

**how to**  
**find**  
**hope**  
**when life**  
**hurts**

**JIMMY EVANS**

with Frank Martin

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**SPiRE**

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To my precious wife, Karen.

You have been my best friend and devoted partner for over forty years. You have been long-suffering and faithful in the good times and bad. You have walked the pathway of healing with me as God has used you more than any other person to help heal the hurts of my past and minister his love to me. This book would not be possible without you.

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# Foreword

As a frequent traveler, I'm always fascinated by what others take with them and how they carry it. So many people lug around these huge suitcases and duffle bags, enormous purses, and overstuffed backpacks. It not only slows them down but also makes travel more difficult, always dragging stuff from place to place. So I've learned to travel light, which is exactly what this book will help you do.

No one intends to carry around so much baggage, but it happens to everyone. Your life starts off innocently enough. As a child, you enjoy playing make-believe, chasing one another outside, and swinging on the playground. Even if you encounter a bully or not-so-nice teacher, you're still full of hope and idealism. You look forward to getting older and enjoying more of what's ahead of you.

But then life's path takes a detour and trouble starts interrupting your journey in ways you never saw coming. You face a devastating loss and suddenly things no longer look so simple and innocent. The world is no longer the place you thought it was. Life is not as fair as you had once hoped. You try to do the right things, but following the rules can't guarantee you the security you so desperately crave.

## Foreword

So you make some bad choices, the kind with repercussions that don't go away. Maybe it's a habit that leads to an addiction. Maybe it's hanging out with the wrong crowd or dating the wrong kind of person. Maybe it's cutting corners at work. Maybe it's settling for something that kills your dreams. Once you're angry and hurt, though, you figure you might as well try to find pleasure anywhere you can.

Then other people in your life start doing things and saying things that hurt even more. Some of these experiences come from family members who say things that cut to the heart and leave wounds that just won't go away. Others come from random people who seem intent on destroying your life. All of a sudden, you've got some baggage.

It's usually not much at first—you know, just the carry-on type that you can wheel behind you or wear on your back. You think you can manage it, so you learn to compensate and just accept how it weighs you down. Then more stuff happens. And before you know it, there's even more baggage.

And then you begin to think that this is just the way it will always be. You grow weary and ache from the burdens that seem to pile on you from every direction. With each step, your journey gets tougher, and you feel resigned to despair. Life weighs you down and crushes your spirit, and you become convinced that there's no way out.

Sound familiar?

Well, now is the time for you to finally be free from all of the pain and baggage. Aren't you ready to be free, to lighten your load and experience new joy and fresh peace? The answer is obviously "yes," but the real question is "how?"

For me, the most liberating moment of any trip occurs when I realize I have nothing to carry through the airport



*Foreword*

terminal. Not only did I pack light, but I also checked my bags. You can do the same as you read this book.

In the pages that follow, my friend and fellow pastor Jimmy Evans will help you lighten the load you've accumulated over a lifetime. With his help, you'll discover where your baggage came from and why you continue to carry so much of it around everywhere you go. More importantly, you'll understand how you can let it go and walk in the freedom of God's grace. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). With biblical insight and practical wisdom, Jimmy will show you how to make this promise a reality.

Get ready. You're in store for a faith-filled journey of hope and healing.

Godspeed,  
Chris Hodges  
Bestselling author of *Fresh Air*

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Last and definitely not least, thank you to the elders, staff, and congregation of Trinity Fellowship Church in Amarillo, Texas, for their incredible love and support. Karen and I

### *Acknowledgments*

became members of Trinity in 1979. We were the walking wounded. At Trinity we found the most loving people we had ever met. All these years later, we haven't changed our minds. Thank you for believing and investing so much in us.

# 1

## Pictures of Pain

There is a sacredness in tears. . . . They are messengers of overwhelming grief . . . and unspeakable love.

