God's love so strongly it ~~at times~~ sometimes overwhelmed me. I allowed myself to open up to him so he could start to bring to the surface the many areas ~~that~~ I needed healing in; His surgery on my heart had begun, ~~began~~. This time I stayed on the surgery table, allowing Him to carefully, lovingly, and

strategically work within my heart. I am forever grateful for what He did during this time and

what He continues to do within my heart.

God's plan for us does not stop at Ssalvation, ~~but~~It goes far beyond thatis. He wants us to be transformed, that we would truly know what it means when He says in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

~~(NKJV):~~ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (NKJV).

I know God's heart aches for us when we choice to not accept His offer to be Lord over our livesfe but still want Him to be our Savior. To attempt to live one without the other is not living as God designed. To fully live as ~~a~~ new creations involves allowing God into our souls to bring about this transformation.

It is arrogance to think we can have the "perks" of Ssalvation without havingexperiencing the "discipline" of Llordship. Unless we make the choice to have HimJesus as Lord, He can-not do the work He longs to do within us to bring about the process of restoration. God wants to set us free with His truth, but He is not a fairy godmother, a magician, or a sugar daddy ready to dish out things as we demand. He is God almighty who created the universe, reigns over the whole world, and defeated Satan at the cross. At His name every knee will bow and every tongue confess He is Lord (Romans 14:11).

He is strong and all powerful. Yes, He Saves and will respond to everyone ~~that~~who repents and asks Him to be their Savior, but our relationship with Him is not supposed to be a negotiation deal where we chooseice what we will take from what is on offer. If we want to truly live in a strong relationship with our Savior, then we must surrender to His Llordship. To not do so results in ~~an~~ unnecessary struggle and pain as we fight God and resist Him at each step. Ultimately what happens if we reject His Llordship is that we end up hardening our hearts to

Comment [Rachel Th25]: Great picture here! Staying on the surgery table is a great image for allowing God to work.

Him and missing out on all that He intended to give to us. I know full well how strong the battle to surrendering can be, how much time it wastes, and how much it hinders us walking free.

It was a rocky road that brought me to the place of understanding that I needed a Lord ~~and Savior.~~ But looking back, I smile in delight that God never gave up. What I thought I needed was anything but the best for me! ~~A Savior~~ Salvation alone can be misunderstood ~~as to relate to~~ just scraping by—“getting a ticket to heaven.” Where as, accepting Jesus as both Lord and Savior is about living life fully with God. I am forever grateful I chose Him in both respects. ~~a Lord and Savior.~~

“So be very careful to act exactly as GOD commands you. Don’t veer off to the right or the left.

Walk straight down the road GOD commands so that you’ll have a good life and live a long time in the land that you’re about to possess.”

—Deuteronomy 5:33, MSG

Chapter Two: The Journey Begins

“They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.”

—Psalm 22:5

When I finally asked Jesus to be my ~~Savior and my~~ Lord, I made a conscious choice to give Him access to every part of my broken heart. Making this choice allowed Him to begin the slow and often very painful process of restoring my soul to all that He desired it to be. ~~By~~ My being surrendered to Him ~~meant~~ He could ~~then~~ now lead and guide the journey of restoration without me running away or fighting Him. At eighteen years of age, the journey of my life being restored began, and I have never looked back.

This restoration journey He wanted to take me on was only for my good, not ~~my~~ harm. But I had to make ~~it started by making~~ a choice to begin the journey not knowing the final outcome. I hadn't known God long. I didn't know if I could trust Him, I didn't know what love was, and I didn't really know the state of my own heart. It was only by ~~my~~ allowing God into my broken life ~~that~~ He has been able to prove that I ~~could~~ can trust Him completely with my heart and life. His ~~word~~ promise in the ~~b~~ Bible was clear at the start of my journey: ~~that it told me~~ I could trust Him. ~~b~~ But I had to experience the truth of His Word in action to ~~now~~ be able to carry ~~it~~ that truth as a revelation.

Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. (Psalm 9:10)

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. (Isaiah 12:2)

Many people don't realize that it is a choice that God leaves entirely up to us to make. He is not ~~mean~~cruel or harsh towards us, forcing us to open up to Him, but instead He gently offers us love and the opportunity to be healed by choosing to let Him in. He can't step into the depths of our hearts if we keep the door firmly shut to Him. Whatever the ~~amount~~degree of brokenness in our lives, the journey of our hearts rests in our ability to make a choice, surrender to the restoration process, or shut the door of our hearts. It is up to us to choose.

{CHECK: compare from here and above}

One of the biggest deceptions we can believe is that being saved is enough and that we don't need to do anything more in order to be set free and made whole. This approach stems from a belief that the past is the past and therefore there is no need to be concerned about it now. This is like a ~~solid~~ier being seriously wounded in battle yet pressing on regardless of his wound. He keeps going for a while, but eventually the wound will ~~not only~~ interfere not only with his life, but others around him will be affected withby his inability to truly function as a ~~solid~~ier. It is foolishness to think brokenness can just be moved on from despite the serious wound created within us; that we can function without the wound~~not~~ being cleansed and healed. By not addressing the wounds of our hearts, we allow Satan to havegain even more victory over our lives as we continue to live un-restored.

This approach to the Christian life keeps people living far below what God wants for them. The brokenness of the past will influence our future because anything that is not restored continues to bring death, ~~to our life~~ whether we are conscious of it or not, through our beliefs and

Comment [Rachel Th26]: It's not completely clear what "it" means here. Trusting Him? Starting the journey? Go for more specific wording here :).

behavior. This in turn influences those around us, who experience pain and frustration ~~by~~through our conscious and unconscious actions of brokenness. Jesus came to save us not just so we could spend eternity with him but so that, on earth, we could be restored and live a life of wholeness, influencing those around us with His love and truth. God's heart is not that people get saved and still drag around their wounds, only half-living the life He intended for them. Our life in God is not all about "one day in Hheaven"—~~but~~ the here and now matters to God. —His desire is for the abundance mentioned in His ~~w~~Word to be our seen over the whole of our ~~lives~~fe while on Eearth.

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10, NKJV)

We need to face the past in order to build a future that can be abundant. For this process of restoration to take place, we must choose ~~see~~ to allow it and commit to complete it. This takes considerable courage and support, but as the testimony of so many around us shows, it is worth it. Every step of my own journey of restoration has been worth it for the final outcome.

In 1989, I began what was to be an incredible journey of restoration, not knowing the how, what, or why of what was about to happen. ~~The journey had begun.~~ All I knew was that I now had the eOwner of the universe, the Lover of my soul, and Lord of my life leading me forward. By the time I made the decision to become a Christian at eighteen, I had shut down and blocked out a large proportion of my childhood. I didn't go about trying to dig up my past, but God simply started to bring back memories and unlock my heart. All I did was surrender to God and build my relationship with Him—that was my number-one focus.

God began the restoration process within me by helping me develop a strong, close, and honest relationship with Him. I struggled with feeling inadequate and ~~blaming myself to blame~~ for my family struggles, ~~both of~~ which meant I held on tightly to a belief that I was responsible for the things that had occurred. This put a lid on ~~my~~ being able to open up about my life. It also created a huge darkness over my soul, ~~as and~~ I kept to myself my struggles with thoughts of suicide and death.

~~But b~~By drawing near to God and sharing my heartaches, my hopes, and my dreams ~~with Him, I~~ was ~~this~~ prepared ~~me~~ for opening my heart up to others. God needed to establish ~~in me~~ trust in Him so that when He asked me to begin to open up to others, I would know it was safe because I had first found safety with Him. He helped me to establish a place of security within my heart where I knew His love deep~~ly~~er enough that I could ~~then to~~ start to allow others into my life ~~as well~~.

In my early years of being a Christian, I felt confused and ashamed about my childhood, so I remained silent ~~about it~~. I spoke in general terms about growing up, but I would really only talk about good things, leaving out the details of what else was happening at the same time. Sometimes I did share, but it was from a clinical, disconnected place in my heart, as if I was talking about some-one else. I never spoke of the depth of pain in my heart or my experiences at the hands of those who were entrusted to care for me. During this time I battled greatly with fear that if people knew my struggles, they would speak out ~~that~~ I was to blame and reject me.

~~But F~~the process of restoration is not just about God wanting us to face the pain and the ugly things within our lives, ~~though~~. It is just as important to God for our heart to find the joyful and good things—in fact, this is essential to our journey, ~~of restoration~~. He wants us to know:

- Who we really are—the amazing person he created us to be.
- Our dreams and desires (both of which are squashed under brokenness).
- Who He is—His love, mercy, joy, and hope.
- How to live life fully.

He has worked within my life to bring restoration in three major areas:

1. Revealing His love for me and His unchanging character, ~~that is unchanging.~~
2. Healing my brokenness and /pain.
3. Restoring my identity—who I was meant to be.

It is impossible for us to know who we are; if we are always trying to stop or cover the pain and /brokenness of our hearts. The pain within our hearts suffocates the real us from coming to the surface to be healed. ~~Unless~~In less we deal with this, we will never truly live free to be the person He created us to be. Being restored is about God restoring us to who we always were meant to be. That's the real person—our real identity—untainted by pain, sorrow, ~~OR~~and deception.

Who we are created to be is usually hidden under ~~the~~ layers of brokenness. There is no other way to become ing the person God created us to be but to allow Him to heal the brokenness that surrounds our hearts. The pain has to come out and be healed for restoration of our identity to happen.

My journey of restoration began with the major focus being on God, building a strong relationship with Him as He revealing His love towards me, ~~and building a strong solid~~

~~relationship with Him.~~ Once this was established within me, He moved on to an even deeper healing and restoration in my life. It was time to deal with my family.

I grew up in what appeared to be a nice white middle-upper-class family with the two nice cars, the ~~animals~~pets, and the nice house with the pool which matched the expectation that we were ~~therefore~~ happy, well cared for, and part of a loving family. Along with the rest of my family, I did my best to protect this image.

We live in a society that associates dysfunctional family life, especially in regards to verbal, mental, and physical abuse, ~~as being with~~ families of a certain socio-economical status or even, certain cultures, ~~even~~. My life and many other ~~s' people's life stories~~ are evidence that there are many families never reported ~~on~~ national statistics, never on the national news, and never known to ~~our~~ Welfare Services, and yet as they live as we lived on behind ~~our~~their lovely homes, everything was anything but safe.

That same room ~~that in child-like fashion where~~ I ~~gave had given~~ God my Aunt's brooch was also one of severe pain numerous times over a number of years. Six years after the brooch offering, ~~to God~~ I was lying on that same bed, unable to move, being -with a completely different scenario happening. Unable to move while being pinned down, strangled, and being told I was going to be killed. I was desperate for someone to help, someone to rescue me. I had run from one end of our large house to the other where my bedroom was to try to escape as my mother chased me, yelling, at me "I will kill you, I want to kill you!" Her anger was explosive, and she was totally out of control.

I felt pure, cold fear as confusion overwhelmed me as to what I had said or done this time to ~~ev~~provoke her. Her strength and force pinned me down as I struggled to try to stop her. To my young heart, her eyes looked like they were filled with complete hatred for me as she stared right

at me while shaking me by the throat and yelling that she was going to kill me. I had no way of stopping this as her hands tightened around my throat and my head began to buzz loudly. Before I blacked out, suddenly her cold hands let go off me and she was off me and gone back to the kitchen to prepare dinner, never to mention or acknowledge what had just happened. I was left alone on my bed with my fear and pain.

While I survived that event, at that time part of me died emotionally. ~~that~~It took many years before I was able to allow God in to restore that deepest part of my heart. As I have already shared, in His gentleness and wisdom, ~~I believe that~~ when I became a Christian God focused ~~me~~ on bringing me to eoming to ~~have~~ a deep, solid conviction of His love ~~towards~~for me before He asked me to face and work through the pain of this and many other events in my childhood and teenage years.

