

JASON VALLOTTON
with
KRIS VALLOTTON

WINNING THE
THE JOURNEY TO HEALING *and* WHOLENESS
WAR WITHIN



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Note that in some of the authors' stories, the names and identifying details of certain individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Foreword

This book is a powerful key to unlocking the hearts of those who have been trapped by the pain and memories of their past traumas and experiences. Jason's vulnerable testimony will help those who have been hurt and betrayed to find the courage and strength to face their own pain. His journey of love and forgiveness testifies that there is no situation beyond the unending reach of God's love and redemption. God promises us that if we give Him the ashes of our lives, He will exchange them for His beauty, no matter how big our ash heap seems to be!

Jason and Kris have shared deep insights from the heart of God that are crucial for the journey from pain into the beauty of His restoration. They have done an amazing job of writing about a difficult subject in a very transparent and moving way. Their openness and vulnerability will pave the way for many to come out of the prison of unforgiveness and into a place of healing and freedom.

During the last several years of being a missionary in one of the poorest nations in the world, I have seen some of the greatest suffering imaginable. I have also had the joy of seeing God bring about restoration in the most remarkable ways! This hinges on one of the biggest decisions that we can ever make: the decision to forgive. Forgiveness makes the difference between continued torment and suffering, and freedom and redemption beyond our wildest dreams.

Often, I have witnessed how those who have experienced unimaginable atrocities have come into a radical transformation beyond what they could have ever hoped for. This happened as they courageously chose to forgive. One such person is Luis. He is one of my greatest heroes. He taught me about the power of forgiveness and mercy.

I found Luis on the streets. He was sick and full of anger because he had been burned in his house (which was a cardboard box) by people who had previously been his friends. They had poured gasoline on it, tied him to the cardboard and lit it on fire, leaving him to die. He was terribly burned and spent many months in a dilapidated local hospital. He was unhappy and bitter about being treated so horribly. His misery had brought him to a place of great brokenness, and he had nothing left to take pride in. He would often wet himself, and he lived in filth.

When I met Luis, I held him in my arms and told him about Jesus' passionate love. I invited him to come home and live with us. At the time, Luis was not very merciful or forgiving; he made his living by hitting, stealing from and knifing people! But I kept telling Luis about this man

named Jesus who had given up His home and riches and had walked the streets—the One who had left heaven and came to earth to find him. Eventually, Luis said, “I must know this man!”

One day, Luis came to me and said that he wanted to go to the streets with me so he could tell the guys who had tried to kill him that he forgave them. I watched Luis pour out extravagant mercy on many in the streets of Maputo, and I watched the favor of God increase in his broken little life.

One of our churches at that time was an unconventional congregation. We met in a brothel to reach the prostitutes. We worshiped Jesus, prayed and simply loved the resident prostitute girls. We were not seeing a lot of breakthrough, however, in the girls escaping the cycle of their destructive lifestyles. (Some of these girls were as young as ten, eleven and twelve years old, and they were selling their bodies on the streets for a bottle of Coke.) I was desperate for Jesus to set them free.

While I was on a 40-day fast (and feeling very hungry and desperate), I cried out to God to change the situation. Shortly after this, the girls fell on their knees during worship and started screaming, “We cannot sell ourselves anymore!” I started weeping for joy and asked Jesus what I should do next. I knew that I could not move these girls into the same center as the boys and that I needed to find a church where the pastor would not fall into temptation. I needed a pastor whose heartbeat matched Jesus’ in holiness and purity, and who was free from judgment.

After crying out to God, I looked up and saw Luis praying and worshiping God wholeheartedly in the dirt. He had not finished the pastors' Bible school because he could not read or write, but he was a man full of mercy and compassion. Luis was worshiping with his hands lifted up, adoring the Lord. I held Luis and asked him if he would like to care for these girls as a pastor. He fell apart sobbing, asking if God could give him the privilege and honor of such a beautiful task.

