

Fully Alive

LEARNING TO FLOURISH—
MIND, BODY & SPIRIT

SUSIE LARSON



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Susie Larson, *Fully Alive*
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To my friend Lynn

Thank you for standing with me in the trenches, for lifting my arms when my own strength failed me, and for reminding me that victory and breakthrough won't come without a fight, but that after the fight, they will indeed come—because we are on the winning side. Your presence and persistence have been priceless to me. Thank you.

To Dr. Troy

God has given you a divine understanding of the human condition, and He's used you greatly in my healing process. How can I ever thank you enough? Thank you for your commitment to Jesus, to people, and to thinking outside the box. I thank God upon every remembrance of you.

To Dr. Jimmy and Karna Ching

God put you in my path at exactly the right time. Thank you for being such champions for me! I'm healthy and strong today because of your brilliant minds and kingdom hearts. Thank you. So much.

To my Savior, Jesus Christ

Thank You for allowing me such intimate and personal access to Your heart. Thank You for never giving up on me. Thank You for Your faithfulness. Anything I am or have become, anything I've accomplished, is always and only because of You. You are my greatest treasure. Can't wait to see You face-to-face. Love you so much.

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Introduction

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, Jesus asked a man who'd been sick a long time, "Do you *want* to be well?"

"I can't, sir," the man replied.

I've always thought I'd give a different answer.

I've recently walked through one of the most refining seasons of my life. Old health symptoms flared and new symptoms grabbed me by the throat. Anxiety surged and fear seemed to win the day. Current fears reminiscent of old threats instinctively made me curl up, cover my head, and brace for impact.

Day after day I felt prompted—strongly nudged, even—to revisit the passage in John chapter 5. But I couldn't understand why. *Of course* I wanted to be well. I ate well. Drank lots of water. Guarded a consistent bedtime. Prayed the Scriptures. Embraced faith. And took my vitamins. What more could I do?

Yet one day the Lord whispered these words to my heart: "*The storms reveal the lies we believe and the truths we need.*"

I hated my storm. I wanted out of my storm. I couldn't bear the thought of another significant health battle surfacing and the anxiety it stirred within me. But once I realized that God intended blessings for me even in the midst of this storm, I opened my eyes and looked around. And

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though painful to face and to own, I soon discerned the lies that had held me back. Here's another important truth: *Those lies had remained hidden before the storm.*

Once I spotted the lies holding me captive, I also identified the truths that would set me free. Though I was clueless before the storm, I realized in the storm that I'd had my own "I can't" answers for Jesus' question *Do you want to be well?*

I know I'm not the only one. People everywhere are dealing with storms, symptoms, fears, rogue emotions, and anxieties that have upended their lives. A friend said to me the other day, "Dealing with emotional stress and crazy health symptoms is no longer just a topic for conversation. This is an epidemic crisis. People are stirred up, stressed out, and long to know the kind of health, freedom, and wholeness that Jesus promised us." I asked a couple of friends—one a counselor, the other a doctor—if they were seeing the same thing. Without hesitation, both answered yes.

The pressures of life, the pain in our past, and the stress perspective we choose all swirl around us, and even more so within us. There's not a woman who can honestly say that she's unaffected by it all. And because of the storm, we react—if not inwardly, then outwardly—to our hurts, our fears, and our perspective, especially if it's skewed. Eventually, our minds, bodies, and emotions suffer the accumulative effect of living an untended life in a stressed-out world.

I've learned a valuable lesson from my most recent storm, and it's this: *What happens in our souls happens in our cells.* A distressed soul creates a distressed body. Where our thoughts most often go, our lives follow. And the hurts and heartbreaks that we endure? They too will settle into our souls and into our cells unless we learn to metabolize them¹ with God's help and loving perspective.

We live in a culture that is addicted to treating symptoms. We want just enough help to get us on our way so we can continue to live a life of just enough, good enough, well enough. But at what cost to our souls, our story, and our calling—not to mention the very quality of our lives?