That day was not an isolated abusive event, but one of many. ~~abusive events verbally, physically and emotionally that I experienced.~~ Being hit around the head, chased and thrown against walls and onto beds, ~~along with~~and cruel words being spoken over my life were ~~a~~ themes of the first seventeen years of my life. There were often physical consequences to these experiences: ~~loudly~~ ringing ears, the huge rush of adrenaline, a bladder I could not control as my body responded in shock that overwhelmed me. ~~y~~Yet that was nothing compared to the depth of pain my young heart was storing up. ~~inside.~~

Physical abuse was not a daily occurrence. ~~They weren't a daily occurrence and~~ ~~s~~Sometimes it would be months before any angry outburst from my parents that resulted in them physically hitting me. But the verbal and emotional abuse ~~was~~were fairly consistent. ~~It was~~They ~~were~~ intermixed with the normality of going to school, doing homework, riding my horses, and

everyday life, all ~~of these~~ things I enjoyed and thrived in despite the anxiety and depression within my heart.

~~For me,~~ The journey of restoration ~~for me~~ has meant God asking me to stop and face ~~my~~ this past. To actually look at it and to allow my heart to feel the loss that I never allowed myself to face during the seventeen-year period I lived at home. ~~But as I have already shared this was not at the beginning of my journey of restoration though.~~ The beginning was all about His love and character—He wanted me truly know who He was so that I could go on to face the past from a place of strength in Him. This didn't mean He wasn't bringing up issues for me to face and process ~~even then,~~ but going deep within the recesses of my heart of hearts was to come much later, ~~in my journey.~~ I see emotional healing a bit like peeling the layers of an onion ... layer by layer comes off before you can get to the core. ~~I believe~~ that is exactly how God worked to bring healing to my heart—layer by layer uncovered over time. ~~I am not saying this is the same for everyone but for me~~ Once His love was firmly established within my heart, He asked me to allow ~~h~~ Him to reveal to me the full impact of the truth of what my home life had been like. This was painful, and without a deep love relationship with Him as my Lord and Savior, I couldn't have done what He asked of me. ~~The process may not be the same for everyone.~~ I didn't plan how this happened, nor did I orchestrate a method for doing ~~it,~~ this. I simply went to God with my heart daily for many years as He brought healing and truth into it. He had a plan for the restoration process; I didn't need one, nor did I need to control the steps. I was to stay surrendered and let Him be Lord and Savior.

Brokenness was evident ~~over~~ throughout our whole family in the way we interacted with each other and saw life. ~~Our home~~ was never peaceful, yet to the outside world, the presentation was ~~one~~ that of a normal family. The struggle between my parents ~~with each other~~

Comment [Rachel Th27]: Beautiful testimony ... I know others who have been through the same process, and it's amazing how personal, careful, and truly loving God is!

~~and~~ ~~and my parents~~ with each of my siblings was constant ~~over those years~~. My brother left home when I was ~~11~~ eleven years old and had limited contact with our family in the years that followed. My oldest sister ~~soon~~ followed when I was ~~13~~ thirteen, ~~years old~~, and my other sister when I was about ~~16~~ sixteen. ~~I years old~~ followed ~~by me~~ a year later.

We were not a close family, but one under extreme stress. I believe that each member of my family wanted something better, and if ~~the~~ circumstances had been different, we ~~could~~ might have been a very different family. God's heart ached over the pain, anger, and harm that happened. He never stopped loving my mum, my dad, my brother and sisters. He desired for all of us to come to know Him and experience His love and forgiveness.

Growing up was like living in a prison with rules that were constantly changing, not understood and never explained. It was unpredictable ~~as to~~ when one of my parents would explode in anger as "the rules" had not been obeyed. Fear dominated and ~~was what~~ allowed patterns of behavior to continue on unchanged. ~~My family~~ We adopted a ~~way of living that~~ involved a bizarre pattern of living where abuse would occur followed closely by resuming some type of normal family activity like nothing out of the ordinary had just occurred. ~~out of the ordinary~~. The abusive event could have happened only a few minutes ago, but we would still all ~~get to be quickly in~~ our places around the dinner table, in the car, or wherever we were to be to make it look like everything was fine and nothing had just happened. Nothing was ever spoken about these events, and if at any time ~~if~~ questions were asked, the pain of ~~having tried~~ trying to stand up was quickly felt both physically and verbally. It took me many years before I could describe this pattern as I struggled to articulate what it was really like.

I was the only one of my ~~sisters/brothers~~ siblings to experience physical violence, but all of us experienced verbal and emotional abuse to some degree. Not everything that happened to me

Comment [Rachel Th28]: Can you/do you want to explore the "circumstances" at all? What circumstances do you see as creating the stress?

was when others were around, but some of it was seen by them. My siblings never knew what to do with what they witnessed happening to me—they were only children and teenagers themselves while ~~this~~ it went on. They couldn't possibly have known how to handle it as children. They were ~~role~~-modelled a belief that it was my fault, which led to the creation of a pretense ~~being created as if it~~ that it was not happening, or if acknowledged, ~~by my siblings~~ it was as one sister would angrily tell me—“It's your fault this happens, Helen!”-

It was only as a young adult that one of my sisters ~~once~~ shared about what they had witnessed. She talked with me about a time when I was five years old (I had just started school) and was being beaten by my father ~~as~~because the show-and-tell item I had been allowed to take to school washad been broken when someone dropped ~~it~~ by someone. While I was being beaten, my mother and siblings all hid in the lounge, too scared to do anything but ~~to~~ keep away. She remembers seeing what was happening, then being huddled in the lounge listening to the loud thuds ~~as my dad hit me~~ and my yelps of pain. I was left alone to recover while with the family ~~carried~~ying on as if nothing had ~~ever~~ happened. It washad been instilled into them ~~to~~ never to come to my rescue, and abuse was never acknowledged by the family as a whole, as a family it was never acknowledged so I learned ~~ed~~ to keep my pain to myself.

Living like this ends up consuming your soul—your identity—and leaves you powerless. I felt abandoned as no one stood up for or protected me, which helped ~~emphasised~~emphasize ~~the~~my belief ~~I had~~ that I was not deserving of protection, love, ~~and~~or care. The impact of what I experienced coupled with their own experiences has influenced the relationship between me and my siblings, not just me and my parents. I became acutely aware of this when many years ago a friend had to tell me that she would not allow one of my sisters to come to stay again at our place if she did not change her behavior toward me. I was shocked at the time but listened as ~~my~~

Comment [Rachel Th29]: "Our place" meaning you and this friend shared a house or apartment? This isn't clear from "a friend"; you might want to change it to "housemate" or "roommate."

~~friends~~she went on to tell me that it was not normal for someone to speak like this to another human, that it was not acceptable. She went on to say if she ever heard my sister speak ~~like~~-how she ~~did~~had to me again, she would ask her to leave. I knew that this particular sister was abusive in the ~~manner~~way she spoke to me, but it was so familiar to me ~~that~~ I ~~had~~ never ~~had~~-really taken into account that it was not acceptable. ~~and~~~~i~~In all honesty, I thought I deserved it. It took someone saying something for me to stand up ~~to~~and put boundaries in place.

Like my parents, this sister holds such deep-seated beliefs and brokenness ~~that~~ she knows no other way to treat me. This causes her to continue to remain un-changed ~~on~~in the beliefs she holds even to this day. I do not excuse ~~the~~her behavior (I know full well it is wrong to treat anyone like ~~she does~~ ~~methis~~), but I do understand now where her actions come from and why—it has nothing to do with me ~~and is, it is~~ not my responsibility. All of us in life have to take responsibility for our actions, but it is only through a relationship with God any of us can be set free and change. The journey of restoration doesn't necessary involve others changing—it is about us changing and being restored so that we can live free despite what others may do, believe, ~~and~~or think about us.

Un-dealt-with brokenness binds you up and causes you to accept what is not normal behavior as being okay. You see it as being perfectly normal, especially when that is all you ever have known and you don't think you deserve better. Standing up and not living under my family's words, opinions, and deceptions was a very difficult journey, ~~not~~ something I could ~~not~~ have done without the Holy Spirit and others standing with me. It has been a very hard step to take in my journey of restoration.

~~As I have already mentioned my experiences of abuse growing up relate mainly to physical, verbal and emotional abuse. I experienced some very~~The bizarre things I experienced

Comment [Rachel Th30]: Just cutting down on some repetition here and trying to streamline it. See what you think :).

growing up and the equally bizarre way we dealt with them ~~and these~~ significantly impacted my identity, my sexuality, and my beliefs. ~~But N~~othing is impossible for God to bring His healing into, ~~though~~. I have discovered that as He has asked me to face the truth of what I experienced, He has ~~then~~ been able to bring healing and transformation into my identity, my sexuality, and my beliefs.

In my family, we grew up with a ritual of kissing our parents on the lips. ~~Which w~~While not that unusual in itself (~~as~~ a lot of families and cultures do ~~this~~ as a normal part of their lives), what was unusual was that ~~the practice~~ was maintained by force. I was not allowed to choose to not kiss either of my parents fully on the lips whenever I went to bed at night. If I dared ~~not to~~, ~~not kiss them fully on the lips~~—I was grabbed forcefully and a kiss ~~was~~ demanded. The kiss was often coupled with having just been hit around the head or yelled at for something.

Most nights I would feel sick ~~about it~~ and would hope I could just say good night if I stood in the door-way, particularly as I grew into my teenage years, but that was met with abusive words and violence if I did not obey. I never was able to explain my fear and deep ~~revulsion, of u~~tion—which grew stronger the older I got as I was repeatedly forced to kiss those who hurt me.

During the early years of my childhood when a family member asked me to touch his genitals—“play with his genitals”—even though he was ~~only~~ a young teenager only eight years older ~~than me~~, it was something I did without question. As a little girl not yet at school, it was already established deep within my soul that I was worthless and not wanted. They were powerful, I was not. I actually never thought it was wrong of him until I was an adult and had allowed God to bring into my heart the truth of right and wrong. At the time, I felt I got his approval by doing as he ~~had~~ asked. He ~~used~~ to read to me and was the person who taught me my

times tables and how to tell the time, all good things, all kind things. I desperately wanted to be loved, to have attention given to me, and while his actions were wrong, to my young heart he was giving me something better than nothing—his attention.

My revulsion towards kissing and struggle to understand with my understanding of intimacy soon crossed over to feeling panicked and out of control if anyone kissed me. The panic that would rise up inside me with when anyone wanted to kiss me on the lips or cheek was debilitating and also very hard to explain. A kiss was related to power being taken away from me, to safety being violated, and it revolted me. A kiss was something I had to try to tolerate, not enjoy. To discover that a lot of Christians would kiss you on the cheek made matters worse for me when I first became a Christian. It was scary territory, for me and it represented a very difficult journey for me to go through—let only explain to others.

Initially, I actually had no idea that my family life was so abnormal. I knew it wasn't quite right, but it was only when I started being around healthy families that God was able to open my eyes to what was His desire for family life. I was shocked when I became a Christian and I began to see how healthy families operated and related. I just couldn't believe the difference to the way I grew up!—It couldn't have been any further from what I had known, was now seeing and experiencing for myself. To be honest, I still live in awe of normal healthy family life—it is amazing to me and one of my deepest longings.

