



SHE IS FREE

LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LIES
THAT HOLD YOU CAPTIVE



ANDI ANDREW



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Andi Andrew, *She is Free*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Andi Andrew

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-9328-9

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled AMP are from the Amplified® Bible, copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations labeled AMP-CE are from the Amplified® Bible, copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2011

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled Message are from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled TPT are taken from *Letters from Heaven by the Apostle Paul*, *The Psalms: Poetry on Fire*, and *Proverbs: Wisdom from Above*, The Passion Translation®, copyright © 2014, 2015, 2016. Used by permission of BroadStreet Publishing Group, LLC, Racine, Wisconsin, USA. All right reserved. ThePassionTranslation.com

Scripture quotations labeled Voice are from The Voice Bible, copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society. All rights reserved.

Author is represented by The Christopher Ferebee Agency, www.christopherferebee.com.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Andi Andrew, *She is Free*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

*To my beautiful and only daughter,
Finley Grace*

The moment you were born, it all changed. Your peaceful, beautiful, and joyful entrance onto the earth and into my arms during one of the darkest nights of my soul was a catalyst for freedom.

Months before your birth, someone who had never met us prophesied to my father and mother that I was pregnant with a daughter and that she would be a “flower” bringing beauty and life into a hard season. You did, and you bring that beauty and life to all that you do and touch every day.

Finley, may you stand on my shoulders and live free in your beautiful Kingdom inheritance here on earth as it is in heaven, connected to the deep Love of the Father all the days of your life.

I love you, Finley Grace, “from a blessed place”—with my whole heart that has been healed in the hands of the Father.

Contents

Introduction	11
1. Trapped by Pain	17
2. Chaos and Real Love	36
3. From a Prison to a Palace	52
4. Freedom from Unforgiveness	70
5. Freedom from Fear	93
6. Freedom from Anger	113
7. Freedom from Shame	132
8. Freedom from Control	157
9. Freedom from Isolation	174
10. Keep It Personal	189
Appendix	205
Acknowledgments	212
Notes	217

Introduction

I've heard it said, "What you don't know can't hurt you," but what I didn't know was destroying me. Ten years of serving Jesus on my resumé, knee-deep in three kids under the age of three, married for seven years, and yet I was completely unaware of how deeply loved I was by my Father in heaven. I didn't know there was no need to perform, serve, and achieve for love and acceptance or that I could live from a place of deep love and acceptance. I was one of the greatest Christian performers around, yet I wasn't getting paid for my efforts. I was desperate for the real thing, for someone to let me fall apart and see me in my mess and not walk away. What I didn't know was that Jesus was right there all along waiting for my great unraveling. Not only that, He didn't walk away; He gently and steadily led me into healing and wholeness.

How often have you heard this phrase, "The truth will set you free!"? Many times it is out of scriptural context. This line by itself is used in movies, churches, devotionals, and countless conversations around the world, but the truth alone

can't set you free because it depends on what truth you're holding on to. Is it your own truth? The world's truth? Your neighbor's truth? Buddha's truth? The government's truth? Pop culture's truth? What about the truth of your past and pain? Or the shocking truth of your present reality that hurts more than anything? All of these "truths" will fade away, yet there is One whose truth is eternally unshakable because He *is* truth incarnate, the world made flesh. This is the truth that we can align our lives with to live in freedom.

So Jesus was saying to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word [continually obeying My teachings and living in accordance with them, then] you are truly My disciples. And you will know the truth [regarding salvation], and the truth will set you free [from the penalty of sin]." (John 8:31–32 AMP)

Scripture tells us that if we hold to Jesus's teaching—know it, walk in it, abide in it, and follow it—*then* we are truly His disciples or His students. Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49) so holding to His teaching and following in His ways is also holding fast to the Father's heart and ways. Once we meditate on and align ourselves with His truth, *then* we will know it and the truth of His goodness, love, and salvation that rescued us from the penalty of sin and death (John 3:16–17). *This* my friends is the truth that will set us free.

