



# Healing What's Hidden

PRACTICAL STEPS TO OVERCOMING TRAUMA

EVAN AND JENNY OWENS

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The names and details of some of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the authors have worked.

To Noah, Asa, and Judah,  
thank you for sharing your parents with  
hurting people around the world. The sprint is over,  
now it's time to watch God do what only he can do.

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PART 1

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# Your First Steps

# Restoring What Seems Broken beyond Repair

## **You Aren't Broken; You're Wounded**

Trauma brought you here—to this moment, right now.

Down the road, you'll remember this exact moment because you'll look back and realize that this was the moment things started to change. This was the moment when you made a choice, a conscious decision, to move forward in spite of the pain, tragedy, and trauma you've walked through. There are over 220 million people living in the United States who have had a traumatic experience,<sup>1</sup> and many of them will never truly heal.

But you will.

You will overcome trauma and embrace a brighter future because you are taking action. You are doing something about your trauma when many people do nothing.

In 2012, Jenny and I were sitting in a Chick-fil-A with our friend Jeff. He had served in the army as a medic during Operation Enduring Freedom, which you may know as the war in Afghanistan.

He was in his early twenties but had the life experience of someone much older. It took more than a year of building trust with Jeff for him to finally open up about his traumatic experiences, and he chose to do it at 9:45 p.m. in a booth at Chick-fil-A.

“There was so much blood on my boots,” he began. “I remember how cold my feet were because they were wet with their blood. To this very day, I wake up from nightmares and my feet are freezing.”

He paused, trying to sort out the order of his experiences as a thousand memories flooded his brain. “Why does it always have to be the neck? It seems like every time, it was a neck wound.” His eyes flooded with tears as he wiped his cheek with a rough paper napkin.

“No matter how hard I tried, I could never seem to save the ones with the neck wounds. There was always just so much blood, and I couldn’t get it to stop. . . . They died—they died in my arms, y’all.” We nodded as if we understood. He continued, “I didn’t—you know—I don’t know what to do with it. I’m angry. Angry at myself for not being more capable, angry at them for dying, angry at the enemy for taking that cheap shot, angry at God for abandoning us.” His tone shifted from sorrow to resentment.

“The whole thing is just the worst . . . completely FUBAR,” he said as he looked away, took a deep breath, and regained his composure.

The conversation went on into the middle of the night. We asked him questions about his deployment, and he shared stories of those he had lost. He cried, we cried, we hugged, and a bond formed that has never been (and will never be) broken.

He was right. The whole thing was awful. Absolutely gut-wrenching. But it wasn’t FUBAR. In the military, the term *FUBAR* is an abbreviated way of saying that something is broken beyond all repair. His story and experiences are tragic and will require years of healing, but Jeff isn’t broken beyond repair.

Trauma doesn’t discriminate. White, Black, military, civilian, gay, straight, rich, poor, Christian, Muslim, atheist—not one of

us is outside the reach of trauma. It can touch our lives at any age, stage, or place. It can come through the actions of a stranger or through the touch of a trusted family member. It may strike suddenly as a single defining moment or seep in slowly, almost undetected, over many years of abuse or neglect. Trauma impacts the whole of us—our minds, bodies, souls, and spirits. In an all-out attack, trauma targets our self-esteem, trust in humanity, emotional well-being, and even our hope for the future. It is as elusive and tough to defeat as any enemy could be.

Time alone won't heal trauma. Faith alone won't fix it. Medicine alone won't mend it. And living life alone will only make it worse.

But you aren't broken beyond all repair.

Trauma didn't break you. You aren't broken; you're wounded.

And wounds can heal if proper measures are taken.



Scan the QR code, sign up for "MyREBOOT," and get instant access to important content throughout the book.

## *What ABOUT You?*

In what ways does your life feel broken right now?