However, this major difference created some difficulties of its own when I became a Christian. As a new Christian, The new people in my world who were Christians had nice families, and led simple lives with a few hard things thrown in, but really nothing bad—or so it appeared to me. I couldn't allow myself to let them know my life hadn't been like theirs. Despite

Comment [Rachel Th31]: Can you expand this "it" by listing a few of the things that really stood out to you? For example, "Loving conversation, healthy interaction, mutual respect—it couldn't have been any further ..."

this internal struggle. I did open up to a few people and continued to stay committed to allowing God to bring healing. I remained surrendered to what He was doing within me. This was one of the most significant steps in the beginning for me—staying surrendered to God no matter what He would bring up from deep within me to face. I never searched out things to deal with; I just kept focused on God and His love that He was revealing to me more and more.

Not long after I accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, I began to have repeated dreams about the past. My heart began to feel overwhelmed by this until I got some help to recognize that God was letting my past come up into my consciousness again so I could face it and work through the pain. I had locked away many memories, and much pain was sitting deep within me.

This process of restoration helped me to begin to unlock my heart. Up until getting saved, I hardly ever would think about the past. I shut my thoughts and feelings about it completely off. As a consequence, one of the things I found exceptionally hard to do was to cry and express sadness. I had blocked out allowing myself to feel any depth of pain and rejection within my heart that could be expressed. I constantly felt darkness over me but did not recognize the pain in my soul. I didn't want to let myself think about why my soul was not peaceful and struggling. I also found it very hard to hearing or seeing others hurt or in pain and would feel detached from any story they shared. I was scared of my emotions related to sadness and pain, so I would try to avoid allowing even others' pain to touch my heart.

I see the human heart (our emotional life) as similar to a garden. If a garden is made of rotten unfertile soil, you can't just go and plant beautiful healthy plants on top of it in the hopes that you will then have a lovely garden. You have to remove the dead plants and change the soil that the plants will grow in. The soil of my heart was polluted, had with rocks and broken bits throughout it. I needed to have a clean-out, not cover it up with lovely plants. The journey

Comment [Rachel Th32]: This isn't quite clear—your soul was not struggling? Or do you mean, "why my soul was not peaceful, why I was struggling."

Comment [Rachel Th33]: Rotten soil is usually pretty good :).

of restoration is like that of restoring a run-down, rubbish-infested garden. It takes time and is a labour of love based on the picture of what it can become. If plants are just added to a garden that is full of rubbish and weeds, they ~~too~~ will eventually be taken over by the weeds. Whatever the foundationsoil is within the garden of our hearts will over-ride anything that is added. The only way to change this is through the process of restoration.

From early on in my journey, God began ~~from early on in my journey~~ to “clean up the garden of my heart” around my identity. There were many rocks in the garden of my heart that were suffocating me from being who I was created to be.

- I struggled with feelings of shame and disliked looking people in the eye for too long or getting too close to them as it made me feel out of control—vulnerable.
- I had formed my identity around believing cruel words and taking on false beliefs.
- I was confused about who I was and wasn't, so I often projected a different “me” ~~to~~ from who I was created to be.
- Underneath the surface, hidden from most people, was this anger and rage that I couldn't explain.
- I spent a large amount of time in my own world of fantasy to separate myself from the reality of my family. I would make up stories and live in my imagination.

God is faithful and trustworthy with His plan for each person's journey of restoration.

Things didn't change over-night, but gradually, change did happen. ~~ed~~. God's grace is amazing, and I believe He leads people to healing and other necessary change without us having to always point out the areas they need to address in their lives or condemn them. This certainly was how

Comment [Rachel Th34]: Amen!

God worked in my life during the early days. I was trying to find my way forward, and there were many areas that needed addressing. But love and grace ~~is~~are what softened my heart to the Holy Spirit and ~~lead~~ to changes, not condemnation.

I am grateful that ~~people~~Christians accepted me and did not take me on as a project to fix but simply loved me. One Sunday night at church, while I was still drinking and doing other things, I felt the Holy Spirit tell me, “~~d~~Daughter, you don’t need to drink like that, you don’t need to do that. ~~H~~Let me in, honour me with your body and life.” After that, I just simply stopped drinking. ~~not that a~~Alcohol is not bad in itself, ~~was bad~~ but I was using it in a wrong way, so for a period of time I totally stopped drinking all alcohol. I felt that night God showed me how it saddened His heart that I drank too much and ~~how~~that I was worth looking after. I am so glad it was God ~~that~~who revealed to me that I needed to change! In many areas of my life it was God ~~that~~who spoke to me first about the need to change, the majority of Christians around me just simply loved me along the way. Many of them will never know the impact they had on me or what I was going through at the time, but the way they displayed God’s heart to me was life-changing.

The keys I will share in the chapters to come are. I believe, ~~are~~ helpful for anyone who has been through abuse of any type, though they (~~but~~ are definitely not limited to this and are will be helpful for anyone in their life journey!) You may have experienced a similar story to mine of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse that left your heart broken, or you may have been raped or sexually abused by a neighbour or family member, and this has left you devastated, unable to move into all that God desires for you. Or you may have experienced the pain of loss through a loved one dying, a divorce, or any ~~mat~~anner of heart-breaking events that may have left your heart less than whole. What ~~ever~~ they your brokenness is, God has the power and the desire to heal

Comment [Rachel Th35]: Very well said!

it. This is true in our all of our lives. ~~the brokenness in all of our lives.~~ The journey began for me many years ago, and I can look back and say with confidence that God is the healer of the brokenhearted.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”

—Isaiah 61:1–3

Chapter Three: A Restored Overcomer

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.”

—Psalm 28:7

Many of us say we want to be free, to be whole, to live a life no longer bound by our past, yet the number who walk free is so small. Why is that? I can't help but wonder if one reason is that our restoration lies in our own hands. It is a choice that we are responsible for. Restoration doesn't come to us because we wish for it enough, tell people we want to be free, or sit thinking how good it would be. Nor does it also doesn't come just from just being prayed for enduring altar calls or by having the pastor over for lunch!

Restoration comes from choosing to have courage, determination, and commitment to walk the road to our freedom. Often, however, Taking personal responsibility to put the time into building our relationship with God and applying the things He asks us to do is often not something we want to hear about, let alone do. It is hard work, it takes time, and it can be ever so painful as our soul faces the past in order to build the future. God's responsibility is to supply the power and strength we need for that journey, but He can-not do this if we are just passively watching life go by.

Even so, if we will take our responsibility, He will do His part in ways we can't imagine.

He promises that He will counsel and watch over us:

Comment [Rachel Th36]: This serves as a transition and introduction to the Bible verses. See what you think of it :).

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. (Psalm 32:8)

He will strengthen us:

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10, NKJV)

He will be our refuge:

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. (Psalm 9:9–10)

We do not need to walk the journey of restoration alone without God's Spirit helping us, but we do need to walk—God can't do what He has given us responsibility to do.

A number of years ago, God showed me some things I hadn't seen before about the journey of restoration. My focus, like that of a lot of people, was on applying God's principles to my life, and as I did so, I was experiencing considerable freedom, but not *total* freedom. He showed me how that many people are over-comers, —having overcome abuse, alcohol, divorce, or any number of issues so that now they can live without ~~them~~ those things dominating their

lives. But not many respond to His God's invitation to become restored overcomers. A Restored Over-Comer or understand the power of what this is means.

~~According to the Merriam-Webster~~ gives the following means for the words restore/restoration: ~~dictionary the meanings for restore/restoration refer to some of the following:~~

1. The act of restoring; renewal, revival, or reestablishment
2. The state or fact of being restored
3. A return of something to a former, original, normal or unimpaired condition
4. Restitution of something taken away or lost
5. Something that is restored, as by renovating
6. A reconstruction or reproduction of an ancient building, extinct animal, or the like, showing it in its original state
7. A putting back into a former position, dignity etc.

~~So in~~ a nutshell, restore means "to give or bring back to the original condition." God's heart is that we all would live as He originally created us to be—whole. Restoration is the process that leads us to this state.

A Restored Over-comer is someone who not only overcomes the past but is restored from it. God's Spirit works within their lives to bring them back to being the original person they were always meant to be. They Restored overcomers face the truth of the past and go through a restoration process, not just a building over ~~the~~ top of the past. Building over something or on top of something else that exists is not restoration. Restoration happens when

Comment [Rachel Th37]: Well said!

Comment [Rachel Th38]: Again, well said :). This makes me think of Isaiah 58:12: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

~~something~~ the existing structure is stripped back and all the blemishes and weaknesses are seen and attended to before ~~the structure~~ is ~~then~~ returned ~~back~~ to its original glory. Restoration doesn't mean there is no imperfection, but it does mean the original is seen and displayed the way it was always intended to be.

I remember being on ~~f~~Face-book and reading someone's comment that they were painting an old oak dresser. ~~In~~ their words, they were restoring it. This is not restoration (besides the fact ~~it painting~~ is a terrible thing to do to oak!), as they were simply doing a bit of a sanding and then painting over the original with a colour of paint never intended for the dresser. While the dresser may ~~have~~ looked nice enough painted, it will forever ~~be~~ hiding the original and beautiful piece of furniture it was meant to be. The true beauty and value of the oak wooden dresser ~~was~~ has been hidden. What the ~~oak~~ dresser was created to look like (to be) ~~was~~ being covered over with something not true to what the dresser actually is. This same approach is often used by Christians when we try to "paint" over the past rather than strip it back to allow true restoration to happen.

When we apply the meaning of restoration in the context of God's heart towards us, I believe it means something like this: He wants to:

~~God's heart is to restore us, this means He wants to:~~

- ~~Return the core of our heart to the original, normal, or unimpaired~~ state it was meant to be in place it was meant to be.
- ~~To r~~Resituate that which has been lost or taken from us through brokenness.
- ~~He wants to r~~Renovate our heart—strip it back and bring it back to its original glory and purpose for which He purposed it to be
- ~~He wants to p~~Place us back to our former position before brokenness entered our hearts.

- ~~To b~~Bring us back to a place of dignity, not shame or brokenness.

The very foundation of our hearts needs to be restored before we can be restored overcomers. ~~A Restored Over-Comer~~. It was never God's intent for us to just build over brokenness and seal it off in an attempt to stop it coming into our future. Yet that is what many people do without realizing it, and they go on to declare they have ~~over-over~~come the past. Settling for just-living God's principles over ~~the~~-top of brokenness is in effect pushing the voice of brokenness aside before it has been properly heard and healed. By doing this, we do not allow for God's full restoration work to be done within us. We are simply "painting" over the past. We may look good, and others may not even notice that the core of who we are ~~is~~has not been restored. But God and the deepest part of our hearts will always know. We will not be able to live to our full potential or freedom.

The "over-comer" approach does work, and it brings some great freedom. ~~That~~ is why even those who are not yet Christians ~~who~~but who apply some of the principles of God can walk in a degree of freedom from the past. But ~~this~~it is second best to the path of being a restored overcomer. ~~A Restored Over-comer~~ which brings true lasting freedom.

My own journey towards realizing what being a restored overcomer. ~~A Restored Overcomer~~ was began when God showed me I had saturated my life in His ~~w~~Word; ~~I~~ and was living by His principles, which allowed me to be an over-comer, and that while this was good, it was not all He had for me. He told me ~~how~~that He was bringing me to a time where I needed to stop, be still, and face the painful truth of what had actually happened in my past and the impact it continued to have ~~which I continued to experience~~ through any encounters with my family as an adult. He showed me ~~T~~hat He had established a strong foundation of love within me so that I

could ~~in order for me to~~ now stop and face the pain which resided at a much deeper level within my heart ~~without being destroyed by it as He restored the core of my heart, so He could restore the core of my heart without me being destroyed with the pain in the process.~~ I was ready for the next step, which would bring the deeper restoration that my heart longed for. I didn't really understand what He meant, but I knew that what was about to happen would be significant. I had to face the truth about the brokenness and rejection I went through and was continuing to experience through my family in order to truly be set free. He wanted to heal the core of who I was, not just the surrounds of my heart.