One thing I've learned on the journey thus far is this: our spiritual freedom is found as we learn the truth about the lies that have held us captive. These are the moments in which love breaks through the darkness and the blinders begin to

fall off of our eyes, revealing the sweet freedom that is ours to walk in. There are spiritual forces at work that try to lure us into their world of lies. The Bible is very clear on this. In Ephesians 6:12, we're told, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Once we buy into those lies, they create an atmosphere or subculture around us from which we live, operate, and see our lives. Imagine the lies we partner with (whether knowingly or unknowingly) are like a dirty, scratched, and damaged pair of glasses. Glasses are supposed to help us see more clearly, but if the glasses are smudged, scratched, or dirty, our view is skewed. Lies do this; they cause us to see ourselves, others, and our lives without clarity.

Oftentimes, what's going on outside of us reveals what's going on deep within us. Whether it's the news, social media, circumstances, our spouses, children, leaders, friends, the driver in the car in front of you, coworkers, or that person walking down the street, any of these can push our buttons and squeeze our lives like a toothpaste tube. It's when we are under pressure that we see what is within us. Is it anger? Control? Fear? Unforgiveness? Or is it peace, love, joy, patience, and the like?

What if I told you there's a way to break free from the lies you've found yourself living in, that there's a way to step into the truth that is wrapped in love, enabling you to create the culture of the kingdom of heaven inside your heart and around your life?

In some seasons it feels like a fight to step into spiritual freedom, and in other seasons there's a beautiful ease in

aligning ourselves with what is already ours in Jesus. I want to share with you how I've done this in my own life. It's an ongoing process for each and every one of us and, of course, a very personal one. It's a journey I hope we can share together. I believe I can help as a fellow traveler on the path of freedom.

So think about this: What if we stopped focusing so much on who we are and stepped into the fullness of *whose* we are? As we choose to crawl up into the arms of the Father, it's there, wrapped within His loving embrace, that we find a catalyst for an avalanche of freedom to take place in our lives. In His presence, we realize *whose* we are and, in turn, find out *who* we are. Jesus is our healer, and He has made a way into the arms of the Father and given us the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth (see John 14:6).

This book is about the love that desires to infiltrate the deepest part of our hearts and lives, healing our brokenness and pain until we place our feet on every inch of territory purchased for us by Jesus's blood. There is spiritual territory reserved for each and every one of us that is a rich inheritance in the land of the free. You don't have to just read about your freedom in the Word of God for the rest of your life here on earth, nor do you have to watch others bask in their redemptive potential while you sit on the sidelines—you can step into it, one step, one word, one moment, one prayer at a time.

You'll be equipped and activated to step into spiritual freedom by learning to distinguish between truth and lies. It doesn't matter when or where the lies have been spoken over us, to us, or about us. It doesn't matter if we consciously or unconsciously bit into the fruit of the lie fed to us by the

enemy of our souls. Together—by sharing our stories and experiences—we will address the lies that surface when we partner with unforgiveness, fear, anger, shame, control, and isolation. We will then combat each lie with the truth of God’s promises so that we can be empowered to step fully into freedom.

Every chapter in this book touches on another theme. Love, forgiveness, repentance, and connection to the Father’s heart are at the core of this book. The greatest of these themes and the hero of the story is the unending, unyielding, constant flood of true love we each have access to in the arms of God. Freedom from the lies is available to all of us through God’s Son, Jesus, and the gift of our helper and counselor, the Holy Spirit. We just have to be willing to do what it takes to partner with the truth and step into it.

As you dive into this book, ask yourself these questions: Is the kingdom outside of me dictating the kingdom inside of me? Or is the kingdom inside of me transforming the kingdom outside of me? Allow the healer to bind your broken heart as He gently whispers to you the truth wrapped in His love so that you can live a transformed life, free from the lies that have held you captive. It’s time for the healing within you to produce an avalanche of freedom around you and bring the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

My prayer for you is found in Ephesians 3:14–20:

So when I think of the wisdom of his plan I kneel humbly in awe before the Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the perfect Father of every father and child in heaven and on the earth. And I pray that he would pour out over you the unlimited riches of his glory and favor until supernatural

strength floods your innermost being with his divine might and explosive power.