Something within us changes when we understand and live as though Jesus *cares* about how we feel. And He does care! He cares if our soul feels

empty or if it's in distress. He cares if our body feels sick. He cares if our heart aches and if we just can't get a handle on our fears. He's with us on this journey. He's for us. And He wants us well. He says so Himself:

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Scoot closer and revisit this statement: "Let me teach you."

There's a path for us to take where Jesus' yoke fits us perfectly. There's a place of faith for us to stand in the storm, where we'll know peace and strength where we once knew angst and fear. There's a promise written over our lives that compels us to dream about our future right in the face of our fears. There's a way to walk in Christ's light and easy yoke while living in a burdened, upside-down world. Jesus invites us to flourish here, right where we live.

Embracing the Mystery

I never ever thought I'd write a book on restoration, wholeness, and healing. Because, quite honestly, I've struggled with some of the theology that proclaims that God *always* heals, and if you don't get your healing, it's because you don't have enough faith. People said those kinds of things to me in my early years when I battled Lyme disease; not only were the comments not helpful, they were downright hurtful.

For years I've felt protective of those who've suffered long without a breakthrough. I've asked God to give them a gift of faith. I've asked God to protect them from people who sound like Job's friends and who assess the sufferer with the preface *You know what your problem is?*

Those who've suffered long don't need more ought-to's and should-do's. Those compassionless statements only make our burden heavier.

But the thing is, when we suffer long, we get used to our situation. We identify with it. And we lose our sense of expectancy. I know this well from personal experience.

It's in those places that we need hope and God's perspective. He doesn't leave us in our pain. He redeems us right in the midst of it. God still moves, still cares, and will do something in our situations that we never expected if we will dare to lift our eyes and trust Him, and if we'll determine to

contend for the promise that He's put before us. God's promises are as potent as they've ever been.

And while I still believe that God performs miracles in our day, I also believe there's a mystery to this thing called life. Godly people get sick and die. Other godly people live but with disabilities. Two such people come to mind immediately.

Joni Eareckson Tada is bound to a wheelchair from a diving accident. She's even battled breast cancer as a quadriplegic. How much can one person handle? And yet, and yet, what God has done through this woman

is nothing short of miraculous. How He has used her is downright breathtaking. And what she has suffered on this earth is nothing compared to the glory that awaits her in heaven. Scripture says so (see Romans 8:18).

I also think of my friend Jennifer Rothschild, who is legally blind. Last time we chatted I got the feeling that she senses she'll see her healing when she sees Jesus, and not until then. But when that woman speaks, God moves.

Both Joni and Jennifer are beautiful, brave, and bold—completely dependent on the Lord for their lives and their futures.

Though this book is about the broader topic of wholeness, restoration, and breakthrough, I must say, there's a lot of heat around the topic of healing. Those who've prayed earnestly for a loved one only to have him or her die are so deeply disappointed that they sometimes get angry when

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the topic comes up. They're done risking faith on the things that matter most to them. And who can blame them?

Then there are those who've experienced a true-blue miracle and long for the rest of us to keep contending, keep believing so that we too will experience our own miracle. There's a part of me that feels very much this way even amidst some of my own not-yets, losses, and heartbreak.

You can see why this conversation almost forces us to choose one of two camps (and I've heard rants from both of these extremes):

- God always heals . . . if you have enough faith. And if you're not healed, it's your fault.
- God never heals, and those who think He does are spiritual kooks. False teachers, even.

Lord have mercy on us for the countless ways we've divided over theology that actually requires faith, a willingness to embrace mystery, and a heart set on the Father's love!

If you're willing, let's embark on a journey and explore Jesus' desire to see us flourish, to heal our soul, and to make us whole. Sometimes we'll get an immediate miracle, but I'd say more often, our healing-wholeness journey is more of a process. No matter what ails us—be it emotionally, physically, or circumstantially—God has more for us. We're not meant to stay stuck here.