—Washington Irving

On a dresser in our home two framed photographs sit side by side—one of me, and one of Karen. We are both about ten years old, both smiling widely and sitting atop the same brown and white Shetland pony. You can tell it's the same horse in both photos by the unique markings on its mane.

Karen and I are both wearing chaps, and we both have on the same black cowboy hat and brown scarf. I've got on my favorite baseball shirt, and a big white bandage is wrapped around my left elbow. I had fallen the day before and gashed it. Karen is wearing a two-toned top and looks as cute as a bug with her cropped blonde hair and precious little smile.

They look like the kind of pictures you'd get if you went to a rich kid's birthday party, where the dad sprung for a clown

and a caterer and about five hundred helium balloons, then rented a pony for the day so all the kids could have their pictures taken on it. The trouble is, I didn't know any rich kids like that growing up, and if I had, they certainly wouldn't have invited me to their party.

Karen would have been invited to such a party, but that's not where she got her picture, either.

It's always fun when new people show up at the house and admire these photos. They usually make some kind of comment like, "I didn't know you guys grew up together," and they're always surprised to learn that we didn't meet until high school. That's when we laugh and tell them the story.

Though Karen and I went to different schools, we grew up in the same neighborhood in Amarillo, Texas. One day after school I heard a knock on the door and went to answer it. There was a truck and a trailer parked down the street and a couple of guys walking door-to-door with this awesome brown and white Shetland pony in tow. I poked my head out the screen door and one of them said, "Hey, kid, how'd you like to have your picture taken on this horse?"

I thought to myself, *Are you kidding?* I was down the front steps and climbing on board faster than a mouse in a cat store. It never occurred to me that there might be financial ramifications for my parents. I assumed they were just a couple of nice guys with a cool horse. My dad wasn't too happy when the pictures arrived and he got the bill.

That same day, these guys also made their way over to Karen's street, and her parents were thrilled at the opportunity, though they obviously took the time to comb her hair and primp her up a bit before setting her on the saddle. So now we have these two great pictures in our home to confuse visitors.

I love these pictures almost as much as I love telling that story. And not just because of how cute Karen looks in a cowboy hat. I love them because they remind me of a time when life was much simpler and more innocent. As I look at these photos, a flood of memories comes to mind. Memories of my mom and dad and our small house on Lometa Street, right next to Fleetwood Park.

I remember playing ball in the street with my two older brothers, Damien and Lucifer (actually, their names are Randy and Mike). I remember walking to school every day with my friends, then walking home afterward, always taking the longest possible route, looking for mischief along the way. Those days are long gone, but the memories are still fresh in my mind. And they come flooding back each time I walk past these two faded photos.

There's another picture in our home that brings back memories just as fond and even more tender. It's a photo of my granddad, "Papaw." I loved Papaw and spent just about every summer vacation on his farm. He and my grandmother, "Mamaw," would open their home to my brothers and me and then spend all summer just loving on us, feeding us big helpings of bacon, eggs, and biscuits for breakfast, letting us ride on their tractor as they worked the land. Some of my fondest childhood memories were built on Papaw's farm.

But there's another memory tied to Papaw's photo. A traumatic one. Papaw was a chain smoker, and it caught up with him at the age of sixty-three. He died of a massive heart attack, far sooner than he should have died. I was just nineteen at the time and wasn't ready to let him go.

Standing in front of Papaw's casket as they lowered him into the ground was one of the saddest moments of my life.

Still to this day the memory haunts me. I wish I'd had more time to spend with him, more days to hang out with him on the farm, to laugh with him as we walked along the road, to learn from him. More moments of sitting next to him at the kitchen table, listening to the stories of his youth. Even now I'd give anything to have one more afternoon with Papaw. I'm convinced that he'll be the first one waiting for me at the Pearly Gates when I pass over, and what a reunion that's going to be.

### **My Favorite Photo**

There's one more photo in our home that makes my heart sing. This one brings back the happiest memories of all. It's our wedding photo. Karen and I are standing side by side, she looking radiant as ever in her beautiful white dress and holding a big bouquet of flowers. And me standing in my black suit with a goofy grin and a head full of stringy blond hair, like a dork who just won the bride lottery.