Then, by constantly using your faith, the life of Christ will be released deep inside you, and the resting place of his love will become the very source and root of your life, providing you with a secure foundation that grows and grows.

Then, as your spiritual strength increases, you will be empowered to discover what every holy one experiences—the great magnitude of the astonishing love of Christ in all its dimensions. How deeply intimate and far-reaching is his love! How enduring and inclusive it is! Endless love beyond measurement that transcends our understanding—this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!

Never doubt God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you. (TPT)



Trapped by Pain

For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17 NLT

With my eyes slightly cracked open, I stretched my hands above my head, arching my back and exhaling the first pungent breath of the day. My hands slapped down on the other side of the bed only to find that Paul had already left for work. I lay there, wallowing in my sorrows and dark thoughts, buried under my depression, anxiety, and fear. I couldn't bear to confront the day ahead. Yet, at the same time, I felt a tension as desperation tugged at my veiled heart to break out from the blanket of heaviness under which I found myself. The trouble was, I didn't know how.

I felt trapped—trapped in my thoughts and emotional pain, trapped in a cycle of living that had me questioning my sanity. Too many times I had confessed out loud, “I feel like I’m going crazy!” and I was starting to believe it was true. I’m not sure if it was the postpartum hormones for the third time around or all the neglected pain that had accumulated over the course of my lifetime up until that moment. Needless to say, I was in turmoil, and something had to give.

I felt like a donkey led by a carrot on a stick, chasing an ever-elusive freedom always dangling in front of me out of reach. I had read about this freedom in the Bible countless times and had heard sermons about it, but it seemed as though I was the donkey destined never to reach it. Maybe it was for everyone else but me. Many moments of failure woven into my days solidified a fear in me that I might just need to live out my Christian life faking it, always putting on a show for everyone around me. After all, I had become good at it. I could keep hiding behind my sense of humor, believing this was as good as the Christian life gets. But the trouble was, I knew that wasn’t true. If the same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead was alive and at work in me (Rom. 8:11), then surely that power was enough to pull me out of this pit.

Something innate in me knew the greatness and goodness of my God and His ability to set me free. I knew that two choices lay before me: completely surrender my mind, will, heart, and emotions to an unseen God or succumb to the darkness I felt creeping in all around me.

As I lay there allowing the accuser to whisper morbid thoughts into my ear, the sound of my daughter’s shrill cry interrupted the introspective spiral I had been entertaining.

The sound made my skin crawl, which was not the loving maternal response I was expecting. It was the reaction of a momma in pain. My daughter needed me. But even more than that, I needed to get out of the prison I was locked in so that I could be fully present to my husband and children and fully present to the life I was created to live.

A deep sadness engulfed every part of me, swallowing the very deepest places of my heart. I was so crippled by depression that I didn't even want to move at the sound of my daughter's crying. I didn't have the energy to swing my feet over the side of the bed, stand up, and go feed my precious baby girl. Instead, I rolled out of the bed and fell facedown onto the floor. There, the trigger was pulled. Uncontrollable sobs welled up from within the deep, dark crevices of my soul, and I let it all come out. Every thought, every fear, all my anger, shame, and pain . . . it all came out in a cacophony of wailing, whimpering, and deep guttural sobs. Dripping snot mixed with tears and ran into my dirty, matted hair. My daughter continued to cry out for me to come hold and nurse her, but first, I needed to be held.

In the midst of my sobs, I said over and over again, "I don't have anything but You. I don't have anything but You. I don't have anything but You," when all of a sudden a tangible peace entered the room. In an instant, I felt the presence of God hovering over me like a protective Father, Jesus kneeling beside me on the floor with His arm around me, and the Holy Spirit comforting me in an all-encompassing embrace. It was overwhelming and vulnerable, yet at the same time sweet and hopeful. Freedom had come knocking on my door in the form of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and I let them into the hardest and scariest parts of my heart like a flood.