At this stage I was a strong Christian, significantly involved in ministry at my church and ~~was~~ living in considerable freedom, but now I realize it was nowhere near the freedom God intended for me. God's grace and love ~~was~~were carrying me. I wasn't seen by others as a "broken or needy person," and I wasn't struggling in any major way. Yet I ~~still~~ knew in my heart that somehow I wasn't experiencing all God's best. I wasn't free in the deepest part of my heart. I knew God had more for me than I was experiencing.

As God began to ask me to open this next level within my heart, He had me pause to stop and remember how much He had already done within my life before taking me onwards. He wanted me to know I wasn't going backwards but forward into greater freedom, even though the time ahead was going to be painful. He showed me He had started my journey of restoration all those years ago ~~with~~by focusing me on the things I could understand more easily, and He had built in me a revelation of His love that I was going to need more than ever to get through the journey ahead. I knew how to live by His principles and out of a close relationship with Him. But what was incredibly difficult for me was facing the truth of how bad the past had really been, and that was the very thing He was now asking of me. He wanted to lift the lid off my heart and look

deep within it with me. This was the only way for me to become a restored overcomer.~~A~~

~~Restored Over-comer.~~

~~I had over come the past but I had not been restored completely. God wanted me to face the truth of the extent of the brokenness and rejection I had gone through and continued to experience in my relationship with my family. The only way I~~ could truly be set free was to face the extent of the brokenness and rejection I had gone through and was still experiencing. ~~is was the only way I could truly be set free.~~ I was still living in bondage to my past and present, ~~but also the present~~ and He wanted me to know it. Knowing the truth would set me free; being ignorant of it would continue to hold me in bondage. The reality was I was naïve about the degree of work God wanted to do within me. ~~I and~~ did not really realize how much of the core of who I was still wasn't whole. I tend to think I am not the only one who has ever walked the planet sincerely naive about the degree of work God wanted to do within my heart!-. But by remaining open and honest with God, the fortunate thing is that He can show any of us what we need to see.-

~~For this process to happen a~~ crucial element of this process was sharing the journey with ~~someone~~others who were sensitive to God's spirit and skilled at helping me ~~to~~ work through the issues within my heart. It also meant sharing some things I had never talked about. Silence is very powerful and locks up the healing process, but sharing with the right people leads forward into a future that is free. ~~Now I~~ looking back, I see how obvious it is that unless I had become free to talk in more depth about the abuse and pain, I could not really testify to what God had done in my life. ~~how could I testify of what God had done in my life.~~ I know I wouldn't be writing this book, and I wouldn't have taken many other steps I have taken over recent years. It was hard for me to share, as it is for most people working through any form of abuse, as~~because~~

Comment [Rachel Th39]: Just tightening up and cutting repetition a bit here. See what you think :).

shame is ~~like~~ a poison that ~~takes has taken~~ over your whole life. Talking and sharing with God was safe and something I did not find hard, but sharing with others was very difficult. When this process began, I could talk in general statements about my childhood and family, but still not in specifics. The reality is, though, that God uses people. We are not meant to go it alone. God works in such a way that He brings greater freedom only when we share with others, not by leaving ~~it things just~~ with Him alone. I honestly had no idea of the degree of freedom I was about to experience by ~~beginning to share~~ sharing specifics rather than global generalizations about my growing-up years and family life.

Comment [Rachel Th40]: See how you feel about the transition here. As always, you are free to reject or rewrite this.

In his epistle, James writes about the need to share our lives with one another. Although he refers specifically to confessing our sins, the purpose and heart behind this is that we are not to live isolated and silent on matters of the heart that need to be shared in order to find healing and restoration:

Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart]. The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]. (James 5:16 AMP)

~~While this scripture in James is referring to confessing our sins I do believe the principle and heart behind it is about sharing our lives with one another. Not living isolated and not keeping silent on matters of the heart that need to be shared for the purpose of us finding healing and restoration.~~

If people don't know our struggles, ~~then~~ how can they be supportive, be prayerful, and keep a loving eye out for us? God is all about relationships!; ~~y~~Yes, our relationship with Him is the most important ~~relationship~~ we will ever have, but ~~this~~ it was never meant to be at the expense of healthy relationships with others.

Different personality types need different things on their road to healing, which is why God hasn't given us a formula to follow, ~~for the journey of restoration~~. As you have heard me say repeatedly ~~in this book~~ already, I discovered ~~very earlier~~ early on in my journey how loved, valued, and adored I was by God, and this opened my heart to Him. But trusting people and sharing my heart with them was incredibly hard and has taken much longer. When God gave me the invitation to become a restored overcomer, ~~A Restored Over Comer~~ it meant I would have to allow others in to a deeper level of my heart. ~~†~~This challenged my lack of trust. ~~One of the hardest things for me to do was truly face the extent of what had gone on in my childhood but also what had continued into adulthood with the way my family functioned.~~ I was scared that I would not be believed, and I also struggled a lot with a false sense of responsibility towards my family. ~~—~~. A sense that as a mature Christian I should not ever talk about my family's struggles and sins, as it could make them look bad. I desperately didn't want to do anything that would harm my family or put them in a bad light with others. But my over-focus on this ~~had~~ actually limited my understanding about the restoration process my loving Heavenly Father needed to take me on.

A scripture that God gave me some time before this and at significant times along the way was John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

~~Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)~~

Comment [Rachel Th41]: You've established this pretty clearly already, so I wouldn't repeat it here.

Comment [Rachel Th42]: Because this verse is quite short, I've run it into the text rather than setting it off. This makes for a smoother flow here as well.

Prior to this verse, Jesus ~~is telling~~told the Jews ~~that~~who believed in Him that if they held to His teaching, they really were His disciples. He then ~~goes~~went on to tell them ~~that~~ they ~~will~~would know the truth and it ~~will~~would set them free. Their response ~~is~~was to question Him, saying they ~~are~~were not slaves—meaning they did not need to be set free! Often we are just like this. —“I am not broken.” we say. “I do not need to go back to the past. I am not a slave.”

Comment [Rachel Th43]: Fabulous insight here.

As I have walked the road of restoration, my understanding of how the truth will set us free has grown. Truth, not fact or fantasy, sets us free. Covering up the past, pretending it never happened, or trying to forget it is not letting the truth set us free. I really did know how powerful facing the truth of the past, the pain, and my own response to ~~it~~this was going to be in bringing restoration to my life. Jesus himself is the Truth that sets us free—He is the source of truth, and it is ~~Him that~~He who sets us free from ~~being deceived~~deception about the past, the present, and the future. As we seek God and allow Him to restore us, His perfect truth frees us to be all that God meant us to be.

Accepting God’s invitation to become a restored over-comer can be hindered by beliefs ~~about the process of healing~~ that go unchallenged, ~~about the process of healing~~. Often God’s invitation of restoration goes unheard, unrecognized, out of a belief that God deals with everything all at once. That pretty much as soon as we are saved, we are healed emotionally and ~~then~~ are to get going on our new life, never looking back again. When God tries to get ~~the~~such a person’s attention some years later when He thinks they are ready, His voice is ignored, pushed aside, or even rebuked as being the devil. But if people haven’t faced the truth of ~~what~~ their past ~~is~~ and allowed God’s love into the pain, how can they ever truly be free? Too many people lock

the past away out of a belief that is the right thing to do, misunderstanding God's invitation of restoration as they think ~~it~~ their brokenness has already been dealt with.

I don't know if in a book I ~~could~~ can ever articulate this clearly enough ~~about this so for it to become that it becomes~~ a revelation for you, but my prayer is that in some way, you may begin to see with your eyes open ~~about~~ what God really wants to do within your heart. God may not be asking you to deal with something right now, but that doesn't mean He won't ask later ~~on~~ when He thinks you are ready. ~~Restoration~~ is about being open to what the ~~s~~ Spirit of God wants to do at any stage of our journey through life.

When people try to adopt a formula or method ~~for to approach~~ emotional healing, ~~with~~ they miss the heart of God. This stops God from being able to do His work within people as things are either hurried along or stopped before they ever ~~had~~ have a chance. God does not gloss over anything to do with our hearts, but ~~that doesn't meansometimes~~ He ~~always~~ doesn't ask ~~you~~ us to face the depths of something right now, ~~either~~. The biggest key is learning to be led ~~ad~~ by the Holy Spirit, seeking wise counsel and not adopting a method that allows no room for God to move in His way and His timing.

Comment [Rachel Th44]: Well said!

This ~~is~~ table below is ~~a~~ useful way to show the difference between an over-comer ~~and~~ compared to choosing to become a restored over-comer.

OVERCOMERS	RESTORED OVERCOMERS
Place the w <u>W</u> ord of God over the past.	Let God into the past to see it in conjunction with applying the Word of God into the depths of their hearts.
Refuse to let the past be part of the present.	See the past through the eyes of God so that it doesn't ruin the present.
See the past as something to conquer.	See the past as something God walks them through to freedom, not something to fight to conquer.
Do not allow much time to be spent in the	With God, <u>will</u> go to the depths of their

absolute depths of their heart.	heart for as long as is necessary for healing to take place.
Acknowledge pain but tell it to be quiet and walk away from it.	Allow God to walk them through the pain of the past and out the other side.
Are striving focused.	Are grace and purpose driven.
Want to maintain control—seen as strength.	Leave control with God as know they are weak without Him.

Comment [Rachel Th45]: Really insightful stuff here as well!

~~To be~~ Becoming a restored overcomer ~~A Restored Over-comer~~ involves a process of pain which is not something any of us want. ~~i~~ In fact, most of us spend considerable energy on avoiding emotional pain. We even try to use ~~G~~ godly principles to cover our pain, thinking we are doing the right thing. But if this is done without acknowledging the depth of pain in the first place, it merely covers over our heart's pain for a period of time before it rises up within us again. This is why many people look (or feel) as if they are not going forward even though yet they may be at all the church meetings, reading all the great books, and listening to all the great teaching. It is simply that the depth of their heart is not truly restored as they haven't allowed God to help them process the pain deep within ~~their heart~~.

There are two types of emotional pain:

- The instant pain of a traumatic or ~~difficult~~ situation or ~~event~~ we go through, which is the sharp pain we want to escape from. ~~This~~ This is often destructive pain and can emotionally ~~can~~ destroy part of our hearts.
- ~~Then there is~~ God-allowed pain which comes is ~~is~~ when He brings things up in our hearts for healing, not for harm.

We often muddle these two types of pain and stop ourselves from working through the pain of the past. When pain rises up in us, we think of it as something to extinguish, like a fire, rather than allow ing it to burn in a controlled burn-off. ~~Not A~~all fire is ~~not~~ bad—out-of-control destructive fire is, and it is similar to the pain experienced at the time of traumatic life events. ~~(e.g. abuse)~~. This type of fire or pain does need to be addressed straight away and put out, meaning i.e. the situation has to be stopped. Much damage results from out-of-control fires, and the same is true of painful life events such as abuse.

Controlled burn-offs, on the other hand, are not considered bad fires. They are used to reduce fuel buildup and decrease the likelihood of serious hotter fires. When controlled burning takes place, it stimulates the germination of some ~~of the~~ desirable forest trees, thus renewing the forest. To the uninformed, a controlled burn-off could be a reason to get the fire hose out, ~~to put the fire out~~. But by putting out such a fire, doing so the purpose of the burn-off is hindered, and in turn, this stops the renewal of the forest.

A controlled burn-off is very similar to how God addresses the pain in our hearts. His desire, when He invites us to be restored overcomers, ~~A Restored Over Comer~~ is to do a controlled burn-off. This looks similar to an out-of-control fire at first, but on closer looking, it can be seen to be that it is under control and very purposeful.