## It's OK If You're Skeptical

Jeff was one of the first trauma survivors we met, but he wouldn't be the last. Our story began with the military, but since that time we've worked with thousands of people from all backgrounds and walks of life who've experienced trauma. But in order to show you why you should trust us, we need to start at the beginning of our story.

I (Jenny) didn't know much about PTSD growing up. I'm ashamed to say that I used it as a punch line more than anything. I had a friend in middle school whose dad had served in Vietnam. My friend would joke about how sometimes his dad would hear a car backfire and dive under the table in the middle of dinner. I laughed. I'm sorry that I didn't have more compassion for my friend, who was likely using humor to cope with what must have been a pretty challenging home life, or for his dad, who never truly came home from war. I didn't understand how fighting for your life and watching your friends die could change you in ways you couldn't explain.

But when I was a freshman in college and terrorists crashed a couple of commercial airplanes into two buildings, killing thousands of men, women, and children, the notion of trauma and its many ripple effects began making subtle waves in my mind. I found myself captivated by the stories of heroism and sacrifice—both stateside and on the battlefield—that dominated the news media.

When, in my first job out of graduate school as an occupational therapist (OT), I was told that our outpatient clinic was going to begin treating active-duty soldiers with traumatic brain injuries, my heartbeat quickened. For some reason, ever since 9/11 I had felt drawn to our nation's combat wounded. This job was literally a dream come true.

I immersed myself in military culture as best I could. I printed out the army rank structure and discreetly googled every acronym I heard. As soldiers returned from deployment, people began using

the term *walking wounded*, and I knew exactly what it meant. My patients were physically fit and apparently healthy. But their legs bounced continuously under the treatment table. They never sat with their backs to the door. Their eyes were dark and shadowed, and while they worked hard to keep it together, sometimes these strong soldiers cried.

Their inner pain was seeping out of them, and I couldn't ignore it.

When an OT job became available at Fort Campbell (an army post about forty-five minutes northwest of Nashville), I felt the unmistakable tug of what I now believe is my calling. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I talked about it nonstop with Evan. I prayed. I asked God for a sign and minutes later pulled up behind a car with a bumper sticker that read Go Army. I felt a nervous excitement growing within me. Could we really uproot our lives in pursuit of this crazy dream? I was a new clinician with zero actual military experience applying for a job in which I would be helping soldiers return to duty after a traumatic brain injury. You know, driving Humvees, firing M-16s, applying tourniquets, navigating with maps and compasses, and so on—all the things a twenty-five-year-old civilian suburbanite female knows how to do, right?

But I learned, and not for the last time, that God often uses the extras to play leading roles on his stage.

Evan and I moved to Pleasant View, Tennessee, a small town halfway between Fort Campbell and Nashville. He kept his job at a web-development company, and I started working at the Warrior Resiliency and Recovery Center on post.

Here are some things I quickly learned from my soldiers:

You don't walk on the grass.

You don't show up late.

You don't tell the shrinks that you're having mental problems.

The first two could get you dressed down in public. The last could get you kicked out of the military. The PTSD stigma was alive and well.

But I wasn't a shrink.

And for reasons outside my control or understanding, my soldiers began opening up to me. One sergeant asked, "Is it possible for my soul to die? I know I had one once, but now, when I look inward, all I see is a dark, black hole." Another spoke of the crushing guilt he felt: "I stepped on the pressure plate. Why am I alive and he's dead? How do I look at his family, knowing I'm responsible?" Another described to me what it felt like to watch the life ebb out of the eyes of a dying Iraqi child as he tried to rescue him from the wreckage caused by a roadside bomb.

My heart is heavy just recalling the looks on their faces, silently acknowledging the invisible rucksacks of guilt and shame they carried. I remember the fog of isolation that surrounded them, severing them from anyone and everyone who couldn't understand what they'd gone through and from God, who, in their eyes, had turned his back on them.