I wailed with every emotion and memory from the past thirty years flashing before me: moments of trauma, pain, betrayal, rejection, shame, and impenetrable fear. Everything seemed to be erupting to the surface of my soul to be refined in fire. It was a force I was unable to hold back. I didn't want to. It felt good to let it all go.

In the very moment when I felt alone and abandoned in a pit of darkness, faking my attitudes and actions like I thought a good Christian should, the lover of my soul came and protected me, comforted me, and knelt down beside me, wrapping His love around me like a soft, warm blanket on a cold winter's night. In an instant, I knew it would all be okay even though I didn't know how. My trust in the unfailing, healing lover of my soul was being restored. Somehow, somehow, I knew I could be free.

I heard a whisper in response to my lament, "That's right, I AM all you've got. I AM here." And just like that, I knew the I AM was all I needed to break free. A new leg on the journey had begun.

After a moment of letting that revelatory whisper sink into my heart, I got up and went to my daughter.

No Wonder the Dam Burst

When I was very young, someone close to my family sexually molested me. It is a terrible thing at any age, but the fallout from those incidents affected virtually every area of my life from then on. I had an uncontrollable temper stemming back to some of my earliest memories that unfortunately followed me into adulthood. At times, I was confused and erratic, acting out for love and attention. My parents had

their own problems brought on from their own personal journeys, which they dealt with in a variety of ways. This drew their attention from their children's hearts as they grasped in desperation to fix their own crumbling world.

I was an impulsive, passionate teenager and did things I regret. I don't regret finding Jesus at nineteen, but it would be a few more years before I truly grew into my relationship with Him, understanding the fullness of love and freedom that were mine to walk in. In the meantime, I fell in love, married the man of my dreams, and carried all of my undealt-with issues into the center of our marriage. Motherhood brought on bouts of postpartum depression that lingered well into long-term depression. Fear and anxiety swirled around in the pit of my stomach as I strove to cover up all of my imperfections. Work- and life-related stress and emotional pain brought on stress-related illnesses. It was a mess. *I was a mess.*

Finally, after the dam burst and while I laid there on the floor in my brokenness, God got my attention. I've been intentionally stepping into His deep love and words of truth and life ever since that pivotal moment.

Why Freedom? Well, Let Me Tell You

I would love to tell you that everything was fine from that instant forward, but this one moment in time was simply a tipping point for an avalanche of freedom in my life. While I had experienced moments of freedom and insight before, this experience was different. It marked a turning point that motivated me to protect the freedom I had received, while propelling me forward to understand more of the nature

and character of God and his goodness with all that I had, come hell or high water (and both of those have definitely come while on the journey).

Lying there, utterly surrounded, I had an encounter with the all-consuming love of our God. The refiner's fire came to me in the form of an unshakable embrace that almost instantaneously brought the dross and dirt from my life to the surface. All the impurities began to come out of hiding in the safety of unadulterated love. That moment on the floor gave me a deep knowing that the very being of God—the One who *is* love—would purify me and that His process would bring the sweet freedom I had been chasing after in my own strength. In that split second I made a choice: I submitted my whole life to the process of freedom, no matter what it looked like. I was no longer afraid to look my pain in the face because I knew Who was with me.

As I lay there on the floor, I realized that in this union and connection with Him, His love was being completed and perfected within me. His love was a healing salve to soothe the inflamed, dysfunctional, and broken parts of my heart. This love was dispelling the darkness and fear I had partnered with, the lies and deception I had allowed to reside in me. This love is the shelter that deflects and breaks the arrows shot at my wounded heart from the enemy of my soul. In this oasis of love, it all changes. This is the gospel, the Good News that Jesus came to bring. We are reconnected to this love and being perfected in it to be bearers of His image (that we are all created in), here on earth as it is in heaven. The gospel encompasses all of our freedom.

The revelation came: when I purposefully still myself and meditate on the Father's endless love for me, He whispers

to me the truth of my inheritance in Him to which I have unrestricted access because of Jesus. This unrestricted access to the Father comes to us just as Jesus said it would through His life in John 14:6–7: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.”