Kneeling down, he looked up at me and asked, "Could God have such great love to use a man like me?" Luis had great humility and great love! He moved to a small new base and began to pastor the girls.

Luis is in heaven now. He died of the AIDS he had contracted in his youth, while living on the streets. Luis's life was one of love, mercy and radical forgiveness, poured out in worship for his King. This day, in heaven, he is full of joy with his Bridegroom. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7 NASB).

Jason and Kris, like Luis, have chosen to let go of the ashes of their deep pain and have said a costly yes to God's great exchange. They have chosen to walk in ultimate justice where forgiveness and releasing is the standard of righteousness, rather than bitterness and revenge. I am so proud of the Vallottons and the way that they have walked in love through an extraordinarily difficult situation. I have watched their lives and have witnessed firsthand how they have chosen to forgive and to show extraordinary compassion.

This is ultimate justice: that even in our times of deepest pain, we get the privilege of partnering with God in His boundless love and get to experience the height, breadth and depth of His glorious forgiveness flowing through us to others. This is the highest call imaginable and the greatest ministry conceivable, and it is for all of us. It is the call and mandate to love so deeply and so well that it will turn the world upside down!

Heidi Baker, Ph.D., founder and president,
Iris Global, www.irisglobal.org

Introduction

I never dreamed that any of my children would come to me and break the news that my son Jason did the day he visited my office several years ago. And I never imagined that what he had to tell me would trigger one of the worst nightmares in our family's history. Nonetheless, I sat there, stunned, trying my best to absorb his words.

“Dad,” he said, “I think my marriage is over.”

For the next eighteen months, I watched my son writhe under the intense pain of rejection, abandonment and grief. Day after hard day, I stood by my family as we mostly fumbled about trying to make sense out of the unfathomable.

My wife, Kathy, and I did our best to comfort our family, but we were wounded, too. It felt as if we had been harpooned in the very depths of our own souls. I had lost my father when I was three years old and had two stepfathers

who abused me, but I had never experienced pain like this. Together we cried enough tears for a lifetime.

As we plodded on, something profound began to emerge. It started with Jason, the most wounded of all. As he struggled through the healing process, he received incredible insights. He would say things like, “Dad, God showed me that it’s only when we mourn that we are comforted.” Jason chose to embrace his pain instead of run from it. At first I questioned the validity of his wholeness. I thought he was living in some sort of denial to help him cope with his extraordinary grief.

As time passed, however, I came to realize that he had taken the most unusual path to wholeness that I had ever seen. Not only was his revelation unusual, but it was also working. Jason and our family were getting well, and joy was filling our lives once again.

The idea of facing pain head on and coming out the other side filled with true joy may be foreign to many Christians, who out of fear succumb to the religious peer pressure of putting on the mask of a happy face at all times. Consequently, hurting people push down their pain instead of confronting it. This leads to a life of unresolved agony, as bleeding hearts continue to fester and never receive the comfort needed to truly heal. Our culture tends to avoid pain because many of us have never been given the tools to work through heartbreak and come out the other end of the process healed, whole and healthy.

In the midst of his grief, Jason started processing his thoughts through journaling and songwriting, which led

him to create a toolbox for working through his pain instead of trying to leap over it. Once in a while he would sing me one of his songs or read me something he wrote. His journal was filled with amazing wisdom and deep insights into the process of his wholeness. He began using his new tools as he ministered to people in our ministry school and church family. Before long he was helping hundreds of people find keys to unlock their own prison doors of pain. When he shared his journey from the podium, people lined up to tell him their own stories and then listen to his wisdom. Now Jason shares his insights and wisdom in this book.

A family psychologist did not write *Winning the War Within*. Instead it was penned by two people—a son whose heart was broken into a million tiny pieces when his marriage ended, and by his father, who healed alongside him.