When God invites us to allow Him into our hearts to burn off some of the past, it will involve pain~~The same principle used in looking after our forests' applies to how God invites us to allow Him into our hearts to "burn-off" some of the past. The only way to do this involves pain~~—but this type of pain with God is not bad pain. It may look bad and ~~look/feel~~ out of control, but it is not. The pain is part of the journey to wholeness; it is not destructive. Nothing

Comment [Rachel Th46]: I'm not quite clear on the distinction you're drawing here. At first you talk about the emotional response as the fire, but then you switch to talking about the event itself as the fire. Can you clarify this?

Comment [Rachel Th47]: Fantastic analogy.

that is God-purposed is ever destructive, but it does not mean it is easy, comfortable, or pain free.

The fact of pain in restoration sometimes leads to less-than-helpful ways of coping. I'm sure I am not the only one who, as I have journeyed the road towards being a restored overcomer, ~~A Restored Over-Comer~~ used some unhealthy methods to deal with the heart pain that God allowed to rise up at times. There are a number of different unhealthy methods Christians use to avoid facing pain, some of which are significantly more serious than others. Just because someone has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior does not mean they are free from some behaviors yet.

Comment [Rachel Th48]: Some kind of transition is needed here. As always, you're free to rewrite :).

Does any of this non-exhaustive list seem familiar?

- Not being able to just be still—never spending time alone, being restless.
- Overfilling life with watching-movies, playing-X-Box, computer games, socializing, shopping, basically anything that results in hardly ever being at “home” or having time to think.
- Excessive internet use—Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Over-spending and mismanaging finances.
- Being religious and/or legalistic.
- Over-involved in either church life or charity work (while not looking after other areas of life—, i.e. i.e., a lack of balance but hiding it under “good works”) so as to not to have time to think about one’s own life.
- Over-focused on criticizing others—judging them and pointing out their faults.
- Over-dependence on others (as opposed to inter-dependence which is healthy).

- Work~~aholism~~—~~a holic~~—working long hours that, while you can justify them, are really ~~are~~ a way of avoiding facing what your heart is saying.
- Controlling others and life events as much as possible.
- Avoiding any real heart connection with others, including people at church (withdrawing).
- Excessive sleeping, always complaining of being tired so ~~to as~~ not to have to do things or be at certain ~~thing~~events. (~~#~~Normally the person doing this is not aware of the~~ir~~ behavior and genuinely feels tired.)
- Any number of life~~—~~controlling behaviors which can range from anorexia, to constantly over-eating (causing ~~obesity~~people to be over weight) to other serious self~~—~~harming behaviors, such as inflicting pain on oneself with razors or knives. I would like to briefly mention that I am aware that ~~sometimes~~ people do not always like having over-eating and being over-weight associated with ~~under the name~~ life~~—~~controlling behaviors alongside what we consider more serious issues of self~~—~~harm. ~~But~~ ~~B~~being over-weight because ~~offrom~~ *eating too much and* consuming *the wrong types of foods* controls a person's life. It covers up a heart issue of some sort, stopping us from walking in true freedom.
- Pornography, promiscuity.
- Excessive alcohol use, gambling.
- Taking illicit drugs.
- Hobbies or sports that become all~~—~~consuming and do not allow for time to stop and face the state of our hearts.
- Being manipulative in relationships.
- Living in a daydream/fantasy world in your thought life.

- Subject to angry outbursts, adult temper tantrums.
- Being defensive, ~~and~~ the person people always have to “pussy-foot” around out of fear of ~~your~~ reaction.

Some of these things (e.g. sports) are not bad in themselves, but when they become what consumes us and ~~when~~ are used unconsciously or consciously as a way to avoid facing our heart's pain, then they are unhealthy. I know ~~that~~ in reading this list many people may feel uncomfortable or even angry at the things mentioned as ~~you~~ they recognize ~~your~~ their own behaviors within ~~it~~, ~~that list~~. Please be reassured you are not alone in this! ~~and a~~ Any of us who have been there or are there do not condemn you, ~~w~~ We are all on the journey towards healing and wholeness. ~~Condemnation is not on God's heart. Conviction, on the other hand, is. The list is not to condemn any of us, that is definitely not God's heart, but conviction on the other hand is.~~ Part of our healing journey is ~~being~~ honesty about where we are ~~at~~ so we can move forward with God's power. To hide from the truth of our life and ~~the~~ behaviors ~~that~~ we exhibit will only hinder us from walking the road of restoration.

It was only as God ~~showed~~ taught me about being ~~a restored overcomer~~ ~~A Restored Over-~~ ~~Comer~~ that I had a revelation about heart pain and its purpose. Heart pain is often God-allowed, and ~~it~~ comes to our attention ~~so that we can~~ for us to take the opportunity for full and complete healing ~~to take place~~ by facing it. That's a Holy Spirit controlled burn-off!

I have shared a lot about the importance of facing the pain in our hearts, but I do want to give some caution ~~with~~ about this. Some personality types are more negative in their outlook on life and look at a glass as half-empty before they ~~w~~ could ever see it was actually half-full. For these types of people, too much time thinking and looking into the past without a strong

connection to God and assistance to move forward can be detrimental. God's plan is not for us to ~~be~~ so intensely looking at our hearts and facing the pain that we a.) ~~S~~stop living life, or b.) ~~B~~ecome someone who carries a victim-type persona. Some people spend so long focused on the depth of pain that they don't build ~~or have~~ a foundation they can climb onto ~~on which to climb up and on to~~ so they can walk on free. The goal is always to walk towards wholeness and away from brokenness.

God's heart is that all would experience restoration and freedom. But many people, when faced with the opportunity to begin to do so, don't really want to be free. The brokenness is all they have known, ~~it~~ feels strangely safe and so familiar that to walk into freedom seems too overwhelming. No one can convince, coerce, or force you to take the road of restoration, but my prayer is that you would hear God's heart and take courage to walk onwards to wholeness. None of the behaviors above bring us healing or help us ~~to~~ journey to wholeness. They are a poor substitute for freedom and a healthy emotional life. Believe me when I say that, from my personal experience, I know without a shadow of doubt that being whole and choosing freedom is worth any struggle it takes ~~that there is~~ to get there!

When I was writing this chapter, I felt the last word ~~for this chapter is was~~ best left to something I feel is on God's heart for you:

"I love you and long for you more than you will ever know. I see your heart, and I see at times you try to turn away, thinking you need to hide from me. I know you are scared to show me what is inside—you feel ashamed and confused, not really understanding what is going on within your heart. Beautiful child, I do not condemn, I hold out to you hands of grace, hands wide open, ready ~~for to~~ caring for your heart. I am giving you an opportunity to walk with mMe, mMy son, mMy daughter. I want you to live life fully alive, not continuing with this struggle.

.....!Let ~~m~~M~~e~~ in_.....!Let ~~m~~M~~e~~ bring healing, let ~~m~~M~~e~~ help. I love you, I always have and always will. I will not force you to places your heart is not ready to go. I simply offer you today an invitation to come on the journey with ~~m~~M~~e~~, the journey to wholeness, the journey to the freedom your heart has dreameded of. The journey of being a restored overcomer. ~~A Restored Over Comer, w~~Will you come?"

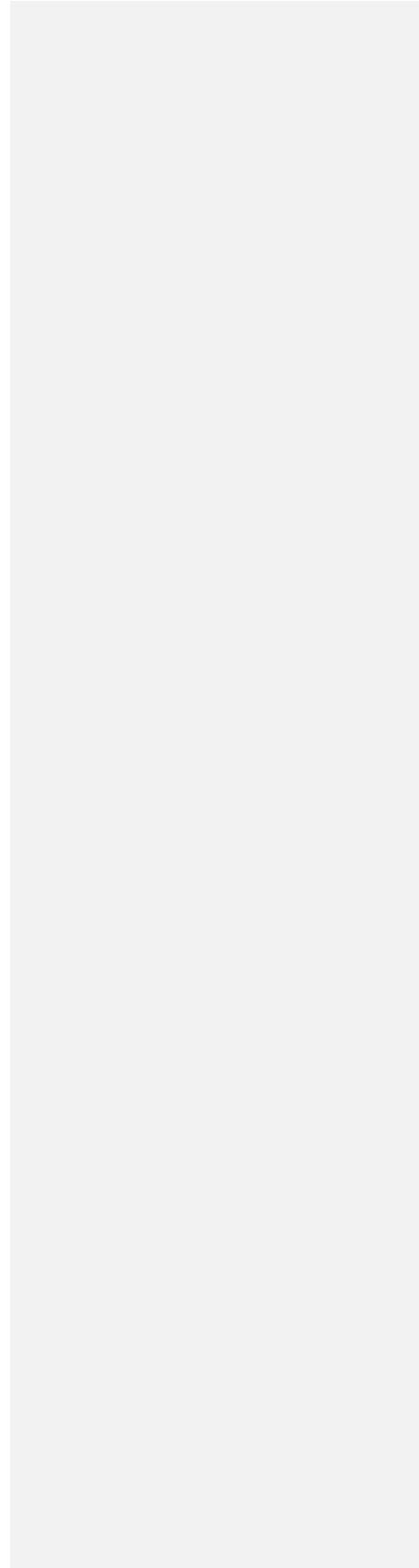
Photo page

Birth photo

7 years old

11 years old

Teenage photo....



~~SectionPart Two: Keys to Restoration~~Essential Keys to Becoming a Restored Overcomer

Comment [Rachel Th49]: I've changed the title here to match what's in your table of contents. You can change both back if you like :).

~~The things I share i~~In the chapters ahead, ~~I~~ will share ~~are~~ what I consider to be ~~essential~~major keys that have helped me to become ~~a restored overcomer.~~A Restored Overcomer. It has not been one isolated thing but a combination of ~~keys~~these together that have helped me in my journey of restoration. I believe that these keys can apply to all of our lives whether we have had a difficult start to life or a fantastic one. ~~It isn't always those who have had the seemingly worse start in life or the most trauma who aren't living free. I have come across many people from great backgrounds, with no hidden trauma or underlying reason to not live free, yet they are living far below what God intends as His best for them. People can come from the most amazing families and be very loved, yet not be walking in freedom. It is a myth to think it is just people who have been hurt or who have gone through some sort of trauma who struggle to walk free.~~ At any time, a challenge ~~could~~may happen in our ~~life~~lives that could lead us away from freedom. So for those of you who consider yourselves to have had a fairly stable and loving upbringing, please don't stop reading—I know these principles will help us all. Unless we establish and maintain sound principles to live our ~~lives~~life by, any one of us could end up walking into restrictions that will affect our ability to live in the freedom God desires.

Comment [Rachel Th50]: I've just rearranged a bit here to create a better flow.

~~It isn't always those that seemingly have had the worse start in life or traumatic things happen that aren't living free. I have come across many people from great backgrounds, no hidden trauma or underlying reason to not live free yet they are living far below what God intended as his best for them. People can come from the most amazing family and be very loved yet not be walking in freedom. It is a myth to think it is just people who have been hurt or gone through some sort of trauma in their lives that struggle to walk free.~~

The things I share in the chapters ahead are basic, so simple that most likely many of you ~~will~~ know them already. I am not trying to introduce some amazing new formula or ~~latest-five-~~ step program~~me~~ to wholeness. But I ~~do want~~am wanting to challenge and encourage each of us to live a pro-active life, embracing all God provides for us so that we can live restored and in freedom. God offers all of us a life of freedom,~~of and~~ restoration, but it involves our time and effort to grab hold of His principles with both hands in order to experience this. My prayer is that you will be challenged and inspired, like I am daily, to apply these keys to how you live your life. I want freedom and wholeness in God for my life, for every season, for every day. Don't you? ~~Amen.~~

Chapter Four: Short-Term Fling or Long-Term Commitment?