When I simply become aware of His unending presence in my life, it’s amazing how easily He replaces all my fears—which come out of a conscious or unconscious partnership with the enemy’s lies—with His pure love. Oftentimes, we meditate on negative thoughts and disastrous outcomes, but purposefully abiding (John 15) in God and His love is the perfecting of our faith; this aids the daily cultivation of our freedom.

Our God is the very person of love, as well as everything else that is wonderful and good. He sent His Son, Jesus, as love incarnate on the earth to save our lives, release us from prison, and set us free. When we receive this as truth, we are instantaneously given the gift of the Holy Spirit to commune with and receive truth from. With this foundation, every single one of us can be set free no matter what we think, feel, or have walked through.

Whoever confesses *and* acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know [by personal observation and experience], and have believed [with deep, consistent faith] the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides *continually* in him. In this [union and fellowship with Him], love is completed and perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment

[with assurance and boldness to face Him]; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love [dread does not exist]. But perfect (complete, full-grown) love drives out fear, because fear involves [the expectation of divine] punishment, so the one who is afraid [of God's judgment] is not perfected in love [has not grown into a sufficient understanding of God's love]. (1 John 4:15–18 AMP)

Freedom Is a Work in Progress

As I build trust and connection with God through the years, the dross is scraped away, and the gold in my heart grows and is purified. The process doesn't happen overnight; it continues year after year, layer after layer, as God remains faithful to His workmanship in me. By wrestling with the Word of God and allowing Him to love, teach, and instruct me in His presence; by investigating and understanding my deepest emotions and the complex inner workings of my heart and mind with counselors, therapists, and inner healing ministers if need be; by talking and praying with trusted friends and family; and through the unwavering, steady nature of my husband, who consistently loves me even when I feel unlovable, I have been strengthened in the truth. I have learned how to wield my sword and persevere while conquering the giants that once taunted me and told me I could never live in what God has already given: *freedom*.

I've woken up to the reality that our spiritual freedom is fought for and won on the battlefield between truth and lies. Life gets complicated when we continually partner with the lies that come to steal, kill, destroy, and ultimately bind our lives in captivity. The longer we remain in agreement with

the lies sown into our hearts, the stronger they can become, distorting our reality as we look through broken lenses at our world. The truth is that we are wrapped in and connected to Christ at all times—we are never separated from His love. His love desires to take over every inch of our hearts, dispelling the darkness so that we can step into the fullness of who He is (Eph. 3:16–19).

For years, I had known in my head who God was, and oftentimes even experienced His goodness. I knew what He was capable of doing for me and in me, but certain areas of my life hadn't been perfected in His love! To be honest, I'm still working on it—we all are.

No Substitutes for God's Presence

I love baking chocolate chip cookies. As a matter of fact, I'm known for my secret recipe. When I went through a season of health challenges, I stopped eating sugar and tried my hand at baking a few healthy, sugar-free things. I love a lot of the recipes we discovered on this sugar-free journey (my kids, not so much), but no matter what I try, there are no substitutes for the “real” chocolate chip cookies I make. Nothing compares to real salted butter and raw, organic sugars when it comes to baking chocolate chip cookies.

On the day I was scheduled to teach our interns at church about identity, I woke up with a phrase running through my head and my heart: “There is no substitute for the presence of God.” This phrase repeated itself over and over again until it hit me: God's presence is the *one* thing for which there is no substitute. It's the one thing David asked for in Psalm 27:4:

Here's the one thing I crave from God, the one thing I seek above all else: I want the privilege of living with him every moment in his house, finding the sweet loveliness of his face, filled with awe, delighting in his glory and grace. I want to live my life so close to him that he takes pleasure in my every prayer. (TPT)

God's presence is the one thing that brings peace to our storms, answers to our questions, freedom to our minds, and identity to our fractured hearts. We must choose to make ourselves aware of His unending presence in our lives and to bring our pain to Him because He is the healer. You cannot earn His presence; on the cross, Jesus made a way for us to have access to the Father at all times. It's in the acknowledgment of His presence that He imparts His perspective, causing us to soar above our issues as we find healing in His arms—the safest place we can be.