The insights came to Jason, and he is the one who lived them out, so he writes most of the book. I added a chapter of my own and insights and reflections in some of the others. Our prayer and sincere desire are that the words of this book would become your path to wholeness and joy. May God Himself meet you as you read and lead you into the palace of your dreams.

Kris Vallotton, father of a restored family,
www.krisvallotton.com

Preface

The Story of a Thousand Lives

From the beginning of our creation, we were designed to win every battle, war and conflict—regardless of the cards we were dealt. Our history in God proves this over and over. With a little faith and some jars, trumpets and torches, three hundred men defeated an army so large that it was impossible to count all the opposing warriors. In Sunday school we learn about Daniel in the lions’ den and about David slaying Goliath with a single stone and no fear. Yet when it comes to us, we crumble at the first sight of opposition because we have not conquered our inner fears.

I am no different from the rest of humanity. My story is the story of a thousand lives. White picket fences and clean sidewalks were my fortress, protecting me from the evils of a world gone mad. I walked the thin line of safety, struggling to weigh out each decision, knowing that each

had the potential to affect my eternity. Yet, as careful as I was, heartache somehow found its way to my front door, leaving me emotionally broke and physically devastated.

Over the past fifteen years of being a pastor, I have heard a myriad of stories from people from all different walks of life. Most of these situations you would never wish on your worst enemy. But with each story (including mine) I have found a golden thread interwoven among them all.

What we learned in school taught us how to climb the ladder of intellectual success. Academically we have been carefully groomed to position ourselves for promotion, with the mindset that a person's happiness lies in his or her ability to create monetary success and financial stability. I have found, however, that regardless of all the scholastic training and philosophical lectures, people are still left hurting, wondering how to do real life. In spite of the countless hours of teaching, even from our mothers and fathers, we have no idea how to navigate the world we live in. Disappointment, pain and fear have so ravished our society that we now live in the most medicated time in history, with no end in sight!

It is in my heart to lead others back to the freedom from hurt in which God created them and encourage them to be powerful in every situation regardless of what they have done. Ever since I was a little kid, I have had a passion to bring restoration to the broken. I can still remember the first time I heard the stories about David's mighty men. I sat wide-eyed at the kitchen table while my dad told me of their amazing exploits. As I sat there that day, my heart

pounded in my chest—not at the thought of slaying a thousand men with only my armor bearer (although that is somewhere in a boy’s dream), but at the fact that these men who were known as “mighty” were once the outcasts of their society; they were the nobodies, the violators unwanted in their own towns!

That day I was overwhelmed with compassion for the lost. The stories of a few broken men made whole gripped my heart, and somewhere inside of me I decided to dedicate my life to restoring the brokenhearted, even if they themselves were the ones who created the violation.

Each of us, I believe, is a dream that a body has been wrapped around. Beyond our flesh and bones is the DNA of God Himself. His Word says it best: “So God created mankind in his own image . . . male and female he created them.” The way God designed life was never meant to be rocket science, nor should it take a book to understand it. But the fortunate thing is, no matter what you have done, where you have been, how high you have climbed or how far you have fallen, there is a road back to wholeness, and today can be your first step.

As you journey your way through this book, I will give you the practical tools to face your innermost fears and find peace in every storm of life, so that you live victorious and win the war within!

God bless,
Jason Vallotton

ONE

Little House on the Prairie

Most people go through life trying not to get hit. We work hard to dodge the punches and avoid conflict, and we even daydream about a “whole new world” instead of learning how to roll with each punch, confront the conflict within and powerfully create a world worth living in. The very way we are born into this world, although traumatic in nature, is a beautiful but graphic picture of life. After a baby spends nine cozy months floating in luxury, something bursts the bubble, and in a moment’s time what was baby’s paradise changes into a cramping, claustrophobic process of pain and intense, head-squeezing pressure. With a loud scream, each one of us was introduced into a whole new world that way, where, for the first time, we had to work for our oxygen, cry for our food and endure twelve to fifteen months of intense physical therapy in order to take a few clumsy steps.