One of the greatest tragedies in the Christian world is the number of short-term flings people attempt with God without having a revelation that it is a long-term commitment that God longs to have with us. Short-term flings are never satisfying, and they always lead to pain and disappointment. Long-term commitment, on the other hand, is all about building a strong, secure future together through all the seasons of life.

Comment [Rachel Th51]: GREAT analogy.

~~The truth could not have set me free. To have the truth set me free could never have happened~~ without my purposefully building a long-term committed relationship with my Lord and Savior. ~~Our~~ The human soul and spirit were designed for a relationship with Him that is deep, meaningful, constant, and long-term. ~~We don't need~~ Not a sporadic, sporadic occasional time alone with Him, but a purposeful commitment to draw close to Him on a regular basis to keep building into that relationship for eternity.

Nothing else is ever going to be as important as ~~our~~ the personal relationship we build with our Lord and Savior. I know that the place I am in emotionally and spiritually today is directly related to my constant, long-term relationship with Jesus. I also know that when I minimize this, I do not remain strong, whole, or content in my life. The evidence of this has been obvious in my life. ~~When~~ When I start to pull away from regularly being with Him on my own, my heart gets hardened, my outlook on life changes, and my disbelief grows stronger than my faith. Nothing will ever compare to the peace, joy, love, and strength I have in my life when I allow Jesus into my day-to-day life on a constant, consistent basis. It is the revelation of this that makes me hungry and desperate to pursue a strong relationship with Jesus.

Being a mediocre Christian and occasionally having a short-term love fling with God is not enough. I want a passionate, strong, and deep long-term relationship with the One who has totally transformed my life. Anything less than that is empty and meaningless. We need to build into our relationship with Jesus so that we will not only last the distance but flourish and thrive, therefore impacting our world with God's love. It is from this intimate relationship with Jesus that ~~the ability to influence the world positively can will then~~ flow ~~an ability to influence the world positively.~~

The enemy knows the power of truth; He knows that if we remain close to God, ~~that~~ we will walk into freedom, bearing fruit. John 15:4 in the NKJV ~~bible~~ says, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” By abiding in God, we will be more able to resist Satan's pull and purpose to bring destruction and devastation to our lives. He knows that we are powerful influencers for good if we come from a strong place of relationship with God. He also knows ~~that~~ if we are distracted away from a long-term commitment to God, we are weak and a tool in ~~his~~ Satan's hand to influence our world negatively. Yet many of us live seemingly unaware and ignorant of this. The ~~b~~Bible says to be alert, ~~telling us in~~ in 1 Peter 5:8 ~~NIV (1984)~~⁸ to “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

We can-not afford to live on last week's conversation with God or allow our hunger for Him to be diverted to other things. Nothing can ever satisfy or sustain us like our relationship with God, but we all certainly try to substitute this with other things at times. This time in history is not a time to be mediocre in our relationship with ~~our Creator, Savior, and Lord.~~ God. If we do not build a long-term committed relationship with God, there is no hope of us becoming restored

Comment [Rachel Th52]: Just looking to avoid repetition here, and also to add a bit more punch to the sentence. See what you think :).

from things in our past. We ~~also~~ won't even know how to resist the devil's plan to rob, kill, and destroy our life and those around us ~~that~~ whom God has placed for us to influence with His love.

There is no formula or ~~a~~ method ~~on~~ for how to build this long-term commitment with God, and I do not pretend I have succeeded fully at doing this all the time. But I do want to share eight things that have helped me to draw close to God and allow Him into my heart to bring healing and restoration. I hope they encourage you as you seek to hunger after God.

1.) Taking ~~€~~ Time to ~~s~~ Stop and ~~b~~ Be ~~a~~ Alone

One of the traps ~~for~~ of our modern lifestyle is making life so busy that we don't take the time we were created to need to be still and alone with God. We need to ask our ~~selves~~ self why this is. ~~w~~ Why do we ~~fill~~ up our lives so full we don't have time to stop? Is it because if we stopped, we would have to face our heart and process some heart issues? How many of us are busying our lives to avoid facing our hearts s out of fear and misunderstanding ~~about~~ of how God sees us? Why would any of us not want to stop and spend time with a loving Savior other than ~~except if we are~~ that we are not carrying a revelation about ~~whom~~ He is and His love towards ~~s~~ us? Adam and Eve hid from God because they were ashamed of their hearts s and misunderstood how God saw them despite their sin. We can give all the excuses, and they sound very believable as to why we are not spending time alone with God, but I believe the bottom line is we are just like Adam and Eve. We are scared to stop and be alone because we are unsure of the state of our hearts. Too many of us are unsure of how God sees us and do not truly believe He loves us deeply and wants to spend time with us. We also like to take matters into our own hands and think we can function quite well without God, like He is an optional extra but not essential to our ~~li~~ ves. ~~fe~~.

Unless we commit and choose to spend time alone with God, we will only ever grow so far, and I believe that eventually, no matter how many times we go to church, we will go backwards in our walk with God. If we are serious about growing in God and becoming a Restored Overcomers, then there is no substitute for time alone with God.

The greatest key to living our life well is building a strong, deep, and honest relationship with the eOne who saved us. This is a key whether you have come from brokenness or not. We do need a balanced life of work, family, friends, and fun, but not at the expense of time with God. We live at in a great time, eOpportunities are everywhere, and there is lots that grabs our attention. bBut the risk of our with the time in history we live in is that we dwon't slow down and spend time alone building a relationship with our Savior &and Lord. We all too often do everything else, then tack God on at end, squeezing Him into a few moments of our day or week. I am sure I am not the only one who has done that his before, only to find myself less than satisfied.

In James 4:8 it really cannot say it any clearer than it does: "Come near to God and he will come near to you." We need God to be near us for us to be transformed, for our lives to go grow and continue to go forward. Our relationship with God is unique to each one of us, though. How you spend time with Him will be different to than how I do. me; tThe time, the place, how you structure or don't structure your time with Him isn't something to compare or rate yourself up against others. on. God isn't impressed with the length, the hour, or the method, as He isn't performance driven, but relationship focused. All He is looking for is you and time with you, so you can relax—this is not one of those chapters where you are left thinking the only way to know God is to get up at 3 a.m. and pray for 5five hours! That's great if that's you, but that really isn't

any more special than the busy mum who meets with God over a coffee ~~while~~when the kids are finally asleep!

It isn't the method that is important, but the key ingredients ~~that~~ we use to draw close to God. Cultivating our own personal relationship with God ~~is what~~ brings greater and greater freedom to our soul and spirit. It allows God into everything, making room and for Him to share with us what's important.

2.) The ~~h~~Holy ~~s~~Spirit

Cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit has been a major key in my walk with God. Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit to be a comforter and counselor:-

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever. (John 14:16, AMP)

In the natural, you can't benefit from a counselor just by knowing that ~~he exists, they exist, y~~ You actually have to go along to the appointment, ~~get~~ to share with the ~~counselor~~ and listen to ~~him, them~~. The same is with the Holy Spirit. We live in a time when ~~we~~ we have many great churches preaching the ~~w~~Word in such a way that the congregation get real life keys on how to live life successfully. People are not just taught about what happened in biblical times and then left wondering how it all relates to their day-~~to~~-day life. They are given relevant keys they can apply to their ~~daily living, day to day living~~. We have excellent courses, great teaching resources ~~available~~, and many great Christian program~~s~~ broadcasting on radio and television that help

us immeasurably. This is all fantastic, but it is ~~not~~ never meant to replace our own personal relationship with the Holy Spirit and Him revealing more of Himself to us. Other teachers and resources ~~They~~ are simply tools to point us to Him so we will seek Him for His voice and instruction to us personally for our own lives. ~~Life~~.

I don't know about you, but I am not satisfied with only ever hearing other's revelations from the Holy Spirit. I want my own! Sadly, many people today come to "get" something on Sunday and then go home, never spending any further time with God until the following Sunday comes around. How can this help ~~some~~ anyone ~~to~~ get to know the Holy Spirit? If we really do want to be free and, see our ~~life~~ lives transformed, then we need to commit to spend regularly daily time with the Holy Spirit. ~~w~~ We need to get to know Him. If we won't do this, then I believe we ~~actually~~ don't actually really want to have our ~~lives~~ lives transformed. Transformation involves us doing something; it is not a passive thing that rains down from heaven with no effort on our part!

Some people struggle with disbelief that the Holy Spirit wants to minister personally to them. There are many reasons for this, one of which is that some people have witnessed things that ~~were supposed~~ have ~~suppose~~ to have been the Holy Spirit which have left them wondering what truly was the ~~Holy~~ Spirit and what was hyped-up emotion. When they have seen no fruit in people's lives, confusion and fear about the Holy Spirit has hindered any openness to Him ministering to them. I think this is very sad and not at all what God wants for any of us. The Holy Spirit has brought a dimension of healing and power within my life through some significant experiences. It concerns me that people would miss something powerful from the Holy Spirit out of lack of belief or understanding of His heart to minister to us. It has saddened me so much when I have heard of stories of things that have ~~lead~~ people away from His ~~s~~ Spirit

~~instead of to Him, not to His spirit. Hence, €~~ This is why I feel so strongly to write about the beautiful work of the Holy Spirit that I know and have witnessed.

The Holy Spirit is a person, and is as significant a part of the ~~€~~Trinity as Jesus and ~~God~~the Father—the Trinity—it is three in one, each with a different role. ~~His~~The Spirit's role is to comfort, to counsel, and to guide us, all of which ~~is~~are ministry. He longs to minister to us and walk with us through the journey of restoration. We don't have Jesus living with us on planet earth, but we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and amongst us.

Getting to know the Holy Spirit in a real and personal way and experiencing His power has transformed my life, bringing significant healing. I thought it would help to share a few significant experiences I had early on in my Christian walk with the Holy Spirit. In some ways, I ~~probably~~ should probably call them encounters, because they not only took me by surprise, ~~d~~ but they were so powerful I was left without any doubt about how powerful He is! Over a nine-month period, for reasons I can-not explain except that the Holy Spirit obviously had a plan to saturate my life with His love and ~~His~~ healing power, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit to such a degree that it impacted those around me as they watched ~~watehing~~ what was happening within my life.

It started when, along with some friends, I ~~went~~was to ~~go along to~~ a conference aptly named The Father Loves You. It wasn't a massive conference of ~~thousands+000s~~, (there were probably only about 150 people), but to this day I have never seen a more powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit. ~~would be the most powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit I have ever seen.~~ It wasn't hyped up; it simply was the Holy Spirit pouring His love out. Before I went along, I was sitting at home praying, and God said to me, "I am about to bring healing into your life far above what any counseling will do. Helen, I am going to pour my love out into your

heart to bring ~~some~~ more healing.” I will never forget it, as I knew that what was about to happen would forever change me. Yet I had no preconceived idea of how God would do what He said.

At the conference, ~~W~~we had beautiful, intimate worship followed by teaching about the Father heart of God. I was sitting there just taking notes and minding my own business when suddenly I felt my legs shaking. This was only the second time I had experienced anything like this, and have to say at first I ~~thought~~wondered what is~~was~~ wrong with me. Having a professional health background, I quickly went ~~quickly~~ through a mental check-list of my “symptoms” to consider what could possibly be wrong with me! Part-way through my careful check-list, I felt an overwhelming joy and desire to laugh. Containing myself was almost impossible as the joy threatened to just ooze out of me. Being~~As~~ someone who was at that point still quite timid and certainly didn't~~not~~ wanting any attention being~~brought~~ to myself, this~~it~~ was slightly ironic that here I was almost making a scene!;

Thankfully, it was time for personal ministry at the front for those ~~that~~who wanted it, and suddenly everywhere were people experiencing the overwhelming joy of the Holy Spirit and being deeply ministered to. Throughout the day of the conference I experienced significant ministry from the Holy Spirit. A large proportion of the time during worship and sometimes while people prayed for me, I experienced the Holy Spirit in a way I ~~had~~-never had before. I could feel hHis physical presence and had such joy flooding my heart that I could not explain. Many times I couldn't stand up and had to just lie on the floor while a flood of tears and laughter welled up inside me and over-flowed. This began what was a nine-month period of encounters both on my own in my bedroom and at church where the Holy Spirit seemed to be just saturating me with love.