This photo means more to me than any possession we own. First, because it reminds me of our wedding day, the happiest day of my life. But more importantly, because it symbolizes a time in my life when everything changed for the better. As I look at this photo I'm reminded not only of the day we married, but of the days leading up to it and the moment I nearly lost her.

Just a week before our wedding, Karen broke up with me. I had been living a wild and immoral lifestyle while still trying to convince her that I was a decent person. I'm not sure why she stayed with me, but the closer our wedding day came, the more she knew she couldn't go through

with it. My friends were sinful and rowdy, and inside I was just like them. I tried to hide that from Karen, but she saw through the façade.

The day she broke off our wedding was a huge wake-up call to me. I suddenly realized that I was about to lose the only good thing I had going for me—the only friend I had worth keeping. And that realization finally brought me to my knees before God. I repented to God that day and pledged to do whatever it took to stay faithful, if only he would bring Karen back to me. I had prayed to God before, even prayers of repentance, but never with this level of brokenness and shame. It was the moment I finally surrendered myself to his will.

Karen could see my sincerity when I begged her to reconsider. She could tell something in me was different. I didn't deserve her forgiveness, but she forgave me anyway, trusting that I would stay true to my word. She agreed to go through with the wedding, and I did exactly what I told her I would do. I broke off ties with all of my immoral friends and threw myself into the Word, praying daily, pleading with God to make me a better person.

On the day of our wedding I was as frightened as I was excited. I had just lost every friend I had in the world except for Karen and Jesus. I had never before been able to keep a promise—especially a life-changing one—and I honestly didn't know if I could keep this one. But I loved Karen and I loved my Lord, and I was committed to staying faithful to both of them.

It is now over forty years later, and I still have my two best friends—Karen and Jesus. Through all the ups and downs, they've both stayed by my side. God has been with us every



step of the way, changing our hearts and making our marriage stronger. It hasn't always been easy—especially the first few years—but I shudder to think where I'd be today without them.

This photo of our wedding day stands as a constant reminder of God's love and faithfulness, even in the midst of my sin and rebellion. It's more than a memory to me; it's my own private stone marker, symbolizing the goodness of God and the journey of faith he continues to lead me through each day.

## Stone Markers

That's what photographs are to us. They are tiny bits of remembrance, snapped during a moment of happiness and captured for all time. We display them in an effort to relive the joy, to remember the moment, to somehow reexperience the emotion of the memory.

A mom and daughter are walking along the beach, collecting shells, washing their toes in the tide, laughing and sharing their deepest secrets, bonding spiritually and emotionally. Dad sees the event and scrambles for his camera, aiming it just in time to catch them gazing into each other's eyes, smiling, with the ocean framed in the background. What was intended as a simple snapshot is soon mounted and framed, hung on the wall as a lifelong symbol of love and devotion between a mother and daughter.

A son stands in his cap and gown at a college graduation ceremony, his arm stretched around his father's shoulder. The two pose for a quick picture, and soon the photograph finds its place on the mantel. To most people it is simply

another graduation photo. But to the father it is a symbol of profound significance. It reminds him of the years they had together, the many days of mentoring and sacrifice, the times of joy, the moments of frustration, the long nights of prayer on his son's behalf. It is a trophy of triumph and satisfaction. A stone marker of approval, reminding him daily of a daunting task fulfilled.

These small memories have a deep and overwhelming impact on our lives. In many ways they make us who we are. They shape our thoughts and silently guide our lives. They remind us who we are, where we've been, and what we've been through. Moments of pride and joy have a way of burning themselves into the fabric of our hearts, leaving marks of contentment on our spirits. And the more good memories we have, the more likely we are to have a happy and emotionally healthy outlook on life.