But to get unstuck, we need a sense of expectancy. Hope needs to make a comeback. Can we toss aside our preconceived notions and see if Jesus won't meet us in a fresh new way and even upgrade our faith? Dare we consider the notion that this kingdom life might be far more transformative than we once thought?

My recent heartbreak and health battle compelled me to dig deeper into God's promises regarding health, healing, and wholeness. I don't know that I'd say my faith has changed as a result of my most recent battle, but it certainly has deepened. I'm convinced—like never before—that God intends to do miracles in our day. I believe—with all my heart—that we'd

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for us. We're
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stay *stuck* here.



see far more miracles on the earth today if there were more faith in our hearts. May God stir up a fresh gift of faith in us!

But I also firmly believe that there's a mystery to God's ways and that we don't dictate to Him; instead, we serve Him, honor Him, revere Him, and trust Him. Godly people get sick and die. I look at men like my dear brother-in-law Donny, or Nabeel Qureshi, the Christian apologist and author. Both of them died of cancer—far too young. But I now see that they won their battle. They didn't lose it. Cancer no longer grips them in its ugly, devastating clutches or robs them of health and peace. They're with Jesus—full, healed, and free. And our time with them will far exceed our short time without them.

I also remember my very first mentor and her battle with throat cancer. One day, with fire in her eyes and her handheld voice box pushed up against her throat, she said, "Susie, God is with me here. Don't you doubt that for a second. And He will take me when He can get more glory from my death than He does from my life."

I'll never forget her words or her faith. She lived a fruitful, faithful life. She lost nothing and gained heaven. The loss was ours. We miss her. But we'll see her again.

And there are those whose lot involves life with a disability. Such a cross. Such a cost. But God is with them, and He'll either miraculously heal them, or He'll miraculously use them in a way that allows them to flourish and reflect the Father's heart right in the midst of their vulnerability. Life on earth is short. Eternity is long. God's promises are true. And if you follow Jesus through the Gospels, you'll find a Savior who cares deeply about the human condition.

What, Then, Are We Called to Do?

That fact—our Savior's heart for the human condition—is what brings us the assurance that God wants us to thrive, and He's with us every step of the way.

You and I need to make some adjustments amidst the craziness of this world and the toxicity of our times. God offers us wisdom from above, wisdom that's unique to us and to our situation. But in order for us to

know the fullness and the restoration that are possible for us as heirs of God, we have some things to learn. We cannot and must not keep grinding our gears through life while ignoring the physical and emotional toll that our hardships have had on us. Neither can we ignore the mental and/or emotional symptoms that are trying to get our attention.

I can't prove this, but I believe there's a trapdoor in our hearts that drops things into our souls. Our soul is the place where our emotions brew and our hurts collide, and the turmoil of it all can put the squeeze on our hopes, our dreams, and our perspective. Jesus wants peace to rule and reign in our hearts so that we can prosper in our soul. He wants us to flourish in every way possible.

My beloved friend, I pray that everything is going well for you and that your body is as healthy as your soul is prosperous.

3 John 1:2 THE VOICE

So here's what we're going to do on this journey:

*We're going to pursue wholeness.
And we're going to pray for a miracle.*

We're going to ask God for a fresh vision of what flourishing can look like for us, and then we're going to position ourselves on the path of healing—whatever it takes. Some of this will be hard. But you're no stranger to hard. You've done it before. We can do hard if it leads us to a better life, right? We're going to roll up our sleeves, take inventory of our habits, give our soul some room to breathe, and maybe change a few of our ways so we can enjoy better health.

And then we're going to go before the Most High God, who loves us with a passion we cannot fathom, and we're going to ask Him for a miracle, because He's the same God yesterday, today, and forever. He loves us, and He still performs miracles today.

Maybe yours is an emotional miracle. You want to be delivered from the constant stress of being at the mercy of your roller-coaster emotions.

You're going to do the work of renewing your thoughts and of standing on God's promises. You're going to get at the root cause of your fears. Then you're going to ask God to do what only He can do. Imagine what a miracle might look like in your life. Do you believe God can and wants to intervene on your behalf?

