

LOVE LIKE YOU'VE NEVER BEEN HURT

HOPE, HEALING
AND THE
POWER OF AN OPEN HEART

JENTEZEN FRANKLIN
WITH **CHERISE FRANKLIN**
AND **A. J. GREGORY**



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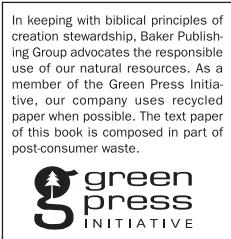
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To our grandchildren, Amelia and Luca,
that they might live out a legacy of mercy and love.

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain said, “If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.”¹

Twain was right.

You can care for a dog that has been abused. You can love it. You can nurture it. You can feed it. You can call it your own. Despite the pain that this animal has endured and because of your love for it, this dog will become your best friend. He will greet you at the door every day. He will come when you call. And he will be loyal to you until his dying day.

As true as this mutually sacrificial relationship is of dogs, it is not always true of human beings. In fact, I believe the very people we love the most will hurt us the most.

We have to learn how to love like we’ve never been hurt.

This is critical because, as sure as you are reading this book, someone is going to break your heart. Someone is going to abandon you or leave you. Someone is going to say something hurtful to you. Someone is going to disappoint you. Someone is going to let you down, lie to you, stab you in the back. Someone is going to reject you.

Chances are, someone already has. As you read these words, you may be picturing the face of the person who has caused you pain. The parent who left home when you were five years old. The spouse who cheated on you. The sibling who refuses to talk to you. The child who has chosen to rebel. The friend who betrayed a sacred secret.

Whatever it is, you have loved hard and were wounded. This someone has cut off your love supply. And you are not living fully, the way God intended, because you do not know how, or if it is even possible, to love like you've never been hurt.

It's easy to love others when we have no conflict with them. Or when we share the same viewpoints. Or the same theology. Or the same standard. It's easy to love when marriage is in the honeymoon stage, when our children act right all the time, when we have our health and our happiness.

But no one lives in that kind of state all the time.

Jesus told us that in this world we would have trouble (John 16:33). In Matthew 18:7 (NKJV), He even says, "Offenses must come."

Getting hurt is part of life. It's inevitable. But that is not the end of the story.

God does not want us to be the walking wounded. He intended for us to be healed and to be whole. He created us to love like we've never been hurt because that is what He does, and we are made in His image.

James Garfield had been the twentieth president of the United States for only four months when he was shot in the back on July 2, 1881, by a would-be assassin. He lived just under three months more.

You would think it was the shot that killed him. It wasn't.

You see, the bullet did not penetrate any vital organs. It got stuck behind his pancreas, but it was not a fatal injury. But back then, doctors weren't concerned about germs; they did not even

believe they existed because they couldn't see them. So minutes after President Garfield was shot, doctors pressed in around him to stick their fingers and push unsterilized instruments into his wound. They poked and prodded as far as they could in his body, hoping to find the bullet and remove it. They continued to do this for eighty days while President Garfield languished in the hospital. As we today would expect, this regular unsterilized digging worsened the president's condition. He developed infections and eventually died.

I find it fascinating that President Garfield did not succumb to death because of the bullet wound. He died from the infections caused by doctors who kept probing the wound.

Funny—we tend to do this with our own wounds. We replay the bad memories again and again. We talk about them repeatedly to anyone who will listen. We think of ways we can exact revenge. We poke and prod at our gaping wounds. In the process, we become bitter. Hardened. And, often, we withhold our love from those who need it most.

But this is not how God wants us to live. He wants to give us a new beginning. A new story. A fresh start. He wants to heal what has been broken. He wants to reconcile what has been torn apart.

This is about understanding biblical forgiveness and reconciliation and establishing healthy boundaries, as I will explain in this book. Love without limits is not about codependence or irrational thinking, and it is not an invitation to be used as a doormat or a whipping post.

The bottom line is that we need to put our relationships back together. The Body of Christ is full of parents who are estranged from their own children. Some of us have not spoken to family members in years, though they live only a few miles away. Some grandchildren have never even met their grandparents. Some Christians who were abused growing up still harbor the injustice, making it difficult to pursue healthy relationships in their own families.

Some have lost loved ones and are too hurt to figure out how to love the ones that are left.

This sickness can only be healed by Love.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

Love never fails.

Love is a powerful force. In this passage, Paul notes that our problem in the Church is that we place power gifts higher than love. But good preaching, revival services and prophetic words, without love, will fail. You can't win the lost with any other language than the language of love.

When we seek to love God, love ourselves and love others, we can learn to love despite what happened in the past. We can mend brokenness that has plagued our families for generations. In fact, Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5 that we are to have a ministry of reconciliation (see verse 18). If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are called to reconcile.