I share this not because the se manifestations are something to pursue or glorify in; ~~themselves as they are~~were ~~only~~ simply an outward sign of what was far more significant; ~~which was~~ the Holy Spirit doing a major work within my soul and spirit. How grateful I am to God for this life-changing experience! Without a doubt, a massive change happened within my soul as a result of this time. My understanding of the Father heart of God and His longing for the best for me grew and has become one of the strengths of my faith. I know with no doubt that I am deeply loved and ~~how~~ precious ~~I am~~ to God. I know that He is my ~~f~~Father and that the past has not robbed me of knowing real love or the Father heart of real love. I have gained so much more than anything I missed out on as a child. The love of God has transformed my life.

Sometimes I feel like I am bursting inside with joy when I think of God and His love toward me. What the Holy Spirit did in me during that time wasn't a one-minute wonder but a life-changing encounter. Looking back now, I ~~realis~~ze that without that encounter, God couldn't have built the solid foundation within me of His love which ~~then~~ many years later allowed Him to go deeper into my pain to bring further healing.

As I have already expressed, I believe that God's plan was to establish the security within me of His love and solid ~~ityness~~ so that when it came time for me to process and share through counsel~~ing~~ more of what had happened to me as a child and ~~/~~teenager, I was able to cope. The Holy Spirit empowered me with love and comfort just as His role is to do. I couldn't orchestrate the pouring out of God's love into my heart, strive to make it happen, or arrange how the Spirit of God should minister this to me. It was totally out of my hands, and it was beautiful.

If I had tried to deal with the degree of pain within me prior to this time, I know I wouldn't have managed to function in my job and day-to-day life. God's s establishing such a

strong revelation of love within my heart meant that when I began to face more of the pain, I didn't flip out, freak out, or run away.

I have seen many people ~~unable to~~ cope with dealing with things ~~of~~in their past, and I have seen many people push ~~people~~others that now is the time to ~~do so~~.deal with the past. This is not always wise. I believe that from the moment we are saved, ~~that~~our past is being dealt with by God (if we are open to Him) and that there is timing as to when He actually wants to go deeper. Everyone is different, God doesn't use the same process with every-one, and He doesn't use a set formula. As long as people pursue a personal relationship with God and do exactly what He is saying when He says to do it, I believe healing can and will happen. You can't fast-track the process or force healing. Emotional healing is a journey which has many stops and starts along the way, but the common denominator is always the Holy Spirit at work.

3.) Worship

A key throughout my journey of restoration (and one that I believe is related to why I have experienced the Holy Spirit the way I have) has been worship that involved singing to God or listening to songs. I know ~~that~~these are ~~is~~ not the only way to worship God, but I specifically want to share about the power of music. Psalm 100 commands us:

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless

His name For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. (~~Psalm 100~~-NKJV)

Early on in my Christian walk, I would spend time alone with God and play music while singing my heart out to Him. It didn't matter what it sounded like; what mattered was that I was opening myself up to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him into my heart. Worship softens our hearts and opens us up to hear and receive from God. It also causes our souls to hear the truth of what we are singing; the words of songs are powerful and remind our souls of His truth even when ~~our soul~~~~we don't~~~~doesn't~~ fully understand it yet. That which we focus on, we begin to believe. By speaking (or in this case singing) out His praises and declaring how amazing God was, I was allowing healing to take place in my heart without even really knowing it. ~~#~~Worshipping this way taught me to focus on God, not on my circumstances; it taught me that worship is beyond my past, my feelings, my brokenness, and my current reality. Worship is adoration of ~~my~~your Lord and Savior. By adoring Him, my heart would open to allow His Spirit to work within me, bringing healing.

Comment [Rachel Th53]: Consider using more specific wording here—like “daily time,” or “hours,” or something that gives us a bit more perspective on what degree of time you’re talking about.

Worship is a two-way encounter between us and the Holy Spirit. It honors God and places Him in His rightful place ~~which is~~ over our lives, over brokenness, over every good thing and every difficult thing. It establishes that He is above all things and worthy of praise.

Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and

joy are in his dwelling place. Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. (1 Chronicles 16:23–29)

I remember one day God telling me to learn to worship Him like I was in heaven all the time. Heaven will have a lot of music, a lot of singing, and also times of reflection with no noise—it will have everything. I felt like He was asking ~~for~~ me to choose to always worship Him with an abandoned and devoted heart right now on earth, not to wait to be on my knees with the angels in heaven. Get some practice in now, girl! Worship was something I found myself drawn to; I didn't need a worship leader or a great band. I just needed to be able to sing to Him or even just kneel before Him in silent adoration. This continues today; ~~W~~While I love great worship songs and well-~~led~~ worship where people do sing in tune, I don't rely on that to cause me to enter into praising my Savior. I can't really sing, but in all honesty, I don't care ~~two~~ hoots about what people think anymore! I have so many reasons to worship Him I have chosen ~~to~~ not to hold back. But this all began on my own in my room with no one else around. It was from this very private worship that a strength of intimacy has grown that has helped bring healing to my heart. My public worship in a church environment (~~worship in a church environment~~) is just a small reflection of my time with just God and me. To adore my Savior ~~has~~ ~~cause~~ ~~s~~ my heart to soar, and this has only come from private time with God.

I know without a doubt that cultivating worship time alone with God has brought healing and break-through into my life. I believe we need both public and private worship in order ~~to~~ not just to allow for healing in our lives, life but also to spur our ~~for~~ ongoing growth as ~~a~~ Christians.

4. Journaling

Not everyone will find this ~~to be~~ something that helps them, but I wanted to mention it in this chapter as it helped bring a ~~large~~~~great~~ amount of healing ~~to~~~~in~~ my life. I encourage you to give it a go and see before you decide! It doesn't matter if it isn't something for you. God didn't make us to all be the same, ~~like clones~~ so ~~therefore~~ the tools to our healing ~~won't~~~~aren't~~ all ~~be~~ the same. There is no set way to journal, no method you must keep to. And if it isn't for you, then that's fine, don't do it!

The first fifteen years of being a Christian were ~~a~~ very significant ~~time~~ for me in regards to journaling as a way of processing and bringing God into my world. I would journal sometimes each day, sometimes once a week. I used to share my heart with God through my writing and through this found myself becoming closer to ~~Him, God~~. I would write poems ~~and~~, prayers, share my ugliness, my deepest sorrow, and my greatest joys with Him. Something about writing things down helped me to bring out what was in my heart. ~~J~~Journaling taught me how to open up to God, and considering I ~~had~~ never shared my real heart with anyone, this was a very safe way for me to begin.

By the way, I didn't spend fifteen years writing about all that happened in the past! I would write about the here and now of my life and what I was feeling and experiencing. In dealing with our past pain, we can't just dwell on it and think continually about it; we need to also think of the how and now. Journaling can help with that for many people. ~~For me,~~ ~~J~~journaling ~~for me~~ was more about processing how my life was in the present ~~and~~; how the past influenced that, and bringing God into my world. I discovered a lot about myself in my journaling; I saw themes and became much more in tune with my heart and God's heart toward

me. Some of the time things were quite dark as I processed confusion and struggles within my soul. I ~~would~~ think anyone reading my journal back then would have thought I was maybe never going to make it! But the journaling brought freedom, as it was an outlet for my soul to express that which was locked away within it.

I don't journal today to the degree I did in those first fifteen years; in fact, I probably haven't journalled more than a hand-full of times over the last ~~two~~ years. I write down things when I feel like it, but over recent weeks, I have started to do it more regularly again. I believe we shouldn't ever be doing "have-tos" in our relationship with God or get stuck to the same thing day in and day out, as that sucks life out of what is supposed to be a good thing. That's what I love about building a relationship with God; it changes and grows, and there ~~is~~ are so many ways to cultivate it there is no need for it to get in a rut and boring.

5. Fasting

~~Now~~ This is one I *do* believe is for the majority of us and is not just based on ~~just our~~ personal preference as to whether we establish this in our life or not, so please don't skip ahead! There is no doubt that fasting has had the following impact on me:

- 1.) It has Drawn me closer to God, making me stronger in Him.
- 2.) I hear God more clearly.
- 3.) It has Helped me to let go of the past more easily.
- 2.)4.) It has Allowed me to see things I couldn't see before.
- 3.)5.) It has Bbrought healing into my life.
- 6.) It has Created an deep intimacy with God.

Comment [Rachel Th54]: This section looks a lot at challenges and exceptions, but it doesn't look much at reasons to fast other than naming some of the benefits you've seen. Consider adding a paragraph, after your personal list of benefits, that gives a basic biblical understanding of what fasting is and why we should do it. Give people a real vision for doing this so they're encouraged that it's worth the effort :).

For people struggling with brokenness related to eating, specifically (anorexia and bulimia,) fasting from food is not an area for you at this stage of your journey. It would be counter-productive. I do not encourage you to even remotely consider this as an option for you — ~~—~~ please do not pursue this. But the heart behind fasting is about surrendering ourselves (our flesh) to God's work, so ~~maybe~~ look creatively at some other ideas: ~~—~~ fasting from anything electronic (your iPad, etc.), social media, shopping, going to the movies for a period of time, all are options. ~~and u~~ Use that time instead to seek God.

If you are currently part of a rehabilitation/restoration program, ~~mine~~ then fasting is ~~properly~~ not something for you to be doing at this moment. It can be further down the track when you are more whole and are able to keep from not use going without food for unhealthy reasons. Please seek wisdom on this and counsel from those entrusted to help you in your journey of restoration. The important thing to remember with fasting is that what we are fasting from is to be replaced with time seeking God. Nothing about Christian fasting relates to a diet or controlling our body size.

For ~~For~~ those of us who are not struggling with an eating disorder and are serious about pursuing God and wanting to be restored, then I recommend that fasting becomes part of our journey. There are all sorts of reasons we may give for why we personally can-not fast, but short of it being a genuine medical reasons, it is just that we simply don't want to. I really don't want to offend anyone, yet at the same time I don't want you to miss out on something I know will significantly influence the road to wholeness. This is one area where many of us offer up excuses which we convince ourselves are legitimate, but really it's just our stubborn old flesh not wanting to submit to God in this area. Ouch, I know it hurts hearing that, but if we are prepared

Comment [Rachel Th55]: Just related to eating disorders, or do you have something broader in mind here?

Comment [Rachel Th56]: I've moved this up here for a better flow :).

to look honestly at some solutions to how we can fast (taking into consideration our health situation, our family, and lifestyle, etc), then we may find a way to make it happen. It is a very good idea to get a medical clearance if you have some health concerns. This is about having a wise approach to fasting but at the same time keeping solution-focused despite any real limitations. The old saying “Where there is a will, there is a way” is very true in this scenario. I have to give you an honesty check: as I write this, as I am feeling very challenged to do a New Year’s fast to commit the year we are just about to begin into God’s hands, and quite frankly, I do not want to as I sit here eating my rather nice nut mixture and contemplate the barbeque we are having tonight! There are many reasons for fasting, and while this particular fast will not be around healing and wholeness but on seeking God for the year ahead, it will be just as significant if I obey His prompting to follow through.