Maybe yours is a physical miracle. You've suffered a long time. And though you're weary, you're not giving up. You're about to make some adjustments that might just be game-changers for you. You're about to learn how to separate your emotions from your symptoms. You're about to build a new infrastructure in your thought life. And together, we're going to err on the side of faith for you, and ask God to do what only He can do.

Maybe yours is a relational miracle. Your heartbreak has taken a toll on your soul. Are you ready to give Jesus access to your heartbreak and disappointment? Are you ready to separate your hurts from your heart so you can discern what's yours and what's God's to carry? He has wisdom for you that will bring peace back to your soul once again. He has a path of peace for you that will replenish you before the answer comes. And let's together ask God to intervene in the lives of those you love, in the way only He can.

Consider this your opportunity for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual reset.

We'll not only replace defeating thoughts with redemptive ones, we'll confront the enemy's attempts to derail us. We'll have an answer for the onslaughts of anxiety, fear, and worry that threaten to swallow us whole. We'll learn to stand more firmly on God's truth even when it doesn't feel true. We'll not only put fear under our feet, we'll learn to believe in our hearts the reason Jesus told us not to fear.

We'll not only revisit those painful memories that surface time and time again, we'll do so under the protection and direction of God's great love and care for us.

We'll not only rid ourselves of some of the destructive habits that have weakened us over time, we'll incorporate some new life-giving habits that will strengthen us and prove themselves in a matter of weeks.

We'll not only identify the roadblocks to our soul-healing, we'll finally have an answer for Jesus when He asks us, "Do you *want* to be well?" Our answer will be a resounding YES! And that's why we're about to take this journey.

We'll revisit John chapter 5 and reconsider the man attached to his mat. We'll take a closer look at his encounter with Jesus and see if we can see ourselves in a similar predicament. We'll deal with the "I can'ts" embedded in our souls. But for now, let's consider a change of heart where we need one. Instead of asking for a break, let's press in and ask for a breakthrough.

In my distress I prayed to the Lord, and the Lord answered me and set me free.

Psalm 118:5

Consider our time together as an epic journey for the soul. Are you ready? It's time for some spiritual soul healing. But don't be afraid. Focus on the outcome. Remind yourself that when we passionately pursue Jesus and we respond to the inner work that He initiates, we'll be more firmly established in the abundant life He promised us. We'll be strategically positioned and equipped to help countless others find their path of wholeness.

May Jesus pour out His precious Spirit in a fresh new way as you dare to trust Him to live fully and freely through you.

In this with you~
Susie Larson

PS: I am not a doctor. I am not a counselor. I am the poster child for the truth from Scripture that expresses how God chooses foolish things and the weak things of the world to communicate His ways (my paraphrase). This book isn't intended to be a substitute for counseling, nor should you start any diet or exercise program without first talking with your doctor. But if you long to come alive and thrive, I do pray you'll take the next steps with courage and honesty and see if God doesn't meet you in the most personal and profound way.

PPS: I've never written a more raw book. I've emptied my pockets for this one. You're about to get an inside look at my great unearthing. But wow, Jesus met me here! And I believe He's about to do the same for you. This is not a light read, nor is it a book to rush through. Give yourself some time and space to do this inner work. You'll be richer for it. I'll be praying daily for you.

How to Use This Book

You're about to embark on a ten-week journey. I encourage you to look ahead at your calendar and give yourself time and space for rest, prayer, reflection, journaling, and even conversation with those closest to you. You'll benefit greatly if you give yourself a little extra margin in the weeks ahead.

While you'll find space in the book to answer some of the short-ended questions, you'll definitely need a journal or notebook for your personal reflection time, the study questions, and the things that surface for you along the way. If you prefer more journal reflection, feel free to skip the study questions. And if you're more of a dig-deeper kind of girl, feel free to pass on the reflection questions. I want this material to meet you right where you live and to tend to the needs closest to your heart.