Right from the start, we face challenges. Yet the idea that trials and troubles are a hazard to the believer conflicts with our God-given purpose of overcoming this world and advancing the Kingdom. In fact, I strongly believe that it is impossible to fulfill the call on our lives without first being willing to face the impossible, learn how to persevere through suffering and become the calm to a raging storm. In Mark 16:17–18, Jesus describes what a believer’s life will look like:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

Jesus tells us that in His name, every believer will face his or her own fear and will step toward conflict to bring a lasting, powerful solution that will change every atmosphere and create Kingdom culture. This is an incredibly powerful posture to take in life. The challenge in all of this is that you cannot bring change to the outside of whatever you have not confronted on the inside! You can be sure, however, that life is going to test what you truly believe in your core. It certainly has tested me.

My story is one of humble beginnings. I was raised in the little mountain town of Weaverville, California. (Anyone who comes from a place called “Weaverville” has a fair

amount of catching up to do in life!) Although I have been known to make fun of my hometown, it was in that town that my heart would learn to love, and it was there that my individuality was formed as I journeyed through adolescence into manhood. Historically, Weaverville was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, a place where men tempted fate in pursuit of their dreams. Our town was birthed in the gold rush era. People from all over came to gamble all they had in hopes of striking it rich. Most of these men started with nothing, and most left with nothing except for the invaluable experience life forged into them, a story much like my own.

You can be sure that life is going to test what you truly believe in your core.

My family is the kind that any kid might wish for. With three other siblings (two older sisters and an older brother), and two incredible, loving parents, there was not a lot left to be desired. I have always likened our family to the one on *Little House on the Prairie*. In all my growing-up years, I can only remember one time when my parents had a heated argument, and even when they had a disagreement, we all knew my dad would apologize for being wrong and it would all be over.

Drama in our house looked like the time when a bear tried to come through our window because my mom had prayed it would come closer. Who does that? Or when my neighbor came unglued because my dog walked on his freshly cleaned concrete with his muddy paws. In all

honesty, my neighbor needed some anger management classes like the world needs Jesus. Somehow, he forgot that we lived in “Red-Dirt-Ville, California,” where it is impossible to keep concrete clean, no matter how mad you get.

Living in a small town in the mountains has a much simpler feel to it than anywhere else I have ever been. Success looks like a steady job, a few healthy kids and a good church to attend. To be honest, there is something really appealing even to this day about being happy with the small, simple things. Unfortunately, there is not much to do in a place like Weaverville, and because I had no idea (literally) that the rest of the world existed, the only logical conclusion for me after graduating high school was to get married. Why wait? In our family, the men fall in love young. My dad set the trend when he asked my mom to marry him when she was just thirteen years old. Being the opportunist he is, my father felt that there was no need

To be honest, there is something really appealing even to this day about being happy with the small, simple things.

to waste time in fumbling with all of the pointless details that dating can incur. He was set on Mom early, so he sealed the deal then and there!

You know the saying “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”? It doesn’t in my family. I met my girlfriend when I was sixteen, we dated until I graduated and we tied the knot in the summer of 1998. As if that were not enough, we found out two months into our marriage that our first baby was on the

way. According to me, I had the beginnings of what was to be my perfect life. Little did I know that my simplistic view of life was about to get much more complicated.

1776

There are so many moments that we live through on this earth, only to forget them the very next day. This moment I am about to describe is not one of those moments. Although I cannot tell you the date and time, I can clearly remember what happened. I began reading a book called *1776*, historian David McCullough's fascinating perspective on the beginning of the Revolutionary War. I would not call myself a book buff, or anything even close to that. Actually, if a book is more than three hundred pages, that is usually enough to deter me from reading it. After briefly picking up this book, however, I could not put it down. The stories of our fearless forefathers, who gave everything they had to gain our freedom as a nation, captured my heart. These men had something worth living for.