The reason such memories affect us so deeply is because you and I are hardwired to remember. It's how God made us. More than that, it's how God *makes* us. How he shapes us. God uses the events and experiences of our lives, not only to draw us to himself, but to push us toward our purpose—toward the people he created us to become.

The images we hang on our walls hang much more prominently on our hearts. And the memories they bring have an eternal impact on our lives.

## **Photos of Grief**

If that's true, then what about the bad memories? What about the moments of pain and disappointment? The times of deep and abiding sadness? The days of trying time and again to

succeed, only to end in failure? What about the seasons of sin and rebellion, the times we'd like to forget? What about those memories of abuse or neglect or deep rejection? How do these moments affect our lives?

You and I both know the answer, don't we? Moments of pain can be devastating to the heart and soul. And they can do untold damage to the spirit.

I once heard that it takes ten kind words to undo the pain done by one hurtful and biting comment. I'm not sure who came up with that figure, but I'm convinced it is true. If anything, it's an understatement.

Some good friends of ours are big fans of a program on television called *Intervention*. I've never seen the show, but they've described a number of the episodes to me. The program films real-life interventions, where a group of people confront a friend in an effort to help them overcome a serious problem or dysfunction. Often the person is struggling with an addiction to drugs or alcohol. Sometimes they have a severe eating disorder, like anorexia or bulimia. Other times they are simply unable to process a traumatic event or crisis from their past.

These friends told me about one episode that depicted a girl who refused to swallow. She would chew her food but then spit it out. She had not swallowed in over fourteen years. In order to stay alive, she had taught herself how to inject food directly into her stomach through a tube. The poor girl was dangerously thin and malnourished, and her family was determined to get her help.

Another episode featured a forty-year-old former firefighter named Jeff. He was a decorated hero who had once saved his partner's life. But a traumatic event caused him to start drinking, and soon he lost his job due to several DUIs.

His drinking increased, and several times he was rushed to the hospital with severe seizures. His wife and son moved out of the house in frustration, causing him to drink even more. His family finally confronted him on camera in a desperate attempt to get him back on track.

*Intervention* has been on the air for several years, and each week it chronicles the story of another person suffering through deep pain and addiction. And if you've ever watched the program, you've no doubt noticed an interesting truth. Though the stories are different, there's one common denominator that ties them all together. No matter what addiction these hurting people have, no matter what problem or dysfunction they're struggling with, they can all trace their troubles to a tragic event or circumstance from their past.

Every single story of addiction is somehow rooted in pain. Every dysfunction, no matter how severe, can be traced back to tragedy. Every eating disorder, every case of alcoholism, every emotional disorder they feature has a history of hurt.

I notice that same dynamic in my counseling office. Every person I see with a significant addiction, depression, or other dysfunction—no matter what specific problem they are working through—eventually breaks down in tears as they describe a devastating event or circumstance from their past. I hear stories of abusive fathers, of neglectful mothers, of brutal neighborhood bullies; stories of emotional trauma and heartache, premature deaths, personal rejection, physical and verbal violence, shattered friendships, broken marriages, divorcing parents.

Every person I counsel, without exception, is dealing with some form of deep-seated, unresolved, unprocessed pain from his or her past.

## When Pain Lingers

These are not memories we try to hang on to; they are memories that hang on to us. No one displays photographs of grief and misery on their mantel. I've been to a lot of homes, yet I've never once seen a picture of a car accident hanging on a living room wall. I've never seen a devastating diagnosis from the doctor sitting on the shelf, or a pink slip from work framed on an end table. These are events we try to forget, but they remain just the same.

When moments of chaos and confusion come into our lives they have a way of hanging on, of clinging to the core of our consciousness and clawing at the fabric of our emotional health. They take up residence in the darkest corner of our hearts, a place I call the "hurt pocket." And once there, these painful moments set up house, filling the walls with photos of turbulence and turmoil, memories of abuse and neglect and rejection, thoughts of insecurity and self-hate.