There's a Spiritual Reset page toward the end of each chapter. We'll pray our way through the acronym PRAISE: Praise, Repent, Ask, Intercede, Stand, and Eternity. This is a powerful exercise and good for the soul.

Also, at the end of each chapter you'll find a decorative page with a word of encouragement just for you. Those pages are also available as free downloadable printables on my website. I think you'll love them.

As things surface for you, dare to ask God for a godly mentor, counselor, or friend with whom you can process your journey. We're definitely not meant to do life alone.

Finally, we've developed a beautiful companion DVD for you that includes ten short sessions, one for each week. Together, the book and DVD set allows study groups to host a ten-week study at home

or church, but will also work for those who prefer to work through this material on their own.

One last note—I know this from experience and from the many people I’ve interviewed on my radio show: It can feel so scary to face past hurts and traumas, and to reckon with current fears and anxieties. Sometimes it feels like they’ll swallow us whole. But the enemy is behind that lie. *Jesus allows things to surface so He can set us free.* Refuse to let that enemy bully you into captivity. This is your time to be free. This is your time to walk in a new level of wholeness and health.

Set your face like flint and determine that you will triumph because Jesus says you will.

We’re in this together. I’m cheering for you every step of the way.

He Restores

Believe It

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

Psalm 51:12

If we will listen with kindness and compassion to our own souls, we will hear the echoes of a hope so precious we can barely put words to it, a wild hope we can hardly bear to embrace. God put it there. He also breathed the corresponding promise into the earth; it is the whisper that keeps coming to us in moments of golden goodness. But of course. “God has planted eternity in the human heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The secret to your unhappiness and the answer to the agony of the earth are one and the same—we are longing for the kingdom of God. We are aching for the restoration of all things.¹



OUR YOUNGEST SON, JORDAN, used to live on his tippy toes. He walked on his toes, ran fast on his toes, and played football on his toes. He was born with tight heel cords, tight gastrocs

(calf muscles), and tight hamstrings. Picture him on the examination table at the doctor's office. When the doctor asked Jordan to straighten his leg, Jordan would extend his leg only to have his upper body drop backwards at an angle. He was so tight that he couldn't sit up straight and extend his leg out straight at the same time. His condition made him a fast runner but would eventually present alignment problems if we didn't deal with it during his younger years.

We helped him stretch twice a day. We reminded him constantly to drop his heels and try to walk on his feet. We massaged the back of his legs and his lower back. Our efforts proved insufficient, and Jordan eventually needed serial casting on each leg. They'd flex his foot a bit and then cast it for weeks at a time. He went through three casts on each leg.

Doctors told us that Jordan would deal with consistent back, hip, and joint pain if he didn't stretch as a way of life. We stretched him as often as we could. But, if you've read any of my past books or heard me speak, you know that Jordan still suffered a serious back injury in high school while playing football. Turns out, the less flexible we are, the greater the risk of injury. (I'd say this is true in life too.)

The ref blew the whistle. The play was over. Still, a player on the opposing team clipped Jordan hard when he wasn't ready for it, and the rest is history. Doctors told us it was one of the worst disc herniations they'd seen.

At one point the doctor told me that the disc blowout severely compressed three sets of nerves in Jordan's spine and, as a result, he could lose control of his bowels at any time. We were heartbroken for him. We heard multiple stories of adult men who ended up disabled from this same injury. This was a nightmare come true for our dear son.

But one day I'd heard two stories of miraculous healings from this exact injury and something rose up within me. Faith, I suppose! I shared the news with Jordan. "Son, you know I've struggled most of my adult life with health issues, and God hasn't miraculously healed me. My recovery has been more of a process. But even so, I believe that He still works miracles today. In the past twenty-four hours, I've heard two stories of how God miraculously healed two men with your same injury. What if we go out

on a limb, err on the side of faith, and ask God for a miracle for you? Let's just see what God might do. Are you with me?"

Surprisingly, my dear, reserved son, who'd grown quite depressed from the daily pain and limitations, nodded yes, he was up for it. It's such a beautiful story, I wish I had the space to tell it again here, but suffice to say, one night at youth group, a fellow student prayed for him, and he was instantly healed. A medical miracle.