So I spoke up. I began talking to my patients about God's nearness to the brokenhearted. About how he sets the captives free and comforts those who mourn. About the depth of Jesus's love for them and how he wants to carry their burdens and give them rest.

It was like they'd come upon a spring of fresh water in the middle of a barren desert. The flicker of hope in their eyes lit a fire in my heart to find a way to continue the conversation for those who were willing to meet at the intersection of faith and trauma and ask the hard questions together.

While this was going on, Evan found himself at a different crossroads. Every day, he heard me share stories of trauma and the struggle to overcome it while he continued at his technology job. The juxtaposition between profit-and-loss statements and life-and-death choices drew him to the realization that he wanted to be a part of something that he felt really mattered. He wholeheartedly

joined me on my mission to serve and support military families who were hurting. Together we prayed for God to do something so big it was destined to fail without him.

And God moved.

We started meeting with couples, asking questions, and doing a lot of listening. The themes of guilt, grief, identity, and forgiveness resounded through every story of trauma as the soldiers and their loved ones openly shared their darkest and most painful memories. We quickly realized that while we were hearing repeats of the same struggles, the trauma survivors thought they were the only ones going through them.

And an idea was born: we would invite these soldiers and their families to our home, provide childcare and a home-cooked meal, and sit down together to engage the topics of faith and trauma head-on. We said, “You don’t have to be a Christian. You don’t have to agree with us. We just want to love on you and give you a safe space to be real and raw.” It was a “come as you are even if you wear a hat and sunglasses and sit in the corner with your arms crossed the whole time” kind of vibe. And that’s exactly what some of our soldiers did.

But somehow, it worked.

Evan put together a rough outline, and when he opened his mouth, it was the kind of teaching that made the hair on your arms stand up. It was as if he had read these guys’ mail. It had to be God at work. How else would a (these are his words, not mine!) “chubby civilian who worked in technology” ever capture the attention of these war-hardened soldiers?

Remember what I said about God using those least likely to do his work?

God doesn’t call the qualified. He qualifies the called.

What we started in our living room quickly began to grow. We called it REBOOT Recovery.

In the next few years, we saw miraculous healing as well as miraculous provision. Our group began meeting at Fort Campbell, and we had so many attendees we ran out of tables and chairs. We

were contacted by people in other states, asking how they could start courses like ours. Evan left his job and began working for REBOOT full-time. We received a grant and were approached by John Dale, a retired combat veteran and operations ninja, who raised money to cover his own first year's salary. With John's help, we were able to manualize the curriculum Evan had developed over years of teaching, and we began equipping others to lead our course all across the country.

Soon, we saw that first responders were struggling with job-related stress and trauma in much the same way as combat veterans. So our team developed a course just for them. And finally, in the midst of a global pandemic, we felt the call to make what we've learned available to anyone and everyone who's experienced the upending effects of trauma. We called the course Trauma REBOOT, and locations quickly spread across the country.

For the past decade of our lives, we have been blessed to watch people of all walks of life overcome some of the most devastating experiences we could imagine and go on to embrace lives of joy and purpose. In this book, we are going to share a few of their stories and show you the exact steps thousands of people have taken to overcome trauma.

But this book isn't really about them. It's about you and your story and how you will overcome your trauma.



Meet Evan & Jenny and hear their recommendations for getting the most of out of this book.

## *What ABOUT You?*

What do you hope reading this book will do for you?

## Calling Trauma by Its Real Name

This book was written to help you overcome trauma. But that only works if we can agree on what we mean by the term *trauma*. Perhaps you have already wondered if this book is right for you. Maybe you're thinking, *I have experienced some painful things, but I'm not sure I'd classify them as traumatic.*

That's normal. In fact, that kind of thinking is partially what makes trauma so destructive. So let's demystify the term a bit. By its simplest definition, trauma is a deeply disturbing or distressing experience or series of experiences. If you have been abused (mentally, physically, spiritually, or sexually), been neglected, lost a loved one, survived an assault or natural disaster, or even lived in close proximity to someone who has experienced trauma—you're reading the right book.