In our personal journey to freedom, there are no substitutes for His presence. For years I looked to people to stand in Jesus's place only to realize that they were human and imperfect. Oftentimes disappointment, disillusionment, and ultimately offense and bitterness would begin to take root in my heart as I put people in a position to meet needs that only Jesus can. Then I would move on to other substitutes, which we all do from time to time, simple distractions that can become addictions in order to dull the pain within us: TV show binges, overuse of alcohol, drug abuse, food addictions, nightlife, work, perfection, performance, and so on. However, as crazy as it sounds, feeling pain is essential to finding out what needs healing in our lives. Our distractions tend to replace our face-to-face time with the

Father, who has the desire, ability, and power to search our hearts and help us face our pain and be healed. We have to stop trying to mask our pain with counterfeits and simply be with Him.

Feeling the Pain, Healing the Pain

I gave birth to each of my four children without an epidural or any form of pain medication. I'm neither morbid nor a masochist (I promise); it's simply a personal conviction, which I am by no means putting on you. Without pain medication, I knew what my body was doing. I knew the pain had a purpose, and I could feel when I needed to push. I was able to endure the discomfort because, at the end of the process, a beautiful child was placed in my arms, accompanied by an endorphin rush that surpasses any synthetic high on earth. Birth is this crazy, wonderful, messy roller coaster where pain and joy meet. The pain, in the end, was worth it.

After moving to New York and pastoring for a few years, some issues started to come up for me due to maneuvering through a few difficult seasons. Through a series of effective coaching sessions, I realized that some of my unhealed pain and even physical sickness were the result of unreleased, unprocessed, and accumulated emotions. I've always been a deep feeler, but for years I rejected a huge part of my identity, believing the lie that I was too emotional and should be stronger or more stoic.

I understand that not all emotions or feelings are healthy or productive, but they are real nonetheless. Our feelings *can be* indicators that tell us something about our hearts; they are extremely important in our journey of healing. If we

don't give ourselves space and time to feel and understand what's going on, we tend to shove our emotions down into a figurative box, allowing them to accumulate there, while we protect our hearts with the weapon of our choice. Eventually the dam will burst—we just don't know how or when. Or our unchecked emotions may end up in the driver's seat of our lives, taking over many of our decisions and causing us to act irrationally. We will inevitably begin to operate according to fear-based motivators and surface sins such as gossip, slander, addiction, and the like that point to deeper issues such as unforgiveness, anger, shame, control, and rejection, which are indicators that our hearts are in need of attention and healing.

We've got to choose to live purposefully aware and attentive to our heart, soul, spirit, and body's needs. Only when we truly stare our pain in the face while holding the hand of our Creator, lover, and healer can we let the world we've manufactured crash down around us and allow Him to rebuild us the way He originally designed. It is in His presence that we can be healed and begin to thrive.

Do You Know God?

Maybe you've heard it said that there is a difference between believing in God and knowing Him. Laws, rules, performance, and outward appearance replace a deep and loving connection to an available God. Sometimes we even try to make our calling, purpose, or role in life our healer, and when that changes or the season shifts we're lost at sea. A lot of people would say they believe in God, but ask yourself: Do you truly know Him in a way that brings transformation in

your life today? Or have you relegated Him to a man who walked in power two thousand years ago?

My brother Parker was preaching one Sunday evening service and said these words: “Maybe Jesus doesn’t want to be famous. Maybe he just wants to be known.” As Christians, we can spend our lives trying to make Jesus famous or recognized without knowing Him ourselves or representing Him before mankind. Such a relationship is like a marriage gone dry; you sleep in the same bed and methodically go through the motions, but devoid of connection and intimacy. The ring on your finger has become a rock instead of a symbol of covenant relationship. The truth is, if we don’t live with a sincere awareness of our walk, the same can happen with Jesus.