So few receive this kind of miracle, you'd think this would have changed Jordan's life forever. And it did—physically. Yet he still wandered from the faith after high school. Then the storms hit and God showed him the way home. He was emotionally beat up, bruised, and brokenhearted. And his whole body ached. Especially his back and his hips. In his vulnerable state, he started to doubt that he'd really received a miracle all those years ago.

I grabbed Jordan by the shoulders, stared him straight in the eyes, and said, "Son, there's no disputing what happened to you back then. One day you could barely move, and the next, you were sprinting and lifting weights. God healed you. But do you remember what the doctors told you when you were young? You need to stretch. Jesus will tend to those wounds in your heart, but the physical stuff? I think it's a stewardship issue. *You* have to do that. No one can do it for you."

One day this young adult son of ours walked into our kitchen looking dumbfounded.

"What's on your heart today?" I asked.

He proceeded to tell me that he went to urgent care and saw a random doctor because his knee really bothered him and he needed a brace or support so he wouldn't miss work.

The doctor looked up Jordan's records and somehow a previous MRI showed up (from a different clinic ten years prior). She stared at the screen and breathed out one word: "Wow."

Jordan didn't know what she was looking at, so he waited for her to finish her thought.

She shook her head, looked in his eyes, and said, "That must have been some back surgery you endured. That's one of the worst disc herniations I've ever seen."

His throat caught a little and he replied, “Umm. I didn’t end up needing surgery.”

Exasperated she said, “No way! There’s NO way you’re walking today without having had surgery. Is *this* your MRI?”

He verified the information was correct.

Jesus, in no uncertain terms, reminded Jordan that he’d indeed received a miracle back then. And that for this phase of the healing journey, God wanted his cooperation and participation. I’m watching him tend to the things he can and should. And I’m watching him heal from the inside out. He’s become the Christ-following man we always dreamed he would be. To me, it’s even more marvelous than his sudden-healing moment all those years ago.

Not Much Longer

Recently, John Eldredge joined me on my radio show to talk about his book *All Things New*. We had a fantastic conversation around the whole idea of restoration. I asked him to speak to the person listening who is battle weary and worn out from the fight. He said something like this: “My friend, just tell your soul, ‘*Not much longer.*’ Not much longer. Soon, very soon, Jesus will restore all things to us! There’s no loss, heartbreak, sacrifice, or disappointment that God won’t redeem many times over. But know this: That redemption process starts now!”

Scripture tells us that even creation groans for that day:

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.

Romans 8:18–19

We’ll dig deeper into this passage in the pages ahead, but for now, know that Jesus invites us to expectancy! Right smack dab in the middle of our suffering, Jesus tilts our chin, asks for our trust, and invites us to hope for the impossible. Some of our inheritance we’ll see when we see Jesus

face-to-face, some of it He entrusts to us now. Today. Can we dare believe that Jesus wants to show us His goodness in the land of the living? Do you think it's possible to experience a radical breakthrough in the body you're in? What about those destructive thoughts that you have on repeat? Can you picture yourself with a thought-life makeover—where once you felt small and self-aware, you now feel larger than life and filled with the Spirit?

God wants to partner with us in our flourishing. He plays a part. And we play a part. And of course, there's another spiritual component to all of this too. We have a very real enemy who aims to do more than just poke fun at us. He wants to steal the precious gifts God has given us, kill any hint of life that springs up from our soil, and destroy any work of God that flows out of our abiding life.

If the devil can't keep our soul (because we've trusted Jesus with our eternity), he'll do whatever he can to distress our soul and to destroy our peace. Thankfully, we're not at the mercy of his whims and schemes. Jesus has equipped us to stop our enemy at every turn.

Jesus wants to help us sort through our story in a way that brings us healing and fullness. He designed our bodies and our souls to thrive. We can trust Him as He leads us through the healing process. And yet there's a measure of wholeness and flourishing we will not know apart from both of these things:

- God's divine intervention *and*
- Our cooperation with Him.