Trauma is subjective. If you feel as if what you went through was traumatic, it probably was. However, if you feel that your experience wasn't traumatic, you may or may not be correct because trauma is tricky. It hides in the dark and trips us up when we least expect it. It plays dirty. It tries to convince us that what we experienced was normal and to minimize and excuse it while stacking itself up against someone else who "had it worse."

The first step in healing trauma is acknowledging its existence. We have to come to grips with the reality that what we experienced wasn't normal. Following are a few examples:

- It wasn't normal to suffer abuse at the hands of another.
- It wasn't normal to comb through the remains of your possessions after a fire, flood, earthquake, or tornado.
- It wasn't normal to have raised yourself and your little brother from a young age.
- It wasn't normal to have been completely isolated in your home for over a year due to a pandemic.

These are all traumatic experiences and should be labeled as such. But trauma tempts us to rebrand it. We say things like:

My mom just liked to drink a lot.  
I just had to fend for myself as a kid.  
It was just a really hard time.  
He just roughed me up a little.  
I just saw some combat overseas.  
It was just a tough shift.

Does any of that sound familiar? We've probably all done some relabeling at one point or another in our lives. While doing so is very common, it isn't helpful.

When we dismiss or excuse our trauma as simply a regular part of life, we deny its impact on us. And by doing so, we risk incorrectly assigning blame to ourselves and misdiagnosing the cause of our subsequent struggles.

We end up focusing on symptoms rather than sources.

We end up looking for remedies rather than getting to the roots of the problem.

Here is a true statement: trauma will remain empowered to cause us harm as long as we deny its existence.

Even worse, the longer trauma goes unacknowledged, the more areas of your life it will reach. Like mold in a damp basement, the impact of trauma will spread until you identify its source. Trauma needs to be acknowledged and condemned.

But so often, we end up condemning ourselves. We're ridden with guilt, shame, regret, and despair. We punish ourselves for not moving on and getting over it more quickly. We assume we're the problem and that someone else would have handled it better.

We want you to know that what you are currently experiencing is a common reaction to an abnormal event in your life. No one expects you to handle it any better than you are, except for maybe

yourself. There's no one-size-fits-all response to trauma that says exactly how you should be coping right now. The fact that you are reading this book puts you light-years ahead of most people!

You aren't *failing* at healing. You're *finding* healing.

And the process of finding takes time and effort. We work with people who feel like they've tried everything and nothing has worked. So they start to believe that nothing ever will.

Maybe that's where you find yourself now. Maybe you've tried therapy or read other books and still struggle every day. Maybe you're not even sure you can muster the physical and emotional energy to hope for healing anymore.

We get it. We know the drudgery of rehashing your story again and again so that your new therapist can get up to speed. Or how it feels to struggle with articulating your feelings and symptoms well enough to receive the right diagnosis. We understand what it's like to leave an appointment with another new prescription, weighing the risks and rewards, uncertain if the potential benefits are worth the side effects. Round and round it goes, each cycle a bit more frustrating and discouraging than the last.

But perhaps these attempts to heal aren't failures. Perhaps they are part of the process of finding healing. Physical healing is usually defined as the absence of discomfort or pain. But what about trauma healing? It isn't so cut-and-dried when it comes to healing emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds. What if all your "failed attempts" were actually peeling back layers to help you get to the heart of the problem?

Chances are you aren't sure exactly what to expect from the journey you've just begun in this book. You're only a few pages

Trauma  
will remain  
*empowered*  
to cause us  
harm as long  
as we deny its  
*existence.*

in, and you're wondering where all this is headed. We see this as a good thing because our destination and definition of healing may be different from what you'd expect.