It is never wrong to love.

It is never out of order to love.

You do not compromise when you love.

You never lower your standards when you love.

I know these are loaded truths for some of you to digest, and I will unpack what they mean throughout this book. Many of us fail to realize that what matters most in life is relationships. An abundant life does not consist of the abundance of stuff. The world does not place much value on relationships. It tells us money is important. Titles are important. The right zip code is important. Looks are important. Fast cars and big homes are important.

Do you remember when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was? He replied, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39 NKJV).

Here Jesus emphasized in a big way the importance of relationships. This is what life is about—loving God, loving ourselves and loving others.

I get what it’s like to be hurt. I’m not telling you to do something I have not done myself—and even made mistakes along the way trying. I know the temptation to not want to let go of hurt or disappointment.

My marriage has had severe tests and struggles, and so has my family. In writing this book, my wife and I decided to share some things we have never shared before. We determined we don’t have to keep up a ministerial front. Life gets real! At times I felt unqualified to preach to others because my own marriage and family were going through hell.

What I learned was if you’re going through hell, don’t stop there. Keep going ’til you get to the other side.

I have discovered that trouble is one of God’s great servants because it reminds us how much we continually need Him. God is not put off by our struggles. He says, *I’ll help you. I really will.* When you have gone as far as you can, you have just pulled up

into God's driveway. When you are ready to throw up your hands, throw them up to Him.

Some moments change everything about you and your family for the rest of your life. Whether loss, a betrayal, an addiction, an infidelity—without a doubt, these things affect the dynamics of our relationships.

But God creates all things new.

It is time to let Him give you a new beginning. It is time to let God bind up your bruises and heal your wounds.

I love these words written by the ancient prophet:

Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound.

Isaiah 30:26 NKJV

If you let God heal your wounded places, your nights will become like days and your days will shine seven times brighter.

Think about this for a moment.

Do you want to be right or reconciled?

Do you want to be hurt or healed?

Do you want to keep being the victim or start becoming whole?

Since you have started reading this book, I am pretty confident I know what you would answer. And the only way to be reconciled, healed and whole is to love like you've never been hurt.

LOVE MATTERS

Our daughter glared at my wife, Cherise, and me. Her eyes blazed with anger.

If you have ever raised a teenager, you know what I am talking about. I don't know what it is, but most kids at this age seem to lose their minds for about six years.

"You can't tell me what to do!" my daughter shouted.

I looked at her square in the face. "We're going to work this out."

"Ugh," she groaned. "No way! I'm out of here."

"Oh, no! You are not going anywhere until we sit down and talk!" I said with clenched teeth.

The second our daughter turned toward our bedroom door, I jumped into position. Fullback position. Stretching out each arm, I blocked her path.

"You can't trap me here!" our daughter yelled.

"Oh yes, we can," I shot back, my arms waving wildly.

My frustration mounted, but my heart broke. Arguments like this one had taken place many times, it seemed, not just with this daughter, but with others as well.

During that particular episode, we were smack in the middle of a family crisis. Each day brought another fight. Some clashes were more disruptive than others. Some aroused deep sadness. Others harsh words.

It started when our oldest daughter went off to college. Growing up, she was a model child. But during the first few weeks of school, away from home, she began to stray. She wanted to see what it was like on the other side of church life. She got involved with the wrong crowd. And she made some of the worst choices that a young girl could make.

As the situation grew more serious, my wife and I knew we had to do something.

I will never forget the day I was putting the final touches on a sermon I was about to preach in thirty minutes. Cherise flew into the room, on a mission. The look on her face said it all.

“Jentezen, I’m going to get our daughter. Are you going to choose the church and stay and preach, or are you going to choose your daughter and come with me?”

The answer was obvious. I dropped what I was doing to take care of my family.

Cherise and I did not speak much on the three-hour drive to the university. Our daughter did not know we were coming, let alone coming to pull her out of school and bring her home. We didn’t know what to expect.

Once we arrived, Cherise phoned her. My wife asked what she was doing but did not mention we were there. I waited in the car while Cherise walked into the building where our daughter was. Suddenly, my wife saw her walking toward the lobby where she stood. The minute our daughter saw Cherise, she broke down. Collapsing to her knees, she began to sob uncontrollably.

“We’re taking you home,” Cherise said, gently. “Right now.”

And with those words, the three of us drove off-campus. None of us looked back. We did not even go to our daughter’s dorm and take anything with us; we left her room as is. The stuff did not matter. We wanted our baby girl home.