Even if we think we can, we absolutely cannot separate the various aspects of who we are any more than we can separate the trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, woven together by God's own hand.

Jesus wants us to flourish. He wants us whole. He wants to take what the enemy meant for evil against us and turn it for good. He wants us to live life bold and free, courageous and steadfast.

In order for us to flourish, we need to take the necessary time to examine our most repetitive thoughts and see where they've been leading us.

As painful as it might be, we need to revisit some of the hurts from our past and see if they're still speaking a contrary message to us. We need to better guard our hearts from the toxic influences of the day. And we need to look at our habits and our routines to see what adjustments will bring abundance to our lives so that we can be our best selves. Sometimes the smallest tweaks make the biggest difference.

We also need a few miracles in our lives. How about if we ask for those too?

I'd say the thing in your life that compels you to pray for a miracle is probably the very thing that has taken a significant toll on your soul. Don't lose your sense of expectancy. Dare to hope again. Dare to dream again. Believe that you truly do serve a wonder-working God.

Pursue Healing ~ Pray for a Miracle

Put It into Practice



Focus on . . .

God's Desire to Restore You

Scripture Says . . .

The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always.
He provides me rest in rich, green fields
beside streams of refreshing water.
He soothes my fears;
He makes me whole again,
steering me off worn, hard paths
to roads where truth and righteousness echo His name.

Psalm 23:1–3 THE VOICE

Do you wonder if Jesus cares for your soul, for your sense of well-being? Read this passage again. He goes before you and prepares places of refreshment for you. He offers nourishment when you most need it. And He Himself is your greatest gift. Spend some time pondering the idea that Jesus *wants* to restore your soul.

Because He really, truly does.

Science Says . . .

Rick Hanson, author of *Hardwiring Happiness*, says, “Staying with a negative experience past the point that’s useful is like running laps in Hell: You dig the track a little deeper in your brain each time.” But, “By taking just a few extra seconds to stay with a positive experience—even

the comfort of a single breath—you'll help turn a passing mental state into lasting neural structure.”²

Pursue Healing

Oftentimes we stay with the memories that take the greatest toll on our souls. Yes, we need to revisit them to uproot them, but those moments need to be reserved for guarded times with godly mentors or wise counselors. The rest of our thoughts should instinctively go to God's goodness and provision all around us and in us. None of us are there yet, but it's a worthy goal. In order to be healthy and whole and for us to notice the Savior's healing work in our lives in ways both great and small, we must *practice* thinking like He does. Our thoughts must flow in rhythm with His.

Does God have negative thoughts on repeat?

Then neither should we.

Does He rehearse how people have hurt and offended Him?

Then neither should we.

Does He constantly condemn and accuse Himself?

Then neither should we.

Does He long for us to live flourishing, abundant lives?

Then we should long for and believe for that reality just as much.

God gives us good gifts to enjoy. And it's actually wonderful for our brains when we engage our senses as we notice all He's given. How good, healthy, and healing it is for you to smell a bouquet of flowers and enjoy the moment, to taste your food and savor it, and to marvel at the beautiful sunset until it brings tears to your eyes. Spend some time this week noticing the good in your present moments, and linger there for a while. It will change you from the inside out.

Pray for a Miracle

Dare to daily pray—out loud so your own ears hear it—this bold prayer:

You are the God who performs miracles, and You're working wonders in me! With all my heart I believe You intend to restore my soul. Open my eyes so I can see You move in my midst. I believe You are doing a NEW thing in me. I want to participate with You in my healing process. May my life be a living, breathing testimony of Your miracle-working power. Awaken fresh life in me!

In Jesus' mighty name I pray. Amen.

Soul Searching

Prayerfully dream for a moment. What would a healed-you look like?