There are over one thousand different therapies designed to help those who have experienced trauma, and almost all of them aim to reduce symptoms. But that isn't our primary objective for this book. While it may likely happen, it isn't our main goal. Furthermore, our goal isn't to teach you how to cope with your symptoms or to help you research new treatment options.

Our goal is to help you heal the hidden wounds of trauma so that you can embrace a brighter future. While we can't promise that your symptoms will go away, we can promise that you can live a life full of joy, purpose, and freedom in spite of them.

We believe that healing from trauma ends in empowerment—empowerment to move forward despite the past and empowerment to help others by sharing your unique story, even while it's still unfolding. That's where we're headed, that's our destination. Completing this book may be difficult, but rest assured, it will be worth it.

### *What ABOUT You?*

Looking back at your life, what events might be considered traumatic? Just briefly list them for now. What, if anything, have you tried already in order to heal from those experiences? Did it work? Why or why not?

## **Finishing What You Start**

Whether it was a trial, a tragedy, or a traumatic experience, what you've gone through has changed you. It has made your life difficult enough that you decided to pick up this book and start reading. Your challenge now will be finishing what you started.

While this book is designed to be read over a roughly sixty-day period, don't feel as if you're on the clock. Some of us need more time to process than others. We've broken each chapter down into short lessons because trauma is heavy and we want to make this process manageable for you. At the end of each lesson, we ask, "What about you?" followed by some thought-provoking questions to answer or activities to complete. If writing is helpful for you, these would make great journal prompts too. Our hope is that you'll take time to really connect what you just read in the lesson with your past and present experiences.

If you read a lesson more than once, that's completely okay. If you need to take a day off to reflect on what you've read, that's fine as well. Get some rest and then return to the task at hand. You might be able to read an entire chapter or more in one sitting—if that's the case, then keep on trucking!

We have structured the book so that it can be easily read once and referenced often. The goal is to help you, not burden you. The important thing is that you finish.

OK, now that we've made that clear, it's time for an episode of "Things I Can't Believe I'm Sharing in This Book" with your favorite host, Evan Owens. I abuse Q-tips. Well, rather, I empower Q-tips to abuse me. I have this compulsive behavior of putting Q-tips down into my ear canal. I know, I know—super gross. Not to mention, it literally says right on the box not to stick them in your ears. But, then, why do they make them just the right size?

This behavior is so compulsive that I will pick and dig until I've given myself an outer ear infection. Stop judging me. I can feel you judging me as you read this!

I've done this so many times that my doctor now orders an antibiotic ear drop for me without an in-office visit. Yes, it's happened that many times. These ear infections are quite painful, and I usually spend three or four days whining to Jenny like I have just given birth. But to make matters worse, I exacerbate my symptoms by not following the doctor's orders. Here's the path I take instead: I consult with my doctor, and she prescribes a fourteen-day regimen of antibiotic ear drops. By day seven, I think, *I'm feeling much better*, and I stop using the medication.

Yep. Brilliant, right? I bet you can guess what happens next. You guessed it! The infection comes back—usually worse than before.

Last year, I temporarily lost hearing in my right ear, and the pain spread to my jaw. I broke down and went in to have the doctor check it out. I knew something was wrong when she said “Whoa” as she peered into my ear through her otoscope. The next words out of her mouth were “looks swampy” and “we've got to get this under control.”

I love my doctor. Who says “looks swampy”?

It turns out the infection was a staph infection, and I was at risk for having it spread to my brain. Uh . . . yeah. Who knew that a soft, fluffy white ball on the end of a cardboard dagger could lead to so much destruction?! She sent me down the hall to an ear, nose, and throat specialist who had a similar reaction.

Fortunately, they got it under control before it became more serious. But it took almost ten days for the pain to ease. I'd like to believe that I learned an important lesson through that experience: infections in the body must be completely eradicated, or they return stronger and more deadly. If treatment is halted too soon, the infection spreads and strengthens. Healing becomes more difficult.