Looking back on that time of reading about America's struggle, I was absolutely clueless as to what it was preparing my heart for. I had no idea that in just a few months my whole life was going to fall apart, and I would get the opportunity of a lifetime to deal with the kind of pain that builds character.

So there I was on that fateful day, driving down Benton Street in Redding, California, just thinking to myself, *I*

want the character of George Washington. . . . Now if I were smart, I would have stopped my thoughts right there. But for some reason, I did what no one should ever do if he or she has not counted the cost: I moved that idea from my brain to my lips. Before I could stop myself, I said to the Lord out loud, “I want the character of George Washington.”

The stories of our fearless forefathers, who gave everything they had to gain our freedom as a nation, captured my heart.

I am not sure exactly why it always happens this way, but it does. You can pray a thousand prayers, but it seems as though the one the Lord decides to answer

is the one you then think maybe you *never* should have prayed (probably the one having something to do with building character).

If I had thought about it a little bit longer, I would have realized what I was asking. George Washington was not a man who lived an untested life. He wrote a letter to a family member in 1755, during the French and Indian War, saying that he had escaped uninjured, but that “I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me.” It is said of George that he believed he could not die until his “appointed time,” so he would undertake these crazy feats of valor against all odds, with little or no fear. And here I was, praying that I would have character like his.

As the Bible says, “Ask and it will be given to you” (Luke 11:9). I was asking, and I did receive! I am not sure if you have ever shared a similar experience, but in about four

months' time, my life was completely set on fire. Everything that had been stable soon began to shake. This process began when a very close family member went through a horrific nervous breakdown. I spent countless hours in prayer and on the phone, contending for breakthrough and believing that peace was just around the corner. I had done a lot of counseling in my job, and I had helped people through these types of issues before. But two months later, another family member suffered a similar attack.

What's going on? I asked myself. This whole process had started in October 2007, and now it was December. Sometimes I am not the most spiritually "in tune" person, but even I could tell that "hell had come to breakfast." My hopes were that this visit was just one meal. Unfortunately, it was only the beginning of what would take almost two years to walk through.

When the Temperature Dropped

So there I was, literally in the middle of winter, but I was also slowly beginning to feel colder inside than I had ever felt before. I had never had one close family member go through something like this, let alone two at the same time. As the days passed, I realized there was not going to be a quick fix. Their dark nights of the soul had seemingly come to stay.

There is no feeling quite like that of being a powerless bystander to a total disaster. Watching your loved ones,

day in and day out, tremble under the thought of having to face another morning does something to a man's soul. Momentum is a force to be reckoned with. Once the train

Our family is the type that carries each other's burdens, sometimes to a fault.

gets going, it is a bear to stop, and things were about to get worse. February rolled around, and it had been four months since the beginning of it all. I welcomed the new month with open arms.

I was hoping for crisp morning air and freedom from those long, dark nights that had been such a constant weight on me, since our family is the type that carries each other's burdens, sometimes to a fault.

As the new month began to unfold, it was not long before I started to realize that I was feeling more alone at home than usual. One thing you need to understand is that feeling alone in my house was almost an impossibility back then. I had three kids: Evan, my youngest, was three at the time; Rilie, my princess, was six; and Elijah, my oldest, was eight. And of course there was my wife, to whom I had been married for nine years. Alone time at my house existed only between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., if I was lucky. The other eighteen hours were spent filling sippy cups, playing WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) in the living room and tending to every need ever known to man (or child). There was never a dull moment around my house. My "alone at home" feeling was not being produced by the absence of

people, however, but rather by the absence of connection in my marriage.

At first, I was not all that concerned about my emotional state of being. This was not the first time I had felt lonely in my house, and I was sure it was not going to be the last. If you have been married for any significant amount of time, you know loneliness is not a freak incident, but rather a season you sometimes go through as lovers.