Once she settled back in with us, things got even worse in some ways. We begged and pleaded with her. We argued and screamed at her. We tried to control her with money. We took away her car. We forbade her to party and hang out with friends who were bad influences. Nothing worked. She just hardened more and more.

This constant contention began to affect the atmosphere of our home. We were always having arguments, confronting lies and deceptions. This crisis sucked the life out of my wife and me. Our hearts were broken. We felt little joy. We were different people, aged and emotionally exhausted.

At times Cherise and I disagreed on how we should discipline. This brought a friction into our marriage that was overwhelming. Satan’s strategy has never changed: divide and conquer. A house divided cannot stand.

My other children were enduring life in this war zone. They noticed quickly the change that came over Cherise and me. And they did not like it. Three of our kids were teenagers at the time and had their own stuff to deal with. It seemed every day we were battling a crisis of some sort with at least one of our children.

One such moment was the incident I wrote about at the beginning of this chapter. Let’s get back to it for a moment. When I was blocking my daughter from leaving the room, I could not help but wonder, *When is this all going to end?*

The argument escalated. I noticed my voice getting louder and tried hard to tame my tongue. It was not easy. Our daughter tried to make another move toward the closed bedroom door,

**Satan’s strategy
has never changed:
divide and conquer.**

but Cherise and I were determined. We stood fast, blocking her every turn.

Exasperated, she finally yelled, “If you don’t let me do what I want to do, I’m going to—” As she hurled a desperate and emotion-filled threat to harm herself, I shot back with words of my own. Of course, there was no legitimate truth to what she said—my wife and I knew it was typical teenage theatrics—but it was a tipping point that brought the dramatic exchange to full blast. All three of us were yelling at that point. The conversation was going nowhere, but the conflict was growing.

It went on like this for a while. At some point, Cherise left the room. When she stepped out into the hallway, she practically tripped over our two youngest children. Our youngest daughter was ten, and our youngest child and only son was nine. I cannot remember which one was doing what, but one of them was praying earnestly and the other pleading the blood of Jesus over and over. It was a tender moment.

As our daughter tells it, in overhearing the heated argument, she had taken it upon herself to run spiritual interference. She grabbed her brother from whatever he was doing and said, “You need to come with me to Mom and Dad’s room quick. The devil is in the house. We’ve got to go down there and pray!”

Our son nodded and followed suit. “Hey,” he piped up, as they dashed down the stairs to the first floor, “get the Bible. We need to take a Bible with us.”

Midstride, our daughter bobbed her head in agreement and ran back up to her room. When our son saw her bolting back down the stairs with her girlie-pink Bible, his eyes went wide. “No, no, no!” he said, shaking his head. “A pink Bible’s not going to work. The devil is *really* in this house! You’ve got to get a black Bible!”

Cherise and I burst out laughing when our daughter told us this story. It helped to take the edge off, briefly.

But even a cute story cannot mask a desperate reality.

The constant arguments and contention in our home fragmented our once-peaceful family dynamic. Strangely, as our family struggled to tread water and stay afloat, our church grew exponentially. Amazing doors began to open for the ministry. New multimillion-dollar buildings were built. My books became *New York Times* bestsellers. Christian TV networks began to broadcast our weekly sermons all over the world. All of this was happening while I was going through what felt like the valley of the shadow of death in my own home.

Looking back on how Cherise and I kept functioning, I can only say it was by the grace of God. Some Sundays, before I would preach, I would get on my knees in my office and just weep. “God,” I would say, “I don’t know how I’m going to do this. I’m afraid. I’m broken. I’m hurting. I feel like running away and never coming back. But I do not go in my name or my own power. I go in Your name and the power of Your Spirit. I will not give up the fight for my family. Help me. I belong to You. I’m Yours.” And when I would stand up and preach, God’s grace would come and the services would be powerful.

I have discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weakness. He cannot resist when we humbly and honestly admit how desperately we need Him. When we are empty vessels, He longs to fill us with His grace, love and goodness. This is God’s law of attraction.

I remember countless Sundays during which our kids accompanied us to church but made clear it was the last place they wanted to be. Never underestimate the power of just being there. When it seems like the Word is not working, it is. If you will work the Word, the Word will work. It will not return void. Whatever bad news we would receive about our teenage girls, we would keep on

God is attracted to weakness. When we are empty vessels, He longs to fill us with His grace, love and goodness.

interceding, keep on bringing them to church, keep on marching them into the front row. And I kept on preaching the Word.

One weekend, my wife called me. Our oldest daughter had left home. We had just returned from a trip to Orange County, California, to a note that she had left for good. It said something like, "I can't live by these rules. I'm going to do what I want to do. I can't keep causing you this pain." Cherise remembers thinking that at least our daughter was courteous enough to leave a note before taking off for the last time.