Your situation is much the same. If you don't deal with the trauma now, or only partially deal with it, the effects will compound, and life will become more unmanageable. Taking half a

prescription won't eliminate an ear infection any more than reading a few chapters of this book will heal your trauma.

You may be feeling overwhelmed, scared, angry, or anxious right now. But don't allow shame, guilt, or regret to be added to that list of feelings by quitting before you've allowed the healing process to run its course.

Set your intentions from the start that you will finish what you began. Nothing worth having comes easy. Anyone can start something new. It's seeing it through to completion that's the hard part. Starting things is fun. But it is the remaining 80 percent, the slow and tedious part of the process, that really matters. Yet this is the part where most people quit.

*Don't quit.* If you get overwhelmed, rest.  
But don't quit.

### *What ABOUT You?*

What in your life could hinder your completion of the healing process laid out in this book? What could you do now to help yourself overcome these future hindrances?

## Healing Won't Be like an HGTV Show

We want to set your expectations accurately: healing from trauma isn't like an HGTV house-flipping episode. These shows all follow the same formula and have a happy ending. In the HGTV world, unforeseen setbacks are solved by the next commercial break. No big deal. Everyone is still smiling at the end after what looks like only a few days of work. The predictable path these shows traverse from ruined to restored appeals to us. It gives us a sense that everything can be quickly fixed with a little hard work and some tender loving care.

But have you ever actually tried to flip a house?

If so, you know it isn't a walk in the park. There are setbacks, unforeseen problems, and missed deadlines. HGTV doesn't ever feature a house that is slowly renovated over the course of years. No one would watch that! Instead, they show quick, cosmetic repairs that cover up the deeper issues. Furthermore, most of the time they end up ripping out all the old stuff and replacing it with new.

But that isn't how human beings work. We can't simply rip out the old parts and replace them with new hardware. We have to be restored—and restoration is a more complicated, costly, and time-consuming process.

My (Evan's) parents have some incredible pieces of antique furniture in their basement. Some of them are in really good shape while others show years of wear and tear. Restoring these well-loved pieces would be quite difficult—not impossible but extremely time consuming. First, we'd have to strip the old finish from the wood. This process uses harsh chemicals that must sit on the furniture long enough to dissolve the original stain or finish. Then comes the long and tedious process of scraping, neutralizing, cleaning, sanding, cleaning again, and sanding some more. Then there's applying the first coat of stain, applying the second coat of stain, and applying wood restorer, and allowing time between each step to dry.

Whew! I'm tired just thinking about it.

If it's that difficult to restore a piece of furniture—an inanimate object made of wood—how much more complicated might it be to restore your mind, body, and soul?

Healing from trauma looks less like a quick fix and more like rebuilding parts of your life brick by brick. It is tedious and time consuming and requires hard work. You'll undoubtedly experience unforeseen setbacks and problems. That's why I want to encourage you to set your sights on pursuing progress, not perfection.

Each layer peeled back, each step taken forward, each page turned is progress toward healing. And don't be discouraged if those around you don't understand or aren't able to celebrate the progress you're making.

Most of us don't do a very good job of celebrating progress. We tend to celebrate only when things are wrapped up with a nice bow and the "episode" has a happy resolution. As a culture, we've been conditioned to respond to stories that mirror the narrative arc we've seen on TV shows, no matter how unrealistic or unachievable they may be in real life.

Communities of faith aren't immune to this attraction either. As church members, we love clear-cut redemption stories. The couple on the verge of divorce goes to a marriage retreat, experiences a breakthrough, and stands on stage a few days later to tell their story of reconciliation. Standing ovation! Or the story of a guy who goes on a men's retreat and decides to get right with the Lord—put that on a video and we open the service with it!

These are moments of celebration that are easy to understand. They fit into the story framework we've seen millions of times, and we can comprehend them without burning many mental calories. Our brains are drawn toward the simplicity of transformation.