The hurt pocket is where unresolved pain goes to hide and gather. And the more space it fills, the more it compromises our mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

It's true that pain is a natural part of life. We all deal with it to varying degrees. People die. Friends leave. Parents make mistakes. Sin brings tragedy into the world on a daily basis, and we're all vulnerable to getting hurt. Much of the grief we experience is manageable. But what about those events that you and I are not equipped to deal with? Those moments of emotional devastation that exceed our ability to cope? The wounding words from someone we love. The father who leaves for no apparent reason. The uncle who suddenly turns

into a sexual predator. The accident that leaves us physically or emotionally paralyzed.

These are the moments of pain that begin to collect and build within us, that gather inside the hurt pocket of our souls, leaving our spirits wounded and battered. And the memories they bring have a deep and profound impact on our lives.

Just as the joyous moments we capture on film and hang on the walls of our homes work to lift our spirits, these painful memories work to tear them down. They, too, silently guide our lives, reminding us where we've been and what we've been through. They attach themselves to the fabric of our hearts, leaving marks of insecurity and self-doubt on our spirits. And the more painful memories we have, the harder we have to work to overcome them.

## **The Healing We Need**

There's a phrase that is common in Christian circles. If you've been in the church for any amount of time, you've no doubt heard it. Chances are good you've said it to someone else at one time or another. It's a true phrase that carries lots of wisdom, but also lots of frustration for those who find themselves on the business end of the comment.

It usually comes up in a small group setting where one person finally begins to open up and share some deep-seated feelings of pain or rejection. They'll expose their innermost thoughts to the group, maybe even for the first time, and an awkward silence will follow. Eventually someone will break the silence and say, "Just give your pain to God and he'll bring you comfort."

It's a well-meaning phrase that carries more truth than a mountain of self-help books, but the words can often bring more pain than peace. A person immersed in hurt has no doubt tried to give their pain to God, over and over again, yet still carries it deep inside. To someone who has spent countless nights in prayer, pleading with God to heal their wounded spirit, a comment like this can feel devastating.

If you've found yourself on this page, I'm guessing you understand exactly what I mean. Chances are good you've heard that phrase before, maybe more than a few times. You've been carrying unresolved pain in your heart for longer than you can remember, and you've lost countless hours of sleep praying for relief, yet nothing seems to work.

If I'm right, I encourage you to stay with me as we explore a solution together.

We'll begin by helping to shine a gentle light inside the hurt pocket of your heart, exploring the deep, dark places where pain has gone to hide and fester. We'll expose the pictures of grief and sorrow that hang on the inner walls of your spirit, and perhaps even help you find a name for your pain.

Once there, we'll take a firsthand look at how the enemy works to keep wounds fresh and memories painful. Satan is the father of lies, and he uses grief and misery to keep us in emotional and spiritual bondage. I call Satan the "Hurt Whisperer," because wherever there is pain, you can bet he is there, scheming and plotting, whispering his lies into the core of our hearts and minds. Satan is sly and stealthy, and he relies on his ability to remain under the radar. His voice is not an audible one, but it is always there, always working to tear us down and separate us from God.

Finally, we'll explore some concrete things you and I can do in order to give God complete access to our pain. Only then can he bring the healing we need.

Turns out our friends were right all along. What you and I most need to do is give our pain to God and let him bring comfort. Like most truths of the Christian walk, however, giving our pain to God is a process, not a singular event. And that's a journey best taken together.

..... **Takeaway** .....

- Most of us take photographs to capture those happy and cherished moments in our lives. These photographs remind us who we are, where we've been, and what we've been through.
- Just like the photographs that fill the walls of our homes, the memories that fill our hearts—both pleasant and painful ones—shape our thoughts and silently guide our lives.
- Most of us struggle with unprocessed pain from our past. And these moments of pain begin to collect and gather within the hurt pocket of our spirits. Almost all of us are carrying unresolved pain in our hearts, and the only way to find true healing is to learn how to give our pain to God.