My wife and I were heartbroken. We did not know where she was for about a week. Cherise went into what could only be described as a grieving process. We did everything we could to find our daughter, and we could not. We mourned for days and nights, not knowing where our child was.

Finally, after about a week, she called. She reassured us that she was okay and that she was working as a nanny for a local family. For the next few months, she came around our home only on occasion. Our contact with her was very limited. One day, she told us she had fallen in love. Months later, she got married by a justice of the peace. We found out via a text.

It was a crushing blow to a family that was once very close. Cherise felt robbed of the dream of preparing for and watching our first daughter get married. I remember, a week later, officiating the wedding of one of her friends. When I watched the bride and her father walk down the aisle, my heart broke. I was devastated.

Some things get broken and can never be put back exactly the same. Yet God can make all things new.

It took everything in me not to show my emotion. I would never get that opportunity to do the same with my own daughter.

The truth is, some things get broken and can never be put back exactly the same. Yet God can make all things new.

It was at this time that I first heard the phrase *Love like you've never been hurt*. People specu-

late as to who said it originally, but the words came alive in my heart when I heard it.

If you will be willing to love like you've never been hurt, God can heal every broken relationship in your life. Nehemiah 4:2 talks about the Israelites rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem from dust and burned stones. "Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?"

Do not throw away the stones that have been burned. God can and will use them to rebuild your family.

Reconnecting and rebuilding the broken walls in our family has not been an easy or quick process, I admit. We still have challenges that we have to work through and get over. But we have determined to love like we've never been hurt. It is a choice we have to make over and over and over again.

Now, we haven't always done it right, but Cherise and I have made this commitment to our family. We've been encouraged by the ancient proverb that says when you raise your children in the way that they should go, when they get older, they will not depart from it (see Proverbs 22:6).

Our oldest daughter today loves Jesus with all of her heart. She is the media director of a large church in the Atlanta area. Her husband works there also as a graphic artist. They blessed us with our first beautiful granddaughter, Amelia.

Another daughter is married and together with her husband pastors our church in Orange County and have a precious son, Luca. My third daughter went to Oral Roberts University, graduated from Vanguard University in California and is involved in ministry. My youngest daughter is in her second year of college in Los Angeles. She is a professional model and she loves Jesus supremely. Our son is a student at Liberty University and is pursuing a huge call on his life. This has been the fruit of refusing to allow hurt to dictate how we love our children.

As I was writing this chapter, I remembered the first sermon I ever preached. I was twenty years old. I pulled up to a little country church where I would speak in front of fifty people. As I approached the pulpit, nerves knotted my stomach.

I spoke from Philippians 3:13–14 (NKJV),

I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

I stumbled through that message nervously. But when I concluded, God had touched lives and the altars were filled.

The biggest point in that first sermon was this: “You don’t just need a good memory. Sometimes you need a good forgettery.” To move forward, you have to let go of the past. You have to release what is behind you and reach for what is before you. If you will reach for a new day, God will begin, little by little, to release you from the past.

**To move forward,
you have to release
the past and reach
for the future.**

Funny, 34 years later, I am writing this book with a heavy mandate from God to say the same thing.

Life is an adventure in forgiveness. It is all about releasing and reaching. Release the past and reach for the future. The only way to do this is to love like you’ve never been hurt. This means loving so intensely that it overrides all your natural instincts for bitterness and revenge.

You will never get ahead trying to get even. When you have been wronged, a poor memory is your best response. A good forgettery is what all of us need.

Have you ever noticed how a jeweler shows his best diamonds? He sets them against a black velvet backdrop. The contrast of the jewels against the dark background accentuates their luster.

In the same way, God does His most stunning work where things seem hopeless. Wherever there is pain, suffering and desperation, Jesus is there. There is no better place for the brilliance of Christ to shine.

I do not know what is going on in your life as you read this book. But I do know this: The pain you feel today is the pain you can heal.

I have never felt the pain of addiction. I have never felt the pain of losing a child. I have never felt the pain of divorce. I can only offer people the advice of God's Word and prayer. But people who have *been through* those valleys and felt that pain are more qualified to help heal someone going through the same crisis. What is important to remember, however, is that regardless of the source of your pain, God can heal you.

It has been said that family provides us with life's greatest joys and at times life's deepest sorrows. When I think about how hard it is to make the family work, the challenges that come and the complications involved, it is really something else. Family members know how to tick us off. They can get on our nerves. The people we love most are the ones who potentially, through offenses, can infect us if we do not react right. But I have learned that with challenges comes opportunity. And family also provides the greatest opportunity for us to learn how to love like we've never been hurt.

THE BIG IDEA

The pain you feel today is the pain you can heal.