I wish it were that simple for you. I wish that your story would fit into a flawless arc from hurt to healed. But overcoming trauma rarely fits into such an uncomplicated framework.

Instead, our stories are messy, unpredictable, and complex. They more closely resemble an epic four-thousand-page novel than a reality TV show. Our healing stories are marked by profound character development, plot twists, disappointments, and unexpected victories. When we try to force them into a prefabricated narrative structure, we discount the progress we're making and miss out on the joy of each accomplishment.

Healing from trauma probably won't bring you back to your pretraumatized self because the scars will always be there. But here's the good news: the scars will serve to remind you of what you've overcome. And someday, they will be a powerful testimony to others of what God has done in your life. There's beauty in this kind of renewal. There's a richness found in things that have been truly restored rather than cosmetically dressed up or replaced.

Imagine yourself, a year from now, sitting down with someone who has experienced a trauma similar to yours and speaking words of hope and encouragement to them—knowing that what you speak is true because you've lived it! How incredible would it feel to see purpose in your pain?

Each of us comes to this book from a different place in our healing journeys. Some of us are in the phase of having our old stains and finishes stripped from us as we work on removing the years of wear, tear, and trauma. Others of us are at the stage when we are starting to envision the end product—a future in which trauma doesn't control our every moment. Maybe we are beginning to feel like an upgraded version of our old selves.

Regardless of what stage of healing we're at right now, we are all works in progress. God knows exactly which parts are wounded and what will be required in order for them to heal. He has restored millions of wounded minds, bodies, and souls throughout history, and he is paying special attention to your wounds right now. He is preparing them for healing.

God isn't interested in HGTV fixes. His will for you is that

you may experience true, lasting healing, which can come only by addressing the deeper issues.

Take it from us. All around the world God is redeeming that which seems irredeemable: “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’” (Rev. 21:5 ESV). Notice that God says he is making all things new, *not* that he is making all new things. God’s innate reaction to brokenness is restoration—not replacement.

Just because you’ve been hurt doesn’t mean you are damaged goods that should be set aside or discarded. You are valuable to God. You aren’t disposable or replaceable. He made only one of you. He isn’t going to toss you in the trash because you are wounded.

Disclaimer: spirituality is an intensely personal thing. We know that people with all sorts of feelings and beliefs about faith and religion are going to read this book. Some of you may be devout, never wavering or questioning God’s goodness. Others of you may not trust God—and it’s even possible you’ve been hurt by people claiming to act on his behalf. Perhaps even our use of spiritual language is a trigger to you due to spiritual abuse you’ve encountered. If that’s true for you, we are so sorry.

Nearly four in ten people who don’t attend church in America departed after an ugly incident that deeply hurt them.<sup>2</sup> Consider that for a moment. A substantial portion of the nation’s non-Christian population is composed of people who at one time considered themselves to be Christian.

We’ve found that the main reason people have a difficult time trusting God is because they don’t trust those who follow him. That’s partially because as Christians we claim to be reliable, trustworthy ambassadors of God, though sometimes we’re unable to live up to those intentions when the rubber hits the road.

The hard truth is that Christians don’t always represent Christ. Faith and religion have been used to manipulate people or to build self-serving empires of fame, money, and power. That’s not what

we're doing here. The last thing we want you to think is that we are trying to trick you into agreeing with our faith perspective. If you aren't a person of Christian faith, this book is still for you. The application of the material in this book will still help you heal. If, as you read, you find yourself annoyed or frustrated that we return to Christian faith-based principles or ideologies, we hope you'll afford us some grace and recognize that we're speaking from our worldview and offering a perspective that may enrich or enlighten yours. We may come from different perspectives, but we have the same goal, and that is to help you heal.

### *What ABOUT You?*

How would you describe the stage of healing you find yourself at right now? Just starting out? Partway through and gaining momentum? Stalled? On the verge of a breakthrough? Empowered to help someone else?