There were so many contributing factors feeding into the feelings I had going on inside. On my end of the deal, I felt a lot of pressure due to what my extended family was going through, and it was threatening my overall sense of peace. Plus, I was the father of three very energetic kids. So there we were, going through one of those times when you need the commitment part of love to kick in and pull you close.

After about a week of feeling lonely, however, I realized it was not going to go away on its own. I felt as if my wife and I were magnets that had somehow gotten flipped around, and connecting had become an impossible feat. At this point, I knew I was in over my head and in need of intervention.

As time passed, it was looking as though my love for my wife was not going to be enough. For so long, our simple connection was all that we had needed, but now neither any amount of counseling nor my best efforts were enough to satisfy her. In a matter of months, my life had completely turned to ash. My marriage was over, and it was now time to face reality or tuck tail and run!

All throughout that time when I was reading *1776*, I used to think to myself how lucky a person like George Washington was, not because he did not die in battle or because he made the history books, but because he had a battle to fight. He had an opportunity to test his mettle and fill himself with enough courage so that death no longer held its sting.

They say that heroes are found on the battlefield, and if what they say is true, I now had my opportunity to show the kind of character I admired in George Washington.

Lessons from the Past

Unfortunately, my story is not unique. The older I become, the more I realize how great the war is we are in, and how ill-equipped we are. I spent twelve years in school learning (at least, that's what I was trying to do). I was a horrible student. For me, sitting in one place for an extended period of time was literally torture. Add to that a touch of ADD, little or no academic skill and a private school with horrible funding. Basically, I had no chance of making the grade.

I now know what we all know—making good grades in school can be almost irrelevant to being successful in navigating the life issues we all face on a regular basis. As a counselor, I ask my clients all the time, “Who taught you to communicate?” “What is your process for dealing with pain?” “Do you know what your red flags and triggers

are?” Even the most scholastically educated people either somehow managed to skip the courses dealing with this stuff, or those courses don’t exist!

To add fuel to an already raging fire in me, when our parents grew up they had been in the same predicament as we were, or worse. Their parents were literally fighting on actual battlefields, or suffering through the Great Depression, or stuck in an oppressive culture that suppressed people’s feelings and praised outward control. Then they all passed down to us some of their inability to deal with certain life issues, and the effects multiplied. Now as a result, we live in a society in which many people have lost their moral compass and are completely out of control, mostly due to being ill-equipped to face life.

It is our inner world that dictates the culture we create, no matter the issue.

Let’s be honest, no one dreams of burning out at work, having a failing marriage or raising kids who cannot stand spending time at home. Logically, we know that we judge ourselves against some picture-perfect Instagram world in our heads, and that when we don’t measure up, our demeaning self-talk is toxic to the soul. But where else do we start, and what do we do?

I spent two years walking out of my prison of pain and into wholeness. As you can imagine, I was terrified at first. There were so many unanswered questions, and only a few teachers to run to. Now, over a decade later, I have seen the fruit that has come out of those years in my

life, and the invaluable tools that I gained along the way. It is so easy to focus on what is happening on the outside, or on the particulars of each circumstance. It is our inner world, however, that dictates the culture we create, no matter the issue.

Regardless of whether your story is mine or not, the practical concepts I have learned and have used to shape my life into what it is today are what I want to give to you. In the next several chapters, I want to talk with you about how to place God at the center of your life, confront your fears and walk practically out of pain into a place of real peace and hope. Together, we will win the war within!

REFLECT

1. Reflecting on your life, are there any punches you are trying to dodge, conflicts you are trying to avoid on the outside or conflicts you need to address within?
2. If you answered yes to any part of question 1 (or more than one part), who is going to be on your team to help you find breakthrough in these areas? It may be helpful to find a life coach, counselor or pastor who has the skills necessary to help you.
3. What fruits are you hoping to discover in your life once you learn to process what you have been avoiding?
4. What kind of character traits are you hoping to build as you fight and win the war within?