When we are known by the Father and begin to know Him aside from performance, rules, and religion, and I mean truly, deeply, madly love Him and allow every inch of our being to be baptized in His love, we can continually walk in peace and freedom no matter what season of life we are in. There is no substitute for the presence of God. His presence is always there whether we feel it or not. You may not have an experience like I did with a tangible peace and knowing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were right there in the room, but that doesn’t change the fact that they are always with us. A lot of days I don’t *feel* the presence of God, but my bond with Him is secure and deeply known.

Oswald Chambers, one of the greatest evangelists and teachers of Christ of his time, reminds us of the importance of being in God’s presence on a daily basis. His words still echo today through his life lived in Christ.

We imagine we would be all right if a big crisis arose; but the big crisis will only reveal the stuff we are made of, it will not put anything into us. “If God gives the call, of course I will rise to the occasion.” You will not unless you have risen to the occasion in the workshop, unless you have been the real thing before God there. If you are not doing the thing that lies nearest, because God has engineered it, when the crisis comes instead of being revealed as fit, you will be revealed as unfit. Crises always reveal character.¹

We are transformed in the presence of God, in His “workshop.” He has designed us for communion with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) so that we can become like Him. As we are changed in the secret place, it’s essential that we allow our current season to reveal what’s in us. Once we see the fruit released from our character, we must test it. Is it the fruit of repentance, forgiveness, love, or freedom? Or is it the fruit of pain, offense, bitterness, unforgiveness, or emptiness? Is it the real thing, or is it counterfeit? In His presence is where His spirit is able to reveal truth, uncover lies, and bring about our freedom: “For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17 NLT).

A Seed

I remember a time standing in the kitchen of our home in Australia, just months after I was that snotty, hot mess wrapped in love on the floor. As I washed dishes while watching my three little ones run around naked through the sprinklers in our backyard, my daze was interrupted by a still, small voice: “You’re underground in this season of life, like a seed.

It won't be forever, but for now you're underground. In this season I will cover you and protect the work I am doing in you so that you produce the right things when you come above the ground, bursting forth with freedom. Let me break you, restore you, cover you, give you roots, cause you to germinate, and grow you until you burst forth with new life."

As these words flooded my heart, pictures of a seed underground flashed before my eyes. So much dirt and fertilizer—the mess, the darkness, and the stench. Water flooded the soil and fed the seed. I saw the seed breaking and roots going down deep. I saw a shoot rising from the top of the seed, heading toward the sunlight, as the deep roots drank in the water to bring nourishment to the rising shoot. I knew that this seed was my life, but I didn't know how long I'd be underground. God's measurement of a season and mine are worlds apart. The truth is, in that season, I was hiding from my purpose and calling. Being underground felt safe. I actually half-jokingly asked God if I could just stay underground forever. He clearly didn't feel the need to reply. It's good to recognize that we will all experience underground seasons throughout our lives—they are not one-time things. We've just got to get good at reading our seasons well, otherwise we will long for what's next without the resolution of what is happening right now.

See God's Freedom

As you read this, you may feel trapped by a barrage of circumstances, trauma, and pain that have brought you to this point in life with seemingly nowhere to turn. Maybe you're frustrated and angry all the time and not sure why. Maybe you

blame others for where you are. In the recesses of your mind, there is a nagging feeling that if you start to address your pain, the whole house of cards you've built your life on will come tumbling down all around you. Maybe it was sexual abuse in your youth that you've never told anyone about. Maybe it was a conversation you had with your parents that shattered the perfect picture you had in your head of your upbringing, and now everything you've ever known feels like a lie. Maybe it's those few extra pounds you just can't lose that you're attaching your whole value to. Maybe it was the betrayal from your husband, the nasty divorce you went through, and the collateral damage you find yourself wading through. Maybe your parents abandoned you as a child, either physically or emotionally, and you can't seem to connect to people, so you perform for love and dissociate from reality. Maybe it's the continual rejection from men that causes you to wonder if you're valuable enough for anyone to ever notice you and (dare I say it?) marry you. Maybe the new season you find yourself in has brought the control freak out in you; you can't stop hurting everyone around you, and it's tearing you up inside. Maybe it was a painful church experience, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job that had become your identity, inexplicable pain that you have vowed never to speak of.