I for one love to eat regularly, and I don’t find fasting at all easy or convenient, but the results in my life have far outweighed the temporary battle that goes on between my stomach and mind. Instead of ~~us all~~ allowing every possible reason to stop us fasting, I can’t help but think it would be better if we focused on finding solutions for the genuine times we are limited by something. Here is my attempt at some solutions:

Excuse	Solution
I am pregnant.	Fast from a few of your favourite foods rather than meals, fast from things some of those you are craving, fast from coffee, or from things not related to food. totally not food-related fast from other “favourite” things. Or look at doing the fast as a Daniel Fast.
I am training for a sports competition.	It may not be the best time to plan a fast in when you have this commitment. What about looking to do a fast after your event? Or fast certain foods instead: --- fast from

Comment [Rachel Th57]: Do you want to define this somewhere?

	all sugar foods, soft drinks, chips, chocolate ... all those favourites! Or make this a non-food-related fast.
I have too physical <u>a</u> job.	Unless you work 24/7, then maybe there is a solution!; You could <u>can</u> fast a day or a meal on the days you don't work. Or look at <u>a</u> non-food-related fast.
I get light-headed if I don't eat regularly.	Maybe you could still fast, but you need to watch <u>that</u> you have some regular fuel intake. What about having a banana or some rice crackers (plain) every hour or so (obviously not a banana every hour, or you will feel very unwell!). There are all sorts of solutions that mean you can still fast and are not eating your normal meals. You just have to be organized and write down a plan for how to keep yourself from getting too light-headed. It is important to realize <u>that there is</u> some light-headedness that comes from fasting anyway and not over-react to what is normal.
I will get headaches.	Make sure you drink enough water during your fast. Also make sure, in the lead-up to your fast, <u>that</u> you are eating healthy. People who tend to get headaches when fasting could be getting them because their body is going through a detox as their normal diet is not as healthy as it could be or they are not drinking enough water during the fast. People who have highly processed food diets, <u>eating</u> high fat, lots of sugar, and caffeine, tend to have a lot of difficulty with fasts. The easy solution is to start to eat healthy prior to a planned fast!
I have to have my medication with food.	Look at solutions where you <u>havetake</u> the necessary food for your medication but no more and restrict it to plain food, not your favourite pizza and fries meal!
I have a special event to go to.	If it's a food-related event, e.g. a wedding, then look at maybe not fasting on that day and rescheduling your fast, or eat but restrict amount and type of food. Keep in mind why you are fasting: to pursue God, so maybe it may is not <u>be</u> the best idea to <u>be-planning</u> a fast when you have a

	wedding to attend anyway! For situations When I have been fasting and I need to go to a lunch meeting, I go along but just have a drink (e.g. smoothie) rather than break my fast.
Your excuse (fill it in here) _____	Your solution (fill it in here) _____

~~#Fasting~~ isn't an easy thing to do, ~~so~~ and we need to realize ~~realise~~ that from the start. But by fasting regularly, we actually build up our ability to manage, and we also learn ~~to~~ not to give into the mental mind-set where our stomach screams at us to feed it or we will die! I started off fasting one meal before I ever tried fasting for a number of days in a row.

~~I really don't want to offend anyone yet at the same time I don't want you to miss out on something that I know will significantly influence the road to wholeness. This is one area where many of us offer up excuses which we convince ourselves are legitimate but really it's just our stubborn old flesh not wanting to submit to God in this area. Ouch I know it hurts hearing that but if we are prepared to look honestly at some solutions to how we can fast (taking into consideration our health situation, our family and lifestyle etc) then we may possibly find a way to make it happen. It is a very good idea to get a medical clearance if you have some health concerns. This is about having a wise approach to fasting but at the same time keeping solution focused despite any health limitations. The old saying when there is a will there is a way is very true in this scenario. I have to give you an honesty check as I write this as I am feeling very challenged to do a New Year's fast to commit the year we are just about to begin into God's hands and quite frankly I do not want to as I sit here eating my rather nice nut mixture and contemplate the barbeque we are having tonight! There are many reasons for fasting and while this particular fast will not be around healing and wholeness but on seeking God for the year ahead it will be just as significant if I obey His prompting to follow through.~~

The best books I have ever read about fasting are written by Jentezen Franklin, who pastors a great church in the USA. I encourage you to read this particular one: *Fasting: Opening the ~~d~~Door to a ~~d~~eeper, ~~m~~More ~~i~~ntimate, ~~m~~More ~~p~~owerful ~~r~~elationship with God (2008)*. He is not only passionate about this subject but teaches it in a sound biblical perspective and in a far better way than I can cover briefly in these few paragraphs. You can access further information on his website, and in particular the information he lists on fasting basics:-
<http://www.jentezenfranklin.org/fasting/fastingbasics.php>.

Comment [Rachel Th58]: Do you want to name it?

Comment [Rachel Th59]: Can you name the publisher here as well?

6. Honesty

~~Phew, you will be glad we have got through the last few paragraphs on to maybe a more easier to receive subject!~~ God likes honesty, I don't mean ~~us~~ just not lying, but He actually likes to know, from us, what we really think. He knows our deepest thoughts already, but He wants us to share them with Him, to be real about who we are and what is going on.

Comment [Rachel Th60]: I would cut this because, even though you DO want to recognize the challenges of fasting, you don't want readers to come away with an overly negative impression of the previous section. Challenge them to do it and then expect them to embrace the challenge :).

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4, NKJV)

I have experienced huge freedom as I have shared with God the good, the bad, and the ugly of my life. Being open and honest with God sets a great foundation for our hearts to be healed and restored. If we can't be real with God, how can we ever expect our hearts to be healed? I often hear people say, "eOh yes, I am real with God, I yell at Him when I am mad."

Well, that's okay if you think that's being real, but being real is ~~actually~~ far more than that! I am not sure if people who say that they yell at God also yell at people to express their annoyance, ~~they are annoyed as well or not~~ but yelling isn't necessarily about us being honest. It isn't sharing your deepest heart; ~~as~~ it is just an aggressive behavior we use to cover up our true heart. Being real or honest is all about being vulnerable and allowing God into your hopes, dreams, failures, fears, etc. It's about telling Him what we think, what we are feeling, our struggles and our doubts. He is the only being who ever can completely know us and handle this. He is also the only one who ~~ever~~ is able to accept us totally and allow us freedom to be completely real and handle it without freaking out! People have expectations that often stop us from being who we are meant to be or ~~cause us to~~ tone ourselves down. ~~†~~ This may only be happen in subtle ways, but it still happens. With God, we have the opportunity to be totally vulnerable and in the process allow Him to bring transformation within our soul and spirit.

Comment [Rachel Th61]: Great insight here!

7. Building a Life with Others Who Love God

To build a long-term committed relationship with God, we need to understand the power of community and connection. I share more in ~~Chapter 9, "Nine: Flourishing in His House,"~~ but I want to mention it here as well. ~~†~~ This is all about growing relationships with like-minded people who really love God. Many of these will be people within the church ~~we~~ you call home, but it is not restricted to just there, ~~as w~~ We can meet people who love God in other areas of our lives, such as our work environments, as well, ~~e.g. in our work environment.~~

Being around people who challenge me, show me aspects of God I didn't know existed, and inspire me to want to know Him more are vital to my wholeness. These are people you rub shoulders with, not people at a distant. In my life, ~~†~~ these are people I have prayed with and

shared both hard and good times with. It sounds so simple, yet ~~is~~this kind of community is one of the keys to helping build our relationship with God that ~~some-times~~ people sometimes don't realize the importance of. People mainly think of their relationship with God as being just that “theirs” but God is into community. He wants us connecting with people in order to grow closer to Him because of the influence that community of people will have~~has~~ on us and ~~us~~we on it. If we isolate ourselves from others, we will never have as rich a relationship with God as we could have.

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV)

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17, NKJV)

8. LOL (Laugh Out Loud)

You may wonder what this has ~~got~~ to do with cultivating a close relationship with God, let alone becoming a Restored Overcomer. Well, it has everything to do with it! While I am committed to spending time alone with God, I don't just spend time, tick the box, and leave Him at home while I get on with my day-to-day life. I am stating the obvious, I know, but God really is listening and part of our whole day and night anyway, so we might as well talk to Him along the way and enjoy some laughs with Him! I don't believe that God is serious and boring but that He is fun-loving and full of life and wants us to celebrate life. [Listen to the words of the Psalms:](#)

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126, NKJV)

I firmly believe that God has a sense of humour, that He loves fun and delights in us. When I read in the bBible stories of a talking donkey, a burning bush, and a young lad slaying giants with a little stone and sling-shot, I can’t help but think that God is trying to show us how creative He is and that He will not be put in a box with the words “boring” engraved on the lid. He delights in using the simple and slightly comical to prove His/HIS point—that He is great and all powerful. This is good enough for me to be convinced I need to have fun along the way as I commit to building a long-term committed relationship with Him. God loves joy and laughter, which is why there is/are references to joy and laughter in the Word. Our journey with God is not meant to be all about being serious, being-reflective, and deep. Sometimes in life, we really do need to learn to lighten up and have a laugh.

I know what it is to have such deep sadness that it is like a dark cloud over your heart and to feel like you are viewing the world through a thick dark blanket that is literally strangling the life out of you. It is not good for anyone to remain in that place for long. I believe all the things I have shared in this chapter can help to shift us from that place, but all of them involve us

choosing to apply the principles proactively. Choosing to LOL is as important in our journey to wholeness as the rest of them.

A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones. (Proverbs 17:22, NKJV)

Even just taking time to look at ~~His~~God's creation will shows you what a great sense of humour He has and how much He takes delight in being creative. I remember a number of years ago when I was snorkelling in the Red Sea on the Egyptian coast, thinking “Wow, God, ~~y~~You sure enjoy creating funny-looking fish!; ~~w~~What’s with that?” ~~they~~ The fish had~~were~~ incredibly vivid colours and patterns like nothing I had ever seen before. ~~It~~ It was like watching the movie *Finding Nemo*, but it was real and had far more varieties! A boring God would have made all those fish gray!them all grey! Look at flowers, at animals, and yes, at all of us, and you can’t help but smile! Watching children play is one of the best ways to help draw us out from being so serious. They giggle away, smiling at the ~~most~~-simplest of things that delight their little hearts. I love it!

Laughing opens our soul and spirit up to God’s goodness, to seeing life differently. This draws us closer to Him, ~~therefore~~ enabling our heart to be open to being transformed by Him. Joy and sadness don’t partner together, but joy and laughter do. This means that by allowing joy into our heart, we cause sadness to leave for a time—to give our soul a break from its intensity. It is important on the journey of restoration that we have~~get~~ reprieve from what is often a sad and painful time. If this is hard for you to do, then get around people who are full of joy, who find the funny in life. ~~as~~+~~T~~hey will dreaw it out of you! If anything, we should find more

and more to laugh about as God sets us free. I do laugh quite a bit, and I actively look ~~to find~~for things that are funny to laugh at.

God has given us all the ability to delight in life, but we have to activate this within us. As I ~~have-walked~~ the road of restoration, I realize I have been given a new life I never thought was possible, so I am sure not going to spend it without laughter and enjoyment! I like the way God has made me to see the funny side ~~in~~of things. I often laugh even while out on my own. I was told off for laughing and joy when I was growing up. I believe ~~this~~ was one of the many things ~~that~~ the enemy tried to destroy in me. Yet God ~~had~~-placed this joy within me, and it has become a significant part of who I am today. This has helped create closeness to God and will always be part of my relationship with Him. I think when people forget how to laugh and enjoy God and His creation, they opt out of a long-term commitment, as they get bored and stagnant. God is never boring, but people can allow ~~it is simply the person has allowed~~ their relationship with Him to become stale.

“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

—Ecclesiastes 3:4, NKJV