Life Reflection

1. Scripture tells us that the measure we use against others will be used on us (see Matthew 7:2). Part of our own healing process involves resetting our perspective around our suffering and the sufferings of others. Read this passage from 2 Corinthians 5:16–17: “So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” No need to write down their names, but spend some time with the Lord and ask Him if you’ve unfairly judged the suffering of another. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to show you His heart for that person, and even for a glimpse of what life is like for them. Pray for their healing.
2. What we rehearse we remember, and what we remember we live from. What core belief stands in the way of your flourishing? Give some thought to this. If you don’t know, ask the Lord

to show you. He will. I had no idea that deep down inside me, I really didn't believe that God wanted me well. I thought He had more important matters to tend to. But the truth is, most of us know that His help for me would not limit His help for you. I needed to wrestle that one to the ground. I now believe—with all my heart—that God wants me to flourish. And I cooperate with Him daily to make the necessary adjustments—be they to my perspective, diet, bedtime, thought life, or whatever—so I can be uniquely positioned to help others flourish too. So what about you? Do you believe God wants you well? Why or why not?

3. Based on what you've studied from the passages of Scripture referenced in this chapter, write out a faith declaration of your own. It might look something like this: *I declare, in the mighty name of Jesus, that God's kingdom is far greater than I can comprehend. And I am a part of that kingdom! I believe God wants me to know His promises and to walk in them, to flourish, to be well, and to help others where life finds them. I've lived too long without expectancy, but now I believe God has more for me. And I am determined to learn from Him, do what He says, and then watch Him do what only He can do. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Spiritual Reset

PRAISE

“No matter what your situation, for faith to be great, you must believe that God can change your entire situation in one moment with one decision, with one new circumstance. You are to live on the tiptoe of expectation for God to change your life.”³

PRAISE—Acronym Exercise

P—Praise Him. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving just because He is God.

R—Remember and Repent. Write out a memory of God’s faithfulness. Spend time with Him and repent of anything He brings to mind.

A—Ask Him for what’s on your heart.

I—Intercede for others.

S—Stand on God's promises. Write out a promise that undergirds what you're asking Him for.

E—Eternity. Put your life, your burdens, and your prayer list up to the lens of eternity. Ask Jesus to help you look up and think long, with eternity in mind.

Digging Deeper

*Use your journal or notebook for this section.

- A. Prayerfully read Matthew 9:35–38 and answer these questions:
What’s the *good news* of the kingdom? And might this good news be more far-reaching than you once thought? Prayerfully ask God to show you something new about this kingdom life to which you are called.
- B. Go back and read the passage from Matthew again and consider this: Jesus made sure to address the human condition wherever He went. He touched people, healed them, and consistently spoke truth specific to the need before Him. Imagine yourself walking with Jesus in His day and watching Him minister. Picture a lame man, miraculously healed, leaping and crying and kicking up dust. Imagine a mother sobbing with tears of joy because her child now lives. Write down your thoughts as you ponder His power. Ask Jesus any questions you have. Ask Him for a gift of faith.
- C. Hang with me here. Read the passage another time. Picture Jesus’ compassion for the crowds. Imagine that look of compassion on His face. Then He turns to you and looks at you with that same compassion. How do you feel about Jesus’ expression toward you? How do you suppose He would heal you if you were with Him in His day? Physically? Spiritually? Emotionally? Relationally? What truth do you suppose He’d speak to you? Write down your thoughts.
- D. Read John 14:12 and consider this: If Jesus modeled healing, showed compassion, and proclaimed the good news, do you think He envisioned us doing the same but to a lesser degree? It’s hard to fathom, but Jesus said we’d do greater things still. What would the increase of His kingdom in and through you

look like? Might any limitations lie with us? Do we either consciously or unconsciously limit what God can do in and through us? Are you willing to ask God to answer that question for you? In what ways do you long to see your faith and conviction expand? Faith to see others healed? Compassion for the lost? Conviction to preach truth to those in captivity? Write down your thoughts.

Find the following downloadable print
at SusieLarson.com.

I AM
strong and healthy.

I AM
fearfully and wonderfully made.

I AM
full of life and full of faith.

Jesus is doing a new thing in me!