You feel trapped. The fruit of your pain is evident to you, and likely to those around you from whom you think you've been hiding it. You're starting to lose control. As you read these words, you realize you have nowhere to turn but God. Those "but God" moments are pivotal for your future: Will you live in freedom or captivity? You must choose which one. You may think your circumstance or pain has you cornered, but God is with you—His arms wide open.

Maybe you find yourself in a season where you'd like to remain underground forever, safe being unseen and unexposed to light. On the other hand, maybe you're frustrated that your gift is in seed form. Too often we despise the seed and want the tree it produces, now! We compare our "seed" season to someone else's "oak tree" season, ignoring the years of faithfulness it took for them to get there. If God gives you an underground-seed season, take it! Otherwise you'll try to produce fruit prematurely, and it will be bitter and inedible because it was produced by you and not by the process God has naturally set into motion.

As you embark on your own personal journey to freedom, you will need to allow for time in His presence to connect with the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. If you value the fruit of freedom in your life, change your calendar, set your alarm, and begin the practice of His presence. Mark tells us,

What else is the kingdom of God like? What earthly thing can we compare it to? The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed you can sow. But after that seed is planted, it grows into the largest plant in the garden, a plant so big that birds can build their nests in the shade of its branches. (Mark 4:30–32 Voice)

Make room for Him in a way that works with how you are uniquely created to connect.

After a while, it will become second nature to dwell in and hear from Him wherever you go, not just in the safe place of your home. Mark's tiny mustard seed begins to grow. You may not feel or hear anything at first, but don't be discouraged. Read God's Word daily and allow it to

transform you. In the right moment, the Holy Spirit will bring His words of life to remembrance. Let me encourage you: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8 NKJV).

Remain planted where you are, under the soil of His love and the water of His devotion to our growth. The process doesn’t always feel good, smell nice, or look pretty, but we are each called to grow in Him and produce fruit so that our lives may be a refuge to others. Whatever you do, stay connected to the vine. John 15:1–5 tells us that our Father is the gardener who cuts off every branch that isn’t producing life so that we can bear more fruit. He also reminds us that we cannot bear fruit by ourselves. Branches cut off from the life-giving vine are useless and wither away—remain in Him. Your healing will never come in isolation; it only comes in connection to the Father’s truth and love.

▲ ▲ ▲ *Walking in Freedom* ▲ ▲ ▲

1. How do you like to connect with God? Take some time to think through how, where, and when you’ll connect with Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit throughout the journey of this book. Are you someone who likes to journal? A thinker who needs time to process for longer periods of time? Do you feel things deeply and need time to give understanding to your emotions so confusion doesn’t reign? Do you fly by the seat of your pants and enjoy the spontaneous? We are each uniquely made and formed for love and connection. Ponder how

you'd like to embark on this adventure with the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit.

2. Look at your schedule at the moment. How can you rearrange it to prioritize your time so that you'll be able to purposefully connect with God and become more aware of His presence? Maybe it's reducing the frequency of your nights out. Maybe it's setting your alarm ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes earlier than you usually do. Only you can change your calendar; nobody can do it for you!
3. Take a moment and write a list of the distractions you have accumulated knowingly or unknowingly over the years. These are the things that we do instead of facing the pain or looking deeper past the surface emotions or sin we operate in. Remember, distractions can be anything from TV show binges, a glass (or two . . . or three) of wine every night, food addictions, night life, work, perfection, performance, and so on. Before you jump into the rest of this book, consider fasting from your distractions and replacing them with meditating on God and His Word.
4. Think about buying a new physical copy of the Bible for yourself to complement your progress with this book. Dig into the truth, mark it up, highlight it, and write notes in it. There are so many amazing translations/versions out there that can really help the Word of God come alive to you: The Passion Translation, *The NIV Study Bible*, Amplified, The Message, New Living, the *ESV Journaling Bible*, and many more. Choose one